Exploring The Career-Related Goals and Barriers of Teenage Mothers

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Abstract

As teenage childbearing is increasing in New Brunswick, it is imperative that teenage mothers' career-related goals and barriers are closely examined in hopes of supporting these youths. Using the qualitative approach, I explored the career-related goals and present/anticipated barriers of three teenage mothers. Both academic and career-related goals, as well as the barriers to fulfilling these goals, varied for each participant. Some of the barriers communicated included financial and time constraints, lacking supportive figures, lacking qualifications, lacking motivation to graduate from high school, and uncertainty related to a lack of guidance and knowledge in terms of formal education.

Précis

En raison des augmentations de la maternité auprès des adolescentes au Nouveau-Brunswick, il est impératif que leurs objectifs ainsi que leurs obstacles liés à leurs carrières soient examinés dans l'espoir d'un meilleur soutien. En utilisant l'approche qualitative, j'ai exploré les objectifs et les obstacles actuels/prévus liés à la carrière de trois mères adolescentes. Les résultats montrent que les objectifs liés à l'académique ainsi qu'à la carrière étaient variés entre chaque participante. Certains des obstacles communiqués inclus les contraintes financières et le manque de temps, le manque de soutien à la maison (partenaire), le manque de qualifications, le manque de motivation à obtenir un diplôme secondaire, et une incertitude liée à le manque de conseil concernant l'éducation post-secondaire.

Despite the overall decrease in teenage pregnancy rates in Canada between 2001 and 2010, certain regions have actually experienced an increase during this time (McKay, 2012). For example, New Brunswick saw an increase of 1.6% in teenage pregnancy between 2001 and 2010 (McKay, 2012). Furthermore, approximately 50% of teenagers who become pregnant carry their baby to term, resulting in 20,000 children being born to teenagers each year in Canada (Al-Sahab, Heifetz, Tamim, Bohr & Connolly, 2012). Even though only a small proportion of these teenagers raise their children at home, these numbers reveal that motherhood is a phenomenon experienced by a substantial number of adolescents in Canada.

Various reasons have been proposed in the literature as to why teenage pregnancy and childbearing exist, and in some provinces, are actually increasing. Socio-economic disadvantages have been depicted as partially responsible for why teenagers get pregnant and decide to keep their babies (Bielski, 2013). As Bielski (2013) maintains, "teenage girls are more likely to get pregnant when they have fewer education or employment opportunities to postpone child-bearing for" (para. 4). Furthermore, Dryburgh (2000) suggests that the absence of a negative social stigma surrounding the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy and childbearing can result in it becoming normalized. Ineffective sexual health and contraceptive education may also contribute to increases in pregnancy and childbearing among teenagers (McKay, 2012). Lastly, Al-Sahab et al. (2012) maintain that teenage pregnancy and childbearing is most common among women who are non-immigrant, single, of a low-socioeconomic status and who have been or are currently subject to physical and/or sexual abuse. Although there is an extensive body of literature examining the experience of pregnancy and motherhood during adolescence, relatively few studies have focused on its implications for career development.

Career Development in Teenage Mothers

As evidenced in the literature, teenage mothers aspire to a wide range of career paths, including ones that require post-secondary education (Phipps, Salak, Nunes and Rosengard, 2011; Zippay, 1995). In Stiles' (2005) study, a common theme among the participants was their desire for general happiness, independence and a career: "[the participants] all talked about how education was necessary to earn good money in the future" (Stiles, 2005, p. 13). In another study, authors Barto, Lambert and Brott (2015) suggest that teenage mothers' abilities to plan and make decisions in regards to their future career was similar to those of their childless peers.

Despite these aspirations and abilities, teenage mothers often discontinue their secondary or post-secondary pursuits, which can ultimately propel these girls into a life of poverty (Bissell, 2000). As Bissell (2000), Smith and Wilson (2014) reiterate, teenage childbearing has grave economic conse-

quences, as teenage mothers are likelier to be socially disadvantaged. Dryburgh (2000) expands on these findings by stating that, "childbearing may curtail education and thereby reduce a young woman's employment prospects in a job market" (p. 11). Smith and Wilson (2014) continue by stating that a teenage mother's poor economic situation is largely attributed to becoming a mother before completing high school. Looking at the problem through a different lens, Miller (2009) suggests that delaying motherhood past the early 20s and 30s can actually increase a woman's career-related success, namely increasing her hours worked and consequently her career earnings. Smith and Wilson (2014) conclude by saying that the financial difficulty experienced by teenage mothers in supporting their offspring continues to be a public and policy issue.

