



Adolescent Fathers' Experiences: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The existing body of literature concerning adolescent fathers is notably limited. This study aims to meticulously explore the fatherhood experiences of individuals who assumed the role during their adolescence. The qualitative data for this phenomenological study were collected online between March and August 2022. The study was conducted with participants residing in four different geographical regions in Turkey (Marmara, Eastern Anatolia, Southeastern Anatolia and Central Anatolia regions). The study cohort comprised eleven fathers, aged between 20 and 25 years. Data were gathered utilizing a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview form. Following the thematic analysis, we developed five overarching themes: “Emotions and experiences of being a father”, “Increased need for social support”, “Lifestyle changes due to being an adolescent father”, “Positive and negative effects of being an adolescent father” and “Recommendations for those who consider early marriage and becoming a father”. The study illuminated that those who became fathers during adolescence encountered financial challenges, mitigated by support from their immediate family or experienced relatives engaged in childcare. The findings of this study are anticipated to furnish essential data for nurses working with adolescents, contributing to the safeguarding and enhancement of adolescent health.

Keywords Adolescent · Young fatherhood · Child care · Fatherhood experience · Qualitative

Highlights

- Adolescent fathers face financial difficulties.
- They feel inadequate and ignorant about baby care.
- Fatherhood can be described as a catalyst for positive changes that enable many adolescents to abandon their harmful habits.

Adolescent father is conceptualized as a young male still under 24 years of age who has fathered at least a child or responsible for the procreation of an offspring regardless of the age of the woman (Amoo et al., 2018). Despite the increasing number of studies recently, there continues to be a lack of information about the effects of adolescent fatherhood on both the father and the child (Bamishigbin et al., 2019; Jeong, 2021; Mnizak et al., 2020). Adolescent

fatherhood is a common issue with comprehensive effects on mothers, fathers, children, families, and society. In various studies, the rate of adolescent fathers has been reported as 7.6% in the United States (Martinez et al., 2018), 6.3% in Brazil (Dias & Aquino, 2006) and 6.79–11.9% in low-income countries such as Ethiopia, Nigeria and Zambia (Amoo et al., 2018; Worku et al., 2021). There is no available data on the prevalence of adolescent fatherhood in Türkiye.

One of the factors affecting the concept of fatherhood is the structure of society. When various studies in our country are examined, it has been shown that especially gender roles, patriarchal social structure have an effect on the role and perception of fatherhood (Kisbu et al., 2023; Mercan & Şahin, 2017). Although men who adopted traditional and patriarchal views of masculinity were more common in previous years, their influence still continues to wane today. The roles of fathers who embrace this include providing

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money, being present, caring, providing an external environment and play, providing education and discipline, giving love, protecting (Sunar & Fişek, 2005; Zeybekoğlu, 2013). However, changing conditions and the increase in the number of working women have led to the definition of fatherhood as a role in which the father participates more actively in the care, education and life of the child (Mercan & Şahin, 2017). In Türkiye, there are no studies on the role perceptions of adolescent fathers.

Adolescent fathers often struggle with conflicts arising from their personal development, identity formation, and the newfound roles and responsibilities of parenthood. These roles, responsibilities, and duties can create stress for adolescents and young adults (Sriyasak et al., 2016; Tecik et al., 2022). Studies show that adolescent fatherhood is linked to negative conditions such as lower levels of educational and social attainments, low socioeconomic status, negative physical and mental health outcomes, dysfunctional family relationships, and poverty (Bamishigbin et al., 2019; Daugherty, 2014; Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Fletcher & Wolfe, 2011; Jeong, 2021; Lee et al., 2012). Furthermore, paternal age is known to affect childbirth and infant health (Alio et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2008; Jeong, 2021; Mollborn & Lovegrove, 2011). Children of young fathers have an increased risk of psychiatric disorders as well as alcohol and substance use (McGrath et al., 2014). These findings pose risks to fathers, their children, and spouses, highlighting the need to pay attention to the problems of adolescents, a group in many aspects that is both risky and vulnerable, and whose growth and development continue (Menekşe, 2021).

Nowadays, clinical research increasingly addresses adolescent fatherhood (Jeong, 2021). Although rarely discussed in social aspects, adolescent fatherhood is a multi-dimensional concept. Conducting research to understand these experiences is a necessary first step in developing interventions and programs to meet their needs (Recto & Lesser, 2021). The literature review revealed that studies on the experiences of adolescent fathers were conducted in Australia (Wilkes et al., 2012), Africa (Chideya & Williams, 2013), Spain (Recto & Lesser, 2021), Thailand (Sriyasak et al., 2015), and Indonesia (Astuti et al., 2021). There is no study in national or international literature involving the experiences of adolescent fathers in Turkish culture. This study aims to fill these existing gaps by providing a detailed description of the fatherhood experiences of individuals who became fathers in adolescence and addressing them holistically.

