

Newsletter June 2011

National Resource Centre for those working with Young Parents

Treoir's New Website – is up and running! Go see!

www.treoir.ie

Follow us on **twitter** www.twitter.com/TREOIR

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Treoir's new **Information Pack for parents who are not married to each other** is available on the new website. Printed copies are also available.

Grandparents before time

Growing up in Scotland

The Real Deal

Teen Parents Support Programme

Grandparents before time: Exploring the needs and experiences of parents whose children become teenage parents.

Adapted and Condensed Version of a Dissertation Presented for a MA in Health Promotion at University College Cork by Patricia A. Hurley RGN, BSc (Nursing), MA (Hons) Health Promotion.

Tricia works with the Teen Parents Support Programme in Cork.

Findings: A teenage pregnancy can be an immensely traumatic time for a family and some level of adaptation is required for all family members. Parents are forced to adopt a new, skewed or out of sequence version of life events for their child. This exploratory research unearths a comprehensive picture of the needs and experiences of these new grandparents. They play a key role in mentoring and guiding their teenage children

through the pregnancy and into parenthood. Grandparents themselves have identified that focused support during the different stages, can prepare them for possible challenging situations, and can help to move things in a positive direction.

It is widely acknowledged that family systems are critically important sources of social support for young parents and their children. The maternal grandmother in particular is central in the provision of both tangible and emotional support to the young mother even when the young mothers lived with their partners. The paternal grandmother also plays a pivotal role in supporting her young son to take up the responsibility of fatherhood and enhances the involvement of young fathers with their children. However the paternal grandmothers felt disconnected from the pregnancy. They believed that the focus was on the teenage girl and her family, with limited support for the teenage boy's family. They felt the mother and the maternal grandparents were gatekeepers to their grandchild and were aware that if the couple split up in the future, contact with their grandchild could be severed. They felt the balance of power was very much on the mothers' side. Their son's actions can be dictated by his partner and her family. Inter-family conflict is a reality faced by some families as they struggle to negotiate access, maintenance and childcare practices. In some cases, mistrust and fear contribute to a "them and us" mentality.

The maternal grandmothers can feel a plethora of mixed emotions and reactions when hearing of a teenage daughter's pregnancy. Some were shocked, angry, disappointed, experienced loss, felt in uncharted waters and unsure where to turn. There can also be a lot of blame and can be targeted at their daughter, her friends, the baby's father and his family as well as themselves. Grandparents worry if daughter is not in a relationship – how will she cope as a single mother?

There was an expectation that the teenager would now be able to act responsibly and make the transition to early adulthood. The grandmothers' frustration came with the realisation that this did not always happen.

Grandparents stated that while they were happy to be involved and glad to help they sometimes felt taken for granted.

Most co-residing grandparents stated that they found it difficult at times, not to comment or get involved in the way their daughter cared for the child. This sometimes led to arguments and tensions in the family. It can be a strain having two mothers in the house, especially if there is conflict over childcare responsibilities or ground rules. It is useful to have very clear boundaries and roles which are adhered to as much as possible.

Many young parents see the pregnancy and birth as a predominantly positive event. Most teen pregnancies are unplanned but are still wanted. Young mothers tend not to see their pregnancies as a disaster that is likely to ruin their young lives. In fact many young parents see it as an opportunity, On the other hand teenage mothers may be less aware of the stress that their pregnancy and the birth of their baby have on the family and especially the grandmother.

Grandparent support can be a mixed blessing. Conflict can arise over household tasks, baby care practices, discipline and boundaries for the teenager. This can lead to increased stress and anxiety levels in grandparents.

Many young parents liked being able to bring their parents along to hospital and other appointments but they didn't want grandparents to take over.

Grandparents may need supports such as family and friends – they can often be the biggest support. GPs were also helpful. Some families prefer to settle their private problems themselves. One-to-one or group support could be useful. Grandparents might need support to deal with difficulties of conflict between both families e.g. access, parenting style etc.

Many grandparents were involved in the care of their grandchildren at some level. This can be physically and psychologically demanding and often socially restrictive. Trying to balance their own children's needs on top of intensive needs of the baby was also challenging. Grandparents

need to preserve their own physical and psychological well being, as well as juggle roles and responsibilities very often in challenging circumstances.

Growing up in Scotland: The Circumstances of Persistently Poor Children (2010)

These results are based on data from interviews with the cohort child's main carer across the first four years of GUS, covering the period from 2005/06 to 2008/09

Which children are most likely to be persistently poor?

Various background characteristics of children are explored, including family size and composition, parents' work status, education, health, tenure and characteristics of the local area.

The key findings are:

- Certain children were more likely than others to experience persistent poverty. These included those in lone-parent families, larger families, families with a young mother, families with parents with low education, and families who live in rented housing, particularly social-rented housing.
- Some of these factors may not be driving persistent poverty, they may be consequences of being poor, and for others the relationship with poverty is inherently complex. Multivariate analysis shows that family work status is the factor that bears most on the risk of persistent poverty. Being continuously out of work is the key driver of persistent poverty.

Children in stable lone-parent families were in the family type most at risk of persistent poverty. For example, 73 per cent of birth-cohort children who were in lone-parent families throughout the period were persistently poor, compared with only 12 per cent of children from stable couple-families. Children from larger families also faced a higher risk of persistent poverty as did children whose mother reported health problems or disability, particularly if these were longer-term.

It is evident that the risk of persistent poverty is related to parents' education: higher grades or above offers a good protection against persistent poverty both in the case of mothers' and fathers' education. Also, families who did not use childcare faced persistent poverty. This could be for a variety of reasons; including having one parent at home caring for a very young child who looks after the family through choice or being constrained by uneconomical childcare costs. Finally, social renters faced a higher risk of persistent poverty than private renters and owner-occupiers.

Children with young mothers (under 25) faced a higher risk of persistent poverty than those with older mothers; as did those that had lived in a lone-parent family at any time during the observation period (compared to those permanently living in a couple family) - www.cfr.ac.uk/gus/index.html

The Real Deal

Irish Times Oct 14th 2010

According to a HSE survey, teenage girls are knowledgeable about contraception and the effects of alcohol and other drugs on sexual behaviour but are less aware of the risks posed by sexually transmitted diseases.

Just over half of students surveyed had never had sex but one-quarter of those who were sexually active used no contraception on the most recent occasion, research carried out for the HSE Crisis Pregnancy Programme found by the Real Deal Programme.

Those surveyed were mostly 15-18-year-old girls who had taken part in the Real Deal sex education programme, which is delivered by one-time single mothers rather than teachers or professionals.

The programme, which started in 2008 and is designed to complement relationships and sexuality teaching in schools, has so far been delivered to almost 600 girls and will be provided for another 600 from this autumn.

Alcohol emerges in the survey as a key indicator of early sexual activity; of those students who said they had had sex, all had drunk alcohol at some stage. Conversely, none of those who had abstained from alcohol had tried sexual intercourse.

Some 84 per cent of the girls who took part in the evaluation said they drank alcohol and of these almost half binged by drinking four to six drinks on the one occasion.

One-quarter of the girls claimed to have taken an illegal drug but this figure rose to 45 per cent for those who were sexually active.

Before taking part in the programme, students showed a high level of awareness that alcohol and other drugs can change a person's ability to make decision about sex. The survey of almost 400 girls also found that the level of awareness of various types of contraception was relatively high.

The girls cited "friends" as the most likely source of information about sexuality and said the pressure to have sex was far more likely to come from someone outside their circle of friends.

The evaluation says the programme was successful in getting girls to give more consideration to the decision to have sex and to be more aware of the consequences. More work was required with older girls on the influence of alcohol and illegal drugs on sexual behaviour, it said.

Targeting girls at 15 and 16 years of age may be too late, according to the report, because some are beginning to feel the pressure to have sex from the age of 12. The students also believed that boys would benefit from a similar programme but this should not be at the expense of delivering the programme to all young girls in a certain age group. Research into the feasibility of a similar programme for boys has resulted in a call to Dads aged 21 - 35 who were once teenage dads to get involved in the Real Deal

programme which deals with the REALITY of teenage parenting and the associated challenges.

Real Deal research findings

51% of girls surveyed (mostly aged 15 to 18 years old) never had sex

25% of sexually active girls used no contraception

44% of those who had sex waited until they were 16 years or over to do so

84% said they drank alcohol

41% of those who drank said they were most likely to drink four to six drinks on any one occasion

60% said they would like more sex education

Teen Parents Support Programme

The proceedings of the 10th anniversary conference held on 10th December 2010 in Galway are now available on the Treoir website at the end of the Young Parents section. They are also available from Margaret Morris, the National Co-ordinator at 01 – 6700167.

Change of address and phone numbers:

Two local TPSP programmes have moved address;

- Cork is now at 34 Paul Street, Cork. Tel: 021 4222 987, Mobiles: 086 8278 772 / 4
Email: tpspcork@eircom.net, www.teenparents.ie
- Finglas is now at Mater Christi Secondary School, Cappagh Road, Finglas, Dublin 11. Tel: 01 804 1765, Mobiles: 087 952 3924 / 6. Emails: rebecca.moore@barnardos.ie / lisa.jackson@barnardos.ie, www.barnardos.ie