As indicated above, limited employment prospects may potentially lead the teenage mother to a life of poverty. Living a life of poverty may result in these young mothers choosing to endure an abusive relationship for the financial support. This situation may then place the teenage mother and her baby's physical and emotional growth and development at risk (Al-Sahab et al., 2012, Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative, 2006; Hellerstedt, 2002; Klein, 2005). In addition to the health risks that it places on the baby, exposure to partner abuse can also deter the teenage mother from participating in school, whether at the secondary or post-secondary levels (Kennedy, 2005; Kennedy 2006). Interestingly, MacGregor (2009) suggests that returning to school after the birth of a baby can actually act as an alternative pathway to financial stability among women without stable partners.

Previous research has identified a number of specific barriers that prohibited the fulfillment of teenage mothers' career development. These barriers include financial constraints, having insufficient time for education, the absence of

social support (i.e. peer, professional and partner) and a general lack of knowledge and guidance in areas such as how to manage money and how to balance school and parenting (Stiles, 2005; Zippay, 1995). In another study concerned with assessing the supports and resources necessary in helping parenting teenagers reach their academic and career-related goals, Brosh, Weigel and Evans (2009) highlight additional barriers faced by their participants. For example, inconsistent childcare, an unstable relationship with the parents of the infant's father and a lack of governmental resources were all highlighted as factors that prohibit successful attainment of academic and career-related goals.

Proposed strategies to overcoming these barriers included providing the teenage mother with a mentor (Zippay, 1995) or with school-based and community-based support groups (Phipps et al., 2011; Stiles, 2005) to assist them with pursuing their educational and occupational aspirations. Along with these proposed strategies, Rothenberg and Weissman (2002) maintain the importance of educating practitioners working directly with teenage mothers of their particular needs. Bissell (2000) continues by stating that in addition to addressing their needs, practitioners must simultaneously take into account teenage mothers' particular socioeconomic status, in order to effectively implement any particular initiative or program.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is qualitative and exploratory in nature, and is grounded in Savickas' Life Design theory of career development. This theory, which derives from a life designing epistemological position, focuses on the nonlinear progression, contextual possibilities, dynamic processes, multiple perspectives and personal patterns. Life Design theory also considers lifelong learning, flexibility, commitment, employability and emotional intelligence (Savickas, 2011). In terms of barriers to

career development, this theory maintains that the lack of stable organizations and secure employment, which has marked the twenty-first century, has resulted in an anxious and insecure worker (Savickas, 2011). As Savickas (2011) maintains, "entering today's work world requires more effort, deeper self-knowledge, and greater confidence than ever before" (p. 13). As a guide to this deeper self-knowledge and greater confidence, the Life Design theory is concerned with the construct of a narrative as a means of building a career. In other words, this theory posits that it is through detailing and reflecting upon their narrative that individuals will make career-related meaning, plan exploratory activities and form new intentions (Savickas, Nota, Rossier, Dauwalder, Duarte, Guichard, Soresi, Esbroeck & Vianen, 2009; Savickas, 2011).

To better understand career development among teenage mothers, this theory suggests that it is important to focus on this population's educational and occupational goals, anticipated and current barriers faced while pursuing these goals, and the opportunity structures, social networks, and personal demands they encounter.

Research Question

With the exception of studies such as Zippay (1995) and Stiles (2005), there has been very limited research examining the educational and occupational-related goals and barriers of teenage mothers. Al-Sahab et al. (2012) reinforce the necessity for conducting more research in this area by stating that, a comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of how to assist this population of at-risk youth cannot be attained without examining their career development.

To address this pressing need in the literature and to expand knowledge of teenage mothers' career development, the following questions were addressed in the present study:

1. What stories about their educational and occupational goals do teenagers who have become mothers tell when they think about their future career?

2. Within these narratives, what do teenage mothers perceive to be meaningful supports and barriers to achieving their career goals, including the social networks, opportunity structures and demands that they anticipate having in their lives?