In this context, the aim is to determine the experiences of adolescent fathers in Türkiye. Aligned with this aim, the research question is: “What experiences do individuals undergo during their teenage years and early adulthood upon becoming fathers during adolescence?”

Method

Design

A phenomenological design using in-depth interviews was used to explore the experiences of adolescent fathers regarding early parenting and paternal role.

Participants

Eleven participants who became fathers during adolescence from six different cities in Türkiye were enrolled in the study. Inclusion criteria were; a) being a father within the age limits of adolescence, b) being born and living in Türkiye, with Turkish as his native language. All of the participants currently live in the same house with their children and are known to be involved in their children’s care. One of the participants, a military personnel, had to leave the study because he had to go on duty with an unplanned call and the interview could not be completed. There was no one who did not agree to participate.

Measures

Parent-child descriptive information form

The questionnaire, which was developed by the researchers in line with the literature (Alio et al., 2012; Jeong, 2021; Mollborn & Lovegrove, 2011), consisted of 16 questions, included sociodemographic information such as age, education, employment status, marital status, perception of the economic status, type of family, child’s age and child’s gender etc. This form was sent to three experts who have studies on the relevant subject and their opinions were obtained.

Semi-structured interview form

A semi-structured interview form was employed to delve into the participants’ experiences, offering flexibility, dynamism, interaction, and an exploratory approach to the researcher (Baltacı, 2019; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The questions are aimed at understanding the experiences of the participants and what shaped these experiences. When considered from a multidimensional perspective; fatherhood feelings, baby care, the adolescent’s fatherly roles and responsibilities, and the adolescent’s ongoing identity development questions are included. These questions were sent to three experts in the field of nursing (Fathers are as important as mothers in the care of children due to the family-centered care philosophy in the field of pediatric nursing.) for evaluation. A psychologist and a sociologist were also consulted. In selecting the experts, it was taken into consideration that they had studies on the subject. The form was revised based on their suggestions. There are eight

Table 1 Semi-structured interview questions

Questions
1. Could you explain what were the situations and thoughts that influenced your decision to become a father?
2. Can you tell us how you felt when you first learned that you were going to be a father?
3. Could you tell us what was the attitude of your family and people around you when they learned that you were going to be a father?
4. Can you tell us about your experiences with your baby in the hospital right after the birth?
5. What were the changes in your own life when you became a father?
6. What types of care did you participate in/still participating in while raising/caring for your baby? - Can you tell us about your feelings and experiences of fatherhood?
7. What changes have occurred in your relationships with your spouse, relatives, and friends after becoming a father?
8. In which areas did you need help the most while fulfilling the role of father? - And what kind of support did you receive from whom?

questions in the form. The interview questions and procedures underwent review during the pilot study. In the pilot study, the points that were not understood in the semi-structured interview questions were revised in a way that the participants could understand. The pilot study aids the researcher in assessing the adequacy of the interview form and the suitability of the expressions used for the interviewed group (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The semi-structured interview questions are shown in Table 1.

Procedure

The study was conducted between March and August 2022. The participants were reached by using the snowball or chain sampling methods, among qualitative research sampling methods, by homogenous case sampling. The research received approval from the Non-Interventional Ethics Committee of a university, dated 24/11/2021, and numbered E-10333602-050.01.04-60220. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, the confidentiality of their answers, and how the data would be used. Only volunteers who provided informed consent were included in the study group. Adhering to research ethics, participant names were not used, and interview text encodings were designated as "P1, P2, P3...". The researchers reached out to the first participant by posting an announcement on social media accounts to find someone who had become a father during adolescence. Following snowball technique, participants in this study were asked who they would recommend interviewing regarding the research topic, leading to the recruitment of additional participants. Primary author contacted potential participants by phone to inform them about the purpose, risks, benefits, and rights related to

participating in the study. The interviews were conducted at times mutually agreed upon with the fathers and researchers. Research data were collected using a descriptive questionnaire and a semi-structured interview form. The interviews were conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but one-on-one video calls were used to simulate face-to-face interactions. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, the confidentiality of their answers, and how the data would be used. Since the interviews with the participants were conducted online, there was no chance to take field notes. The interviews were recorded after obtaining verbal consent. One researcher with experience in qualitative research directed the interviews, each lasting a minimum of 60 min. When no new information was generated, the decision was made that saturation was reached and the data collection process was terminated with 11 participants. Table 2 contains the participants' sociodemographic characteristics. During the interviews, participants' explanations were periodically summarized and confirmed with feedback to address potential misunderstandings. After transcribing the interviews, researchers cross-verified them by listening to the audio recordings, and a second interview was conducted with four participants. First of all, during the transcription of the interviews, the unsatisfactory answer we received to the question asked was an important reason for repeating the interviews. In qualitative research, it may be recommended that the researcher conducts repeated interviews with the sample group to ensure data saturation and depth (Guba and Lincoln, 1982). All data collection tools, written transcripts, and files created during the coding processes were documented and securely stored. The researchers are academics with extensive experience in qualitative studies of parenting experiences in paediatric nursing (one is a professor, two are assistant professors and one is a postgraduate student). All of them are female.

