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EDUCATION: A YOUNG MOTHER'S KEY TO SUCCESS, A YOUNG MOTHER'S HOPE

A study of the impact of pregnancy and mothering on the educational participation and goals of young mothers.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Social Work at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

Nikki Hill
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For young mothers
Education is the key to unlocking the door of hope for the future in the lives of teen parents and the next generation, their children" (Kelley, 2002: 203).
Abstract

The overall purpose of this qualitative study is to highlight factors, during pregnancy and since the birth, which impact on educational goals and the motivational levels towards achieving these goals of young mothers. Barriers which hinder the continuation of education for young mothers, as well as supports which influence and encourage educational participation are of significance. The research has involved five young mothers in in-depth, semi-structured interviews, as the primary data gathering tool, and five high school counsellors in a questionnaire, to add to the analysis. The research is underpinned by feminist methodology.

Overseas and national research has found that adolescent parents and their children are often at risk of poor life outcomes, largely because of their lack of educational and employment opportunities. Many internal and external factors have been highlighted in the literature which can influence, positively or negatively, a young mother in continuing education. Despite the large amount of literature, there is limited research on the ways in which pregnancy and mothering impacts on a young mother’s aspirations and hopes in regards to continuing education.

This research shows that the commitment to education changed quite dramatically for the majority of the young mothers interviewed, from conception to motherhood, an angle which has not been captured in the literature. Although the young mothers interviewed believe that education is their key to finding successful and rewarding employment, and they each conveyed a desire to continue with education, obstacles are evident. Two young mothers chose to overcome barriers, placing their educational needs as high priority. The research shows that family, school and peer influences can make a significant difference to continuing education, as well as personal goals and passion towards continuing their education. This research found that responding high schools, although they offer the pregnant student a degree of support, have not seen students who choose to parent, remain in the school system.

The findings raise issues about the need for the educational hopes and aspirations of young mothers, to be fostered in the early stages of mothering. This thesis makes
recommendations for educational policies and programmes, governmental welfare policies, and other programmes/agencies, such as a mentoring service and professional careers advice, to be constituted to ensure that young mothers are given every opportunity to continue their education and turn their educational aspirations into workable goals.
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Many thanks also to my friends, who have not seen much of me in the past year. With a new born baby and a thesis to complete, my time for them has been very limited. A special thanks to Tony and Karyn Aspden for giving up their own valuable time to help get this thesis collated. Sincere thanks also go to my supervisors, Jill Worral and Crista Fouche, for all their support, encouragement and advice. Their expertise was invaluable and without it there would be no thesis.

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# Table of Contents

Title Page ................................................................. 1
Abstract ................................................................. iv
Acknowledgements .................................................. vi
Table of Contents ..................................................... vii
List of Appendices .................................................. xiii
List of Tables ......................................................... xiv
List of Figures ......................................................... xiv

Chapter 1: Introduction ............................................. 1
  The Research Aims and Objectives ......................... 2
  Definition of Terms ............................................... 4
  Limitations of this Research .................................. 5
  Locating the Researcher ......................................... 6
  Reading through the Thesis .................................... 7

Chapter 2: Pregnancy, Parenting and Educational Participation .... 9
  Introduction ......................................................... 9
  The New Zealand Statistics .................................... 10
  The Impact of Adolescent Pregnancy on Educational Participation .... 12
  Barriers to Continuing Education ......................... 15
    Mothering Responsibilities .................................. 16
    Childcare Issues .............................................. 16
    Transportation Issues ....................................... 17
    Educational Costs ............................................. 18
  Barriers to Continuing Education in High School .......... 18
  The Correspondence Schooling Option .................... 20

Supports to Encourage Educational Success .................. 21
  Family Support ................................................. 22
  Peer Support ..................................................... 22
  Support in the Educational Environment .................. 23
  Mentoring ......................................................... 24

vii
## Chapter 7: Since Birth

### Introduction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Goals and Plans to Achieve Goals</th>
<th>114</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Expected 'Rewards' for Continuing Education</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Support Systems Evident

| Parental Support | 121 |
| Peer Support | 121 |
| Birth Father Support | 126 |
| School Support | 127 |
| Parenting Education | 127 |
| Government Assistance Currently Received | 128 |

### Barriers to Continuing Education

| Low Self-efficacy? | 129 |
| Childcare Concerns | 129 |
| Transportation | 131 |
| Finances | 132 |
| Mothering Responsibilities | 132 |

### Supports Required to Continue Education

| Family Support Vital | 134 |
| The Importance of Peer and Partner Support | 135 |
| Governmental Support Required | 136 |
| School/tutor Support Needed | 136 |
| Careers Advice/Mentoring | 137 |

### The Preferred Learning Environment

| 138 |
Chapter 8: The Level of Support Offered in North Shore High Schools

Introduction ................................................................. 142
The Respondents .......................................................... 142
Pregnancy and Parenting Rates ........................................ 143
Pregnancy and Educational Underachievement ..................... 144
Supporting the Pregnant Student ..................................... 146
Referral .............................................................................. 146
Involving Parents/Guardians ............................................. 147
Peer Reactions ................................................................. 148
Educational Planning and Goal Setting ................................. 149
    Alternative Education .................................................. 149
A Written Policy? ........................................................... 149
Following-up Students Who Leave ..................................... 150
Meeting a Young Mother's Practical Needs ......................... 150
    Childcare ...................................................................... 150
    Zoning Policies ........................................................... 151
    Flexibility ...................................................................... 151
    Part-time Study Option ............................................... 152
    Parenting, Child Development and Life Skills Education .... 152
Summary ............................................................................ 152

Chapter 9: Enhancing Educational Opportunities ..................... 154
Introduction ..................................................................... 154
Educational Participation and Goals .................................... 154
    Prior to Conception ...................................................... 155
    During Pregnancy ........................................................ 157
    Since the Birth ............................................................. 158
    Summary of Objective One .......................................... 161
Barriers ............................................................................. 162
    Barriers during Pregnancy .......................................... 162
    Barriers Since Becoming Mothers ................................ 165
    Summary of Objective Two .......................................... 167
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resources and Support Systems</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Individual Context</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports and Influences within the Microsystem Context</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Support and Influence</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer/Partner Relationships and Influences</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Educational Context</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Ideal Educational Environment</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mesosystem Links</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports Within the Exosystem Context</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Services</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmental Support</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Macrosystem Context</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Objective Three</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Viewpoints of School Counsellors</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Policy</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Practice</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Further Research</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Appendices

Appendix 1 Covering letter to social workers/co-ordinators ......................... 206
Appendix 2 Information sheet for prospective interview participants .......... 207
Appendix 3 Consent form: interviews .................................................. 209
Appendix 4 Covering letter: High school principals .................................. 210
Appendix 5 Information sheet for prospective questionnaire participants . 211
Appendix 6 Questionnaire: High Schools ............................................... 212
Appendix 7 Covering letter: school counsellors ..................................... 219
Appendix 8 Information sheet: pilot interviews ....................................... 220
Appendix 9 Interview guide ................................................................. 222
Appendix 10 Consent form: clarification of interview transcripts ............... 224
Appendix 11 Information sheet about the pilot for the questionnaires ..... 225
List of Tables

2.1 Total Confinements Resulting in Live and Still births ........................................ 11

List of Figures

3.1 The Developmental Tasks of Adolescence .......................................................... 38

3.2 Bronfenbrenner's Model of Human Development .................................................. 47

3.3 The Young Mother within an Ecological Framework ............................................ 47

3.4 Gilligan's Stages of Moral Development ............................................................... 52