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**YOUNG MOTHERS' INFANT-CARE SLEEP PRACTICES AND FACTORS WHICH
INFLUENCE THEIR PRACTICE CHOICE**

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE

IN

PSYCHOLOGY (HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY ENDORSEMENT)

AT MASSEY UNIVERSITY, PALMERSTON NORTH,

NEW ZEALAND

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2014

Abstract

New Zealand has one of the highest Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI) rates in the industrialised world. Young Maternal Age (YMA) has been posited as a strong risk factor for SUDI. Little is known of the decision-making processes of young mothers which may contribute to the higher levels of risk. This study enquired into the experiences of young mothers with regard to their infant care sleeping practices. Through the use of Thematic Analysis (TA) it researched as to whether there were patterns in these mothers' talk of their experiences, and then sought to understand the ways they constructed their practice choices, in order to provide explanation and understanding of the complex social environments in which these mothers must survive and how these may contribute to the overall statistics. Eleven young mothers were interviewed in semi-structured interviews. Five themes arose from the data: Needs of the Baby; Needs of the Mother; Baby's Wishes; Mother's Instinct or a Natural Ability; and, Non-compliance – Incognizant or Purposeful Action. Through analysis of the themes, it became clear that the social milieu of which these mothers are a part, has tended to influence their practice choices. However, one surprising discovery was how little their decision-making appeared to differ from that of other western parenting groups. What has been borne of the societal influences and attitudes toward this group is the unexpectedly comforting find that these mothers, despite their age, are resilient, resourceful, insightful young women who, like others, want nothing but the best for their infants. Implications of this work for practice, policy and research are discussed, and future recommendations made which make use of the resourcefulness of young mothers such as those in the present study. This group deserves the right to society's respect, acceptance and, above all, support, which will enable them to be the valued, contributing members of society that they so rightfully deserve to be – as mothers, as women, and as an equal!

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Christine Stephens, for her unfailing support, encouragement, and patience for this research. Thank you also to Dr Natasha Tassell for agreeing to be a valued and supportive cultural advisor on this project.

I would also like to thank my husband, Sean, for all the support and many hours of extra familial roles he has taken on, as well as supporting and encouraging me at times when it has been sorely needed, in order to allow me to complete this project. Likewise, I wish to acknowledge our daughter, Madi, who has virtually grown up thinking I have a keyboard permanently attached to the ends of my fingers. She too has spurred me on to finish. At times, the balancing of the roles of Mum, wife, employee, student and person, have required much negotiation, and without the support of both Sean and Madi, this project would not have been possible.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of my extended family and friends, who have helped out, unconditionally, with childcare, meals, and encouragement along the way. Their contribution is greatly appreciated. My father Brian's incredible wealth of English language knowledge never ceases to amaze me and it has been invaluable throughout the life cycle of this entire dissertation.

I am most thankful to, and incredibly humbled by, the young women and mothers who so kindly and enthusiastically agreed to participate in this study. Without them, this new discovery would not have been possible, and they may never have had an opportunity to have a voice. At the very minimum I have found

them nothing short of inspiring, and full of an incredible maturity and insight well beyond their years.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support and enthusiasm of the staff at the Young Parents' Educational Institution (YPEI), who so kindly allowed me the privilege to work with the young mothers attending it. Their support and flexibility, which enabled this project to be completed, is greatly appreciated.

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