Data Analysis

The participants' sociodemographic data are presented numerically. Two researchers transcribed the audio-recorded interviews. Data analysis was performed with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach using the Max Qualitative Data Analysis (MAXQDA) Analytics Pro2022 program. Themes were created methodologically by inductive coding. Coding in qualitative research consists of processes that allow the data collected to be brought together, categorized, and thematically sorted, and that provide an organized platform for the construction of meaning (Williams & Moser, 2019). In this context, within the framework of inductive coding, firstly "codes related to the sub-theme" were determined in the data analysis, and "sub-themes" were determined based on these codes, and

Table 2 Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

Participant	Age	The age when he became a father for the first time	Marital status	If married, the duration of the marriage	The age of the wife/mother of the child	Educational status	Educational status of the wife/mother of the child	The number of children he has	Perception of the economic status	Type of family	Age of the child/children	Gender of child/children
P1	23	19	Married	6,5 years	21	Primary school	High school	2	Income equal to expense	Nuclear	4.5, 3.5 year-old	Female, female
P2	24	19	Married	6 years	24	High school	Primary school	1	Income equal to expense	Extended	4 years old	Male
P3	20	19	Single	-	18	Primary school	Primary school	1	Income equal to expense	Broken	6 months old	Female
P4	24	22	Married	4 years	24	High school	High school	1	Income more than expense	Nuclear	18 months old	Female
P5	25	16	Married	9 years	27	High school	Primary school	4	Income less than expense	Nuclear	9, 8, 6 years old, & 5 months old	Male, male, female, female
P6	20	19	Married	1 year	18	High school	Can read and write	1	Income less than expense	Extended	6 months old	Female
P7	23	22	Married	1.5 years	21	Primary school	Primary school	1	Income equal to expense	Nuclear	8 months old	Male
P8	24	22	Married	2.5 years	26	High school	University	1	Income equal to expense	Nuclear	2 years old	Male
P9	25	20	Married	6 years	23	High school	Primary school	3	Income equal to expense	Nuclear	4, 2 years old, & 45 days old	Female, male, female
P10	24	16	Married	8 years	24	Primary school	Primary school	4	Income less than expense	Nuclear	8, 6, 4, 1 year/s old	Female, female, male, male
P11	23	21	Married	3 years	20	Primary school	High school	1	Income more than expense	Nuclear	20 months old	Male

“themes” were determined based on both contents. The analysis involved constant movement between the entire dataset, the coded portions, and the analysis of generated data. First author coded the interview transcripts, and the codes underwent review by all authors. The writing process commenced with initial transcription, noting ideas and potential coding schemes, and continued throughout the coding/analysis process. In the initial coding, the researcher’s and experts’ opinions were compared. After reaching an agreement, the first codebook was discussed with a participant, and subsequent interviews were transcribed based on the feedback received. The researchers recorded the first and subsequent transcripts with the revised codebook. Throughout each transcription, coding was compared as a group to enhance the codebook. The revised codebook and expert opinions were used to record the first and subsequent transcripts. Disagreements were discussed until a consensus was reached, finalizing the codebook with five themes and 45 codes. An independent expert confirmed the checking of codes and categories, as well as the analysis of the data. To evaluate whether the participant’s statements were correctly interpreted and coded by the researchers, the code book was discussed with one of the experts from whom we received a semi-structured interview form recommendation and among the researchers themselves.

The Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Studies (COREQ) checklist, as outlined by Tong et al. (2007), was utilized to guide the reporting of the study. Assessing the quality of qualitative research can be challenging due to underreporting of key elements. An important step in improving the quality of reporting is to formulate and define clear reporting standards (O’Brien et al., 2014). There are different reporting criteria used for qualitative research (Burns, 1989; Tracy, 2010; O’Brien et al., 2014; Levitt et al., 2018). The COREQ checklist was also developed to encourage clear and comprehensive reporting of qualitative studies (interviews and focus groups), especially those conducted in the health field. This checklist consists of items specific to the reporting of qualitative studies (Tong et al., 2007).

Results

Methodologically, inductive coding was employed in the data analysis, resulting in the identification of five themes concerning the experiences of adolescent fathers with the care of their children (Table 3).

Emotions and Experiences of Being a Father

Most of the participants expressed positive emotions such as joy, happiness, and excitement upon learning that they would

become fathers for the first time, considering themselves ready for fatherhood at that moment. They described this feeling as “hard to describe.” However, some fathers mentioned concerns about childcare and experienced mixed feelings. Following the birth of their children, participants described their emotions about fatherhood, expressing a sense of peace and a protective instinct. Nonetheless, they also conveyed regret for not being economically prepared and expressed worries about their children’s education.

While some participants felt ready for fatherhood and decided to become a father consciously, the situation was different for others. Fathers who did not experience the feeling of being a father until the later weeks of pregnancy and even until they took their infants in their arms were in the majority.

‘When you hold the first baby in your arms, then you realize that you are a father. You can’t get that feeling of being a father when the baby is in the womb, but when he is born, you experience that feeling of being a father fully.’ (P9)

The participants stated that experiencing fatherhood was tiring, they were inexperienced about infant care due to their young age and worried about adding discipline and value to their children.

‘We needed help with everything. Neither my wife nor I could change the diaper and dress him up. My mother and my wife’s mother helped us all the time. We had no knowledge of anything.’ (P10)

It was observed that most participants were actively involved in the care of their infants and children. It was found that some participants helped their spouses without actively participating in child care, but they did not take responsibility for practices that were traditionally considered as women’s work in the said culture.

‘I get very tired because I work in the industrial sector. I mean, if the child starts crying, you involuntarily take him in your arms. You won’t let him cry anyway. But how can I say, I don’t change his diaper, sway him, or put him to sleep.’ (P9)

‘I prepare my daughter’s food. In fact, she usually eats her soup from my hand while we are sitting at the same table. My duty is mainly to make her sleep because she doesn’t sleep with anyone except me. I have never changed my daughter’s diapers, but we bathe her together all the time. In her infancy, when she was very small, I used to put her to sleep very

Table 3 Themes, subthemes, and codes

Themes	Subthemes	Codes
Positive and Negative Effects of Being an Adolescent Father	Positive effects	Adding maturity/responsibility awareness Generation gap is less than expected Reducing/quitting bad habits
	Negative effects	Missing educational opportunities Not being able to be with them
Emotions and Experiences of Being a Father	Feelings about paternity	Not being able to understand the feeling of fatherhood until he holds him in his arms Frightening Regret for not being economically prepared Feeling peaceful Protective instinct Not wanting at first First news, first feelings Worrying about the education and discipline/value of the child Exhausting Unawareness of paternity before becoming a father
	Role in process of baby care	Not attending their care at night Not being involved in the care process (for cultural reasons) Being ignorant about baby care because of being young Active participation in the care process
Increased Need for Social Support Lifestyle Changes due to Being an Adolescent Father		Experiencing financial difficulties Getting support about baby care from family of origin or someone
		Distancing with the root family Striving for more financial income Attachment to home/not going out much Spiritual difficulties brought by the sense of responsibility Get used to lack of sleep Maturation with a sense of responsibility Putting the health and wellbeing of his child above all else
	Attitude of family and people around	Closer relationships with family of origin Root family sharing in the joy of baby The family and the environment do not think that he is ready to be a father Changing order of importance in the root family
	Changing the dynamics of communications with friends	No change Distancing with single friends Decreased time spent with friends Friends' attitudes that do not support being a father Support from friends
	Changing the dynamics of communications with relatives	No change Reduced relations with relatives Increase in social status among relatives
Recommendations for Those Who Consider Early Marriage and Becoming a Father	Changing the dynamics of communications with his wife	Negative changes (neglecting his wife, not being able to spend time with his wife as they would like) Positive changes (like the first day, taking each other seriously/starting to talk about serious issues, to improve his relationship with his wife)
		Recommend if able to take responsibility Recommend to become a father at an early age Recommend to become a father at an older age

often by putting her on my shoulder and relieving her gas.' (P4)

'No, I generally don't change the baby's diaper because my mother does it. She is a girl, so I can't look at her genital area.' (P6)

There were also participants who did not plan becoming fathers because they were not mature enough and wanted to spend more time with their spouses.

'When they used to say it to me then, I used to say it was early for the child. I wasn't thinking that much.

So I didn't feel ready to take that responsibility, that I can take that responsibility...' (P11)

Increased Need for Social Support

The participants intensely stated that they experienced financial difficulties and received support from their root family or someone experienced both in child care and financial issues.

Participants reported living with or close to their families of origin for the first few years of their marriage, and that they received most of their social support from their families of origin, followed by close relatives who had children. It was learned that they were uninformed and inexperienced in childcare issues such as changing diapers and clothes and bathing the child, and that their own mothers supported their wives in these matters, or that the family of origin directly undertook the care of the child. In addition to childcare, they also stated that they learned tips on discipline and using their families of origin as role models. No participant reported receiving support from health professionals in childcare.

"When the child was born, we came home, and he had to be washed, but my wife did not know how to do it. My mother helped and showed how to do it. My wife knew a little how to bediaper the baby, but my mother still showed how to do it. For example, we didn't know that the baby should not be taken outside until he turned forty days, so my mother told us. That's how our new life passed." (P1)

Always my mom, her mom. They were always helping us. We had no knowledge about anything. My mother was explaining to my wife how to do it, she couldn't do it again. that's how my wife learned how to take care of children. (P10)

It was learned that participants who had financial difficulties were trying to meet the needs of their children by selling their spouses' gold earrings, that they were experiencing unemployment, and that when buying toys for their children, they chose smaller ones to be more economical. There was one participant who thought that fatherhood was not that difficult after meeting the needs of the child.