By addressing these focal research questions, the findings of this study provide a useful framework for beginning to conceptualize career development among Canadian teenage mothers.

Method

Research Design: Narrative Inquiry

This study was informed by Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) narrative inquiry, which focuses on an individual's stories, experiences, and the meaning of these experiences (Creswell, 2012; Maple & Edwards, 2010). As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest, humans are storytellers who both individually and socially lead storied lives. Through the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories, narrative inquiry seeks to study the way in which these storytellers experience the world (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). In particular, narrative inquiry helps to understand a person's story as it is embedded in their personal and social frame of reference, as well as reveal the important themes in these lived experiences (Creswell, 2012). Peterson and Baker (2010) state that stories are a way of understanding a person's experience in their world, and thus gain a glimpse into their reality. It can be argued, therefore, that using narrative inquiry as a method "is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study" (Peterson & Baker, 2010, p. 3). Furthermore, Polkinghorne

(2007) provides justification for the suitability of narrative inquiry in situations where there is limited existing research on a phenomenon by stating that "evidence, such as personal descriptions of life experiences, can serve to issue knowledge about neglected, but significant areas, of the human realm" (p. 472).

Participants and Recruitment

Sample and recruitment. I used physical (e.g., posters) and electronic advertisements in schools, programs and agencies that serve teenage mothers and snowball recruitment strategies to recruit participants for this study. Purposive sampling was used to select participants for inclusion who were nineteen years of age or younger, who had given birth to a child, and who were the primary caregiver for that child.

Three teenage mothers from urban areas within New Brunswick participated in this study. Three participants were used as opposed to the originally sought four to six because of weather and transportation issues, as well as time constraints. Some of the characteristics of this sample of participants included: (a) a seventeen year old participant, an eighteen year old participant, and a nineteen year old participant, (b) they were all in a relationship with their baby's father in some capacity; (c) one of the participants was employed (e.g., financially supporting herself), while the two remaining participants were unemployed (e.g., receiving financial support from another source); (d) two of the participants were currently enrolled in high school, while the remaining participant had graduated from high school and was working fulltime; (e) all three of the participants were English-speaking Caucasian Canadians; and (f) all participants had one child, two of which were eight months old, while the remaining participant's child was ten months old.

Data Collection

I collected data using audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews guided by Wengraf's (2006) Biographic Narrative Interview Method. This method encourages the participant to share as much of their story as they wish, guided by initial probes (e.g., tell me about your experience of teenage motherhood). While the participant told their story, I wrote notes (e.g., what about teenage motherhood is difficult?). Once the participant's story came to a natural end, I revisited my notes as a catalyst for further discussion (e.g., can you tell me a little more about what you meant when you said that teenage motherhood was difficult?). I asked my participants questions from my Guiding Questions as a way of redirecting them or to elicit specific information about their educational and occupational goals, barriers and relevant life contexts. The interviews lasted between forty and seventy-five minutes for each participant. Due to time constraints, the interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, including all pauses and non-word utterances. A copy of the three complete transcriptions can be found in Appendix C.

Due to weather and transportation issues, as well as time constraints, one of my participant's interviews was conducted over the phone. Although this method of interviewing did not interfere with the data I collected, the lack of non-verbal communication impeded my participant's ability to provide a fluid narrative, and thus impacted her experience in telling her story. This "choppiness" may have consequently tampered with this particular participant's ability to make meaning of her narrative, which is one of the goals of Life Design.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the interview content using Connelly and Clandinin's (2000) interpretive-analytic guidelines for narrative inquiry.

Specifically, I began by archiving the data, which involved reading through each transcript and identifying key elements such as characters, themes and plots (e.g., characters and themes: due to a lack of family support and access to resources, a participant seemed uncertain about her chances of attaining her career goal), and restoried the content in chronological order (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Creswell, Hanson, Plano & Morales, 2007). I then proceeded to engage in narrative coding, which consists of categorizing the data from the participants according to such literary elements as time, interactions and places. During this stage, I also identified continuities and discontinuities, gaps and silences, and interweaving storylines within the narratives (e.g., interweaving storylines: two of the three participants found that expensive daycare was a primary cause of their financial strain and could potentially cause significant challenges when pursuing a career) (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Then, in the final stage of analysis, I interwove my personal field notes and observations with the data that I had collected from my participