

Kids having kids: When choice is not an option

Sex is a word thrown around lightly these days; but you'll be surprised how little understood it is, particularly among Filipino youth under 18

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TEENAGE PARENTS. How do education, poverty, and pregnancy interplay in the Philippines? File photo by Joel Nito/AFP

MANILA, Philippines — How are babies made?

Dindin* giggled, following a silent whisper: “Sex.”

She sat on the curb, resting both her body and voice — the most important tools of her trade. The 17-year-old has been working since dawn; her vocal chords competing with screeching wheels and mad horns.

Every day she herds passengers underneath the Katipunan flyover, yelling “Cubao, Cubao, Cubao” over and over. A day’s barking gives her around P100.

Dindin has been a barker for less than a year, and a mother for over 2 years. She first got pregnant at 14, on her first attempt at sex. Her boyfriend dislikes **condoms**. Rubber, he believes, lessens the sensation.

She is not too fond of sex, but her boyfriend forced her.

“*Pagkatapos (ng) sex, binubugbog ko siya. Kaya maga mukha niya araw-araw, ‘yun ang kapalit.*” (After sex, I beat him up. So his face is swollen everyday, that’s the trade off.)

Soon after, Dindin stopped having periods; she did not know why. The baby was already in her belly when friends finally pointed it out. “*Umiyak ako, nabuntis ako nang ‘di ko alam.*” (I cried, I got pregnant without knowing.)

At 17, she has already had three miscarriages.

Her new boyfriend is also a barker, it was his turn to bark while the others napped. Dindin goes for a walk before going back to work; she has several hours to kill. (IN PHOTOS: **Teens raising kids**)

Kids having kids

One in every 10 Filipino women aged 15 to 19 is already a mother or pregnant with her first child, according to the 2013 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS). Early pregnancy is more common among poor households, particularly in families that receive less education. (READ: [Young, pregnant, poor](#))

The figures have not changed much over the last 5 years.

Filipino women aged 15-24 who begin childbearing

2008		2013	
Age 15-19	Age 20-24	Age 15-19	Age 20-24
9.9%	46.8%	10.1%	46.2%

(Source: NDHS)

"Youth today are born in a space where sex is so prevalent, but it's always been like that," said May-i Fabros of WomanHealth Philippines, a non-governmental organization promoting reproductive health rights.

"But now visual cues are so ubiquitous in the streets, Internet, even calendars. And nobody really sits down with them to talk about it," Fabros added.

Fabros is pushing for age-appropriate sexuality education as a separate subject in schools, "It should start early on, even before preschool. And takes the form of knowing body parts, understanding good and bad touches, knowing who to trust, what relationships are, hygiene, taking care of oneself, safety, and dreams."

"The information changes as we grow. Learning more about different aspects of responsibility and decision-making as the students get older. Information is power, so they can make better decisions," she added.

At present, sex education is integrated within other subjects, like science and "*edukasyong pagkakatao*" at the primary and secondary levels.

In 2010, the Department of Education (DepEd) pilot-tested a sex education program among selected elementary and high schools. The project, assisted by the UN Population Fund, teaches adolescent reproductive health. It was opposed by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

The Reproductive Health law requires "age and development appropriate reproductive health education" for adolescents, touching on teen pregnancy, responsible teenage behavior and parenthood. Many classrooms, however, still shy away from teaching about sex, leaving teenagers to seek answers elsewhere. (READ: [When talking about sex is easy](#))

Right to know

Dindin has never used contraceptives because her partner does not want to. They also don't know how to use and cannot afford it.

"*Masakit ata 'yun?* (Isn't it [condom] painful?)" Dindin asked.

She is not alone.

More than 80% of Filipino high school students did not use protection when they first had sex, the 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study [reported](#). To compound matters, less than 10% discussed sex while growing up at home.

Even among college graduates, only 35.6% think their knowledge about sex is adequate.

Those using protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STI) "increase with education, but are generally low for all," the study observed.

Dindin's reasons for not using contraceptives are among the most common cases among the youth observed by the Department of Health (DOH). In the Philippines, use of contraceptives is largely limited to married couples or those who can afford it.



GIRLS, BOYS. Both teenage boys and girls need education and support when it comes to reproductive health say advocates. File photo by Allan M. Gregorio and Kathrine Kessica G. Calano

Responsibility

Girls, however, should not shoulder all the blame, stressed Prescilla Tulipat of the UP Diliman Gender Office. “Their communities lack funds, information, services,” she argued. But frontline workers, such as Barangay Health Workers, are often overworked yet underpaid — hence, leaving several health centers understaffed.

Tulipat advised health centers, schools, and local authorities to remove the stigma against adolescents asking for reproductive health services and information. The goal, she said, is to create health-seeking behavior among the youth. Fabros urged Filipinos to end the discrimination against *batang ina* (young mothers), “Stigma prevents them from asking help.”

“Rights don’t begin at 18,” Fabros added. “Recognize that they’re [adolescents] decision-makers, they own their bodies, and have rights to quality healthcare.”

By choice

Dindin quit the 6th grade because of her pregnancy.

Returning to school is not within her immediate horizon. “*Di ko alam. Nahihya ako, matanda na ako.*” (I don’t know. I’m embarrassed, I’m already old.)

Dindin does not want to have more babies, but she is uncertain of how to prevent pregnancy, “*Di ko pa rin alam paano hindi mabuntis.* (I still don’t know how to not get pregnant.)”

So have they stopped having sex?

No, she says with a smirk. “*Di mo masasabi e, timing lang.*” (You can’t tell [pregnancy], it’s just timing.) – **Rappler.com**

* not her real name

Ref.: <http://www.rappler.com/move-ph/issues/gender-issues/83453-early-pregnancy-philippines>

Look also here: www.philippineculture.ph