'I was unemployed at that time. My child had some needs, but I couldn't meet them. Sometimes I was borrowing money from my friends.' (P5)

'Being a father is sometimes difficult and sometimes easy. Whether it is care or needs. Sometimes, you

can't meet some needs. I even sold my phone when I didn't have money for my child.' (P2)

Lifestyle Changes due to Being an Adolescent Father

The participants mostly stated that they became more attached to home after becoming a father and did not spend time outside as before. The participants saying that the time they spent with their friends decreased after becoming a father were in the majority. Moreover, most fathers said that they had matured and changed with a sense of responsibility. It is noteworthy that the participants define adulthood by living it for their children/home/family, and are reborn and gain the identity of fatherhood.

'I also loved to gallivant around. Sometimes, I'm talking about the period before marriage, I would not come home, I would go there, I would go here. After the child was born, I never went out even once, except with my wife.' (P7)

'I don't spend time with my circle of friends, as I used to do. I do not gallivant around as I used to do when I was single. "I have work to do" and go home.' (P4)

Most participants said that they postponed their own needs after becoming a father, feeling the maturity of thinking about the child and acting accordingly.

'You are arranging your time accordingly, you are arranging your life, I mean, that day accordingly. ... That's why you are working for your children now, you are traveling for your children.' (P9)

Positive and Negative Impacts of Being an Adolescent Father

The participants mostly mentioned the positive effects of being an adolescent father than the negative effects. They expressed the positive effects of being an adolescent father as their maturing by adding a sense of responsibility to themselves, the generation gap being less than expected – therefore, growing up with their children and support in reducing or quitting bad habits.

'For example, my child can understand me when he grows up a little bit. Now I see, our elders are little more old-fashioned. I believe the generation gap will be small, which is an advantage for me.' (P8)

'When you are single, you have no responsibilities towards others. Now I have a wife and a child after marriage. I have responsibilities towards them. That's why I stay away from bad habits. I don't drink alcohol, but I smoke. But I am very careful not to smoke near my child.' (P2)

Participants reported fewer negative effects on their lives as adolescent fathers. They expressed negative effects as falling behind in educational attainments and being unable to be with their spouses and children due to reasons such as military service and work.

'Well, maybe there were different feelings at that moment. I can't even express them completely. I mean, I became very excited, very happy, but I was a little bit afraid as well.' (P11)

'I wanted to become a diver, but after failing an exam, I lost my interest. I also passed the exam of the Forest Sub-District Directorate and then went to the army. Since I didn't want to leave my wife alone, I didn't go there either. I was planning to go to Bursa. I was going to work and take care of my wife there, so I couldn't study. It remained like this after we had a child.' (P2)

'When I went to work, I would stay in another city for 1–2 months. My wife used to take pictures and videos related to the child's growth, showing her laughing, playing and send them to me. Of course, it's hard, when you're far away, you can't touch, you can't be near. I am working, I am at work physically, but I am at home mentally.' (P5)

Recommendations for Those Who Consider Early Marriage and Becoming a Father

While some participants recommended getting married at an early age and becoming a father, the majority advised those who had a plan or thought of becoming a father to wait a little bit.

One participant recommended becoming a father when you feel mature enough to take responsibility for a living being.

'We were children ourselves at 17. We took responsibility without living our life properly. We have had a child we should take care of and raise. It's a huge responsibility. I swear, I do not recommend

having a child at that age to anyone. But it's a very nice feeling, and everyone should taste and experience it. But the age is too young. I think everyone should wait a little longer, it would be better if you were 25 instead of 17.' (P10)

'My advice is not to have a child immediately, it's better to wait a little bit.' (P2)

One participant who recommended becoming a father early used the following expression:

'I recommend it to people who can handle it. Otherwise, people who got married at a young age, they have children, but when you look at them, you see that neither the woman can be a mother nor the man can be the father. ... Of course, I recommend this to people who know the responsibility of this and can manage this.' (P11)

Discussion

This study's main objective is to explore the transitional experiences of individuals who become fathers during adolescence, identify potential risks and protective factors, and assess the impact of fatherhood on their lives. The discussion aims to delve into research findings, drawing on the growing body of literature on this topic, shedding light on the unique experiences teenage fathers face as they navigate the complex landscape of fatherhood. In this section, the discussion of the findings belonging to the themes "Emotions and Experiences of Being a Father", "Increased Need for Social Support", "Lifestyle Changes Due to Being an Adolescent Father", "Positive and Negative Effects of Being an Adolescent Father" and "Recommendations for Those Considering Early Marriage and Fatherhood" is presented.

Emotions and Experiences of Being a Father

The majority of participants conveyed positive emotions, such as joy and excitement, upon learning they would become fathers. However, after the birth, they reported a mix of emotions, including peace, a protective instinct, anxiety, and worry. A study highlighted that adolescent fathers often undergo a range of intense and sometimes conflicting emotions from the news of pregnancy, suggesting the need for them to express these feelings and receive support (Deslauriers & Kiselica, 2022).

In a related study involving young parents, many expressed feeling unprepared for parenthood, echoing

sentiments found in our research. Notably, some participants in our study felt ready for fatherhood, while others acknowledged not feeling like fathers until later in the pregnancy or even after holding their infants. This aligns with findings indicating a portion of adolescent fathers feeling inadequacy in their parenting skills initially (Sriyasa et al., 2016).

The economic aspect emerged as a significant concern for our participants, mirroring findings in studies where limited economic resources posed challenges to adapting to fatherhood. Notably, societal expectations regarding financial success were perceived as unrealistic for young fathers (Recto & Lesser, 2021).

The American Psychological Association (APA) describes the transition to parenthood as a critical window for determining both mental and physical health, even in adulthood. During this process, physical and mental health problems may worsen due to various factors (such as job finding issues, financial problems, etc.) (Easterbrooks et al., 2019). Similarly, parenthood in adolescents is an important social transition that can change the developmental processes of adolescents in many ways, including mental health and risky behaviors (Jeong, 2021). During this transition, adolescent parents may face difficulties in fulfilling their parenting duties due to limited life experiences and coping skills. This can potentially lead to increased stress and conflict, as well as depressive symptoms (Uengwongsapat et al., 2018). Our study reflected this, and fathers expressed concerns about economic unpreparedness and their children's education. Inexperience and feelings of inadequacy regarding infant care were common among our participants. This finding was consistent with other international literature suggesting that adolescent fathers may have difficulty with caregiving duties and report negative attitudes towards fatherhood (Bamishigbin et al., 2019; The Urban Child Institute, 2014).

Despite these challenges, our study noted that most fathers actively participated in infant care, challenging traditional, patriarchal fathering roles. In a study conducted in Brazil, it was reported that adolescent fathers' involvement in childcare is culturally and socially hindered or very limited. Despite a patriarchal structure, it was noted that fathers participated in breastfeeding processes, some took care of their babies, shared household chores, and sought a new model of fatherhood by emotionally supporting their partners (Torres de Lacerda et al., 2014). Similarly, in a qualitative study involving 10 adolescent fathers in South Africa, with a completely patriarchal and hegemonic cultural structure, it was found that almost all fathers viewed participation in caregiving practices (bathing, feeding, diaper changing, etc.) as an essential part of fatherhood, contrary to cultural norms. The study also emphasized the importance of adolescent fathers exhibiting positive

examples and attitudes for children's development (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015). In our study, participants expressed concerns about adding value to their children's lives. The literature findings support our study findings.

In summary, the experiences of adolescent fathers encompass a spectrum of emotions, economic challenges, and caregiving responsibilities. Acknowledging these complexities and providing education and support not only to mothers but also to fathers by health personnel starting from pregnancy and continuing into the postpartum period can increase their well-being and parenting effectiveness.

Increased Need for Social Support

Adolescent fathers commonly experience a strong sense of financial responsibility towards their children (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015). They rely on familial support to navigate their roles as fathers, both emotionally and practically (Deslauriers & Kiselica, 2022; Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015). Given their emotional and financial dependence on parents, adolescents may face challenges in embracing the responsibilities of fatherhood (Bamishigbin et al., 2019; Tecik et al., 2022; The Urban Child Institute, 2014). The inability of individuals to become economically and emotionally free from their families of origin prevents them from forming independent families with their spouses and children. In this respect, it differs from adult fatherhood roles.

Our study findings revealed that the majority of our participants received support from their extended families, including financial and childcare assistance. Sriyasa et al. (2016) reported that adolescent parents received emotional, physical, financial, and informational support from their families during the prenatal and postnatal stages. It was emphasized that this social support helped participants smoothly transition to becoming a young parent (Sriyasa et al., 2016). Consistent with the existing literature, our study findings emphasize the importance of social support from the family.

When the study conducted by Torres de Lacerda et al. (2014) was examined in the context of breastfeeding, it was seen that some participants could not participate in the processes due to lack of information after birth and one father expressed this as "I could not participate in anything, I could not say anything about breastfeeding. Because I do not know how to help..." The study stated that the reason for this was mostly not participating in prenatal follow-up and trainings and not being able to participate due to work (Torres de Lacerda et al., 2014). In another study, one of the adolescent fathers expressed this support as "I looked for information about baby care. I need to learn to be a father... I asked my mother for advice..." (Uengwongsapat et al., 2018). These literature findings emphasize the importance

of information support for adolescent fathers during the transition to parenthood.

