

FACT SHEET



FSU Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy

Social Support

Improving Outcomes for Adolescent Parents and Their Children

Emotional support is only one facet of comprehensive social support for families and program professionals working with teen parents. Social support also involves guidance, social reinforcement, practical assistance with the tasks of daily living, and social stimulation. *

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RESEARCH

Social support systems may either play a protective role, mitigating the effects of stress and other risk factors or create additional stressors through non-supportive, conflictual, or interfering interactions.

Positive social support of teen mothers has been correlated with maternal competency behaviors, feelings of love towards the infant, and gratification in the maternal role.

The quality of social support provided to mothers may influence their infants' attachment security. Satisfaction with intimate support, but not marital status, predicted infant attachment security.

Social support may also contribute to infant attachment security by buffering the infant-mother attachment relationship from stresses.

Teen mothers who have more social support are less likely to exhibit angry and punitive parenting and, in turn, less likely to have irritable infants.

Pregnant teens engaging in bi-directional support (giving as well as receiving support) with their parents reported higher levels of mastery and life satisfaction than those teens only giving or receiving support from parents.

Under conditions of positive family cohesion, co-residence with grandmothers seems to benefit an adolescent mother's mental health. However, under conditions of negative family cohesion, adolescent mothers with co-residing grandmothers experience greater depressive symptoms than their counterparts.

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RESEARCH

Teen parents who live with their parents or relatives are more likely to return to school, to graduate from high school, to be employed, and to be free from welfare payments.

The quality of grandmother and partner support is key to enhancing the outcomes for the child of a teen mother, primarily through intermediate processes of maternal education, responsiveness, and stimulation for the child.

However, a high level of grandmother involvement appears to be related to negative consequences for children born to teen mothers. It may inadvertently encourage teen mother to be less involved with her child.

A study of low-birth weight infants born to teenage mothers found that when the mothers and their infants resided with the grandmother, the infants had significantly higher intelligence quotient scores and better health outcomes at 12 months of age.

Although social support is generally associated with positive outcomes for adolescent mothers, living with a boyfriend or husband is closely correlated with dropping out of school.

In another study, early marriage or living with a partner was associated with lower levels of maternal education and school dropout. It appears that the partners of many teen mothers do not support their girlfriends' or wives' success in high school, post-secondary education, or the workplace.

Programs that involve the male partner, as well as the young mother, are more successful in decreasing the dropout rate.

Initiation of home visits prior to infant birth made a significant difference in preventing child abuse and neglect by adolescent mothers. Genuine, focused attention by the home visitor nurtured the teen parent's self-esteem as well as her potential sensitivity and competence with the baby.

Supportive social relationships can play an important role in buffering the stresses experienced by teenage mothers, thus positively influencing their psychological well-being and mothering ability.

* Dunst, C., Trivette, C., & Deal, A. (1988). *Enabling and empowering families*. Boston, MA: Cambridge Books.