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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
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New Zealand

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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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