Living arrangements also play a significant role, as indicated in the study by Enderstein and Boonzaier (2015), where adolescent fathers receiving support from their families often lived with them. A study in Thailand stated that most of the participants lived with their families, were students and therefore almost completely dependent on their families (Uengwongsapat et al., 2018). In the literature, this situation is explained in studies as; adolescent fathers mostly do not have financial income or it is insufficient and they are still students, so they are dependent on their families even for basic needs such as food and shelter (Deslauriers & Kiselica, 2022; Sriyasak et al., 2016; Uengwongsapat et al., 2018). Our findings align with this, with about 18% of participants living in extended families. Notably, this proportion is higher than the national average, underscoring the increased reliance of adolescent parents on extended family structures for social and economic support (TUIK, 2024).

As household structures evolve, with a decreasing trend in extended families, the data suggests that adolescent parents are more inclined to reside in such arrangements compared to the general population. This emphasizes the ongoing need for social and economic support for adolescent parents, with extended families serving as vital sources of assistance.

Lifestyle Changes Due to Being an Adolescent Father

Becoming a father as an adolescent brings about substantial lifestyle changes, echoing some similarities observed in adolescent mothers (Recto & Lesser, 2021). This study illuminated that, following fatherhood, most participants developed a stronger attachment to home, reduced the time spent outside, matured with a newfound sense of responsibility, and deferred personal needs in consideration of their children (Sriyasak et al., 2016).

In a qualitative study, all participants redirected their focus after becoming fathers, showcasing behavioral adjustments such as abstaining from alcohol, reducing social outings, avoiding new relationships, allocating financial resources in alignment with their children's needs, and prioritizing their offspring (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015). Recent research underscored that couples, upon receiving news of pregnancy, opted to live together, with adolescent fathers drawing inspiration from impending fatherhood. Despite challenging circumstances, they endeavored to assume parental responsibilities and steered their lives in new directions (Deslauriers & Kiselica, 2022). Other studies have similarly emphasized the profound changes ushered in by fatherhood (Landers et al., 2015; Recto & Lesser, 2021; Sriyasak et al., 2015; Weber, 2020).

Positive and Negative Effects of Being an Adolescent Father

Navigating the responsibilities of fatherhood during adolescence can introduce numerous challenges, potentially without corresponding developmental benefits. Intriguingly, the participants in this study underscored more positive effects of being adolescent fathers than negative ones. Notably, existing literature tends to emphasize the negative consequences associated with adolescent parenting and fatherhood (Bamishigbin et al., 2019; Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Deslauriers & Kiselica, 2022; Jeong, 2021; Recto & Lesser, 2021; Sriyasak et al., 2016). Adolescent parents frequently contemplate leaving school to create the time necessary for childcare and to provide for their children by seeking employment. Feelings of shame related to early pregnancy or academic challenges may contribute to their decision to drop out (The Urban Child Institute, 2014). Negative effects identified in our study included educational setbacks and the inability to be with spouses and children due to work-related reasons. Most participants were found to be primary school graduates. Adolescent marriages often result in the deprivation of educational rights, hampering empowerment and contributing to poverty (Suzan & Cinar, 2021). Studies suggest that adolescent fatherhood can limit educational and professional opportunities, resulting in a lower education level and shorter educational duration compared to peers without children (Fletcher & Wolfe, 2011; Jeong, 2021) and adult fathers (Mollborn & Lovegrove, 2011; Sriyasak et al., 2015).

In our country, all young people who are 20 years old have to leave home to fulfill their military service. Another negative effect of becoming a father during adolescence is that fathers move to different cities or districts for reasons such as military service or finding a job, and are separated from their wives and children. The reasons for moving to other cities can be explained as the fact that adolescents often go to big cities where there is a lot of employment in order to find a job and take care of their families, since they have not yet acquired a profession. Lower education levels, a common characteristic among young parents, can impede quality employment and limit earning potential (The Urban Child Institute, 2014). Literature suggests that adolescent fathers often come from families with significantly lower socioeconomic status compared to adult fathers, and their socioeconomic levels are generally lower (Bamishigbin et al., 2019; Jeong, 2021; Mollborn & Lovegrove, 2011; Sipsma et al., 2010). Despite these challenges, some studies indicate that adolescent fathers may have equal or higher employment rates than adult fathers (Fletcher & Wolfe, 2011; Assini-Meytin & Green, 2015), suggesting the influence of factors such as a country's level of development, economic situation, and employment rates.

Fatherhood is considered a process of psychological maturity, independence, self-acceptance, productivity, and stable identity acquisition (Sriyasak et al., 2015). Participants in this study expressed that being adolescent fathers facilitated maturity through added responsibility, motivating them to minimize or quit unhealthy habits. This positive transformation aligns with findings from Sriyasak et al. (2016), where participants reported positive changes in behavior and lifestyle after becoming fathers, assuming increasing responsibilities at home and adapting to new situations through enhanced effort and income generation. Research underscores that being an adolescent father can imbue meaning into adolescents' lives, deterring substance use, multiple partner relationships, criminal behaviors, and unhealthy attitudes (Daugherty, 2014; Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015; Recto & Lesser, 2021). A qualitative study highlighted positive experiences, such as "being better," "being responsible," and "having goals," emerging from fatherhood (Deslauriers & Kiselica, 2022). These positive effects are anticipated to have favorable implications for the physical and psychosocial well-being of adolescent fathers and their children.

Recommendations for Those Considering Early Marriage and Fatherhood

Insights from adolescent fathers in the study revealed a spectrum of recommendations regarding early marriage and adolescent fatherhood. While some participants suggested that early marriage was advisable, others recommended that those contemplating parenthood should exercise patience. The rationale behind this advice included the burden of responsibility without sufficient life experience, the challenges of becoming a father at a young age, and the necessity to mature further before undertaking such significant responsibilities. Additionally, participants emphasized that while marriage is a rewarding experience, it should be savored independently of parenthood, as having a child imposes considerable restrictions on life. This sentiment aligns with the findings of Enderstein and Boonzaier (2015), emphasizing that choosing to embrace the challenges of adolescent fatherhood helped individuals navigate feelings of regret (Enderstein & Boonzaier, 2015).

These recommendations collectively underscore the importance of thoughtful consideration and preparedness before embarking on the journey of marriage and parenthood during adolescence. It suggests a nuanced understanding that, while early marriage may be a viable option for some, it requires careful evaluation of individual circumstances and a recognition of the associated responsibilities. It stands as valuable advice for those contemplating these life-altering decisions, encouraging a holistic approach to family planning that considers both the joys and challenges of early marriage and fatherhood.

Strengths and Limitations

This study has several limitations. Firstly, difficulties were encountered in reaching adolescent fathers and planning interviews due to their employment in full and part-time jobs. The snowball sampling method used to reach participants was very helpful. However, not every father that could be reached agreed to participate, which caused the data to be collected over a longer period of time. Secondly, all the data consisted of self-reported statements from the fathers. Being a father in Turkish society is a phenomenon that carries significant responsibilities. In our culture, it is a very common phenomenon for men, especially fathers, not to openly express their emotions in order to maintain their masculine identities and appear strong. Therefore, adolescent fathers might not have been able to express their internal difficulties clearly due to cultural norms. Finally, our data includes the experiences of 'becoming an adolescent father' from fathers who are still young.

On the positive side, our study stands out as the first qualitative examination comprehensively exploring the numerous effects of adolescent fatherhood on young men's education, life, and psychosocial outcomes in Turkish society. Additionally, the inclusion of adolescents from different parts of the country strengthens the study. Participants expressed their willingness to share experiences, contribute to science, and address the challenges faced by adolescent fathers. This eagerness facilitated the collection of research data and the conduction of interviews.

Conclusions

The results underscore the nuanced emotional landscape of adolescent fathers, encompassing both positive and negative sentiments towards fatherhood. The results of this study are quite remarkable in that they reveal that fathers need emotional, social and financial support. Nearly all participants expressed feelings of inadequacy and ignorance regarding infant care, highlighting the pivotal role of support from their extended families. The prominence of family support in Turkish culture is evident; however, it also poses challenges, potentially exerting pressure on adolescent fathers and impeding the acquisition of parental roles. Exploring avenues for state-sponsored support may empower fathers to independently assume their roles with less familial pressure.

Negative consequences, such as educational setbacks and limited personal time, emerged as significant concerns. Conversely, fatherhood was identified as a catalyst for positive changes, prompting many adolescents to abandon risky health behaviors. While negative experiences take precedence in the findings, the positive transformations underscore the potential for growth amid challenges.

Given the myriad physical, social, and psychological implications for both father and child, preventative measures and early interventions are imperative. Identifying risk factors and determinants of adolescent fatherhood is crucial. Urgent initiatives should include health monitoring, life skills promotion, risk assessments for adolescents, spouses, and children, and evidence-based studies to inform comprehensive care.

Looking ahead, intervention studies supporting adolescents' transition to fatherhood and adaptation to new roles are recommended. Providing professional and social support when becoming a father at an early age is an integral part of raising competent and self-confident teenage fathers.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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Author Contributions All authors were involved in the study's design, conceptualization, and methodology. EE and ST were responsible for obtaining samples and writing the original draft. EE, ST, and DM conducted data analysis. All authors had full access to the study's data. DM and NC reviewed and edited the manuscript. NC supervised the study. All authors critically revised the manuscript for important intellectual content and approved the final version. All authors take responsibility for the decision to submit the manuscript for publication.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethics Approval The research received ethical approval from Non-Interventional Ethics Committee of Bilecik Seyh Edebali University, dated 24/11/2021, and numbered E-10333602-050.01.04-60220. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, the confidentiality of their answers, and how the data would be used. Only volunteers who provided informed consent were included in the study group. Adhering to research ethics, participant names were not used, and interview text encodings were designated as "P1, P2, P3...".

Informed Consent Since the interviews were conducted on an online platform, verbal consent accompanied by a voice recording was obtained from the participants, not written consent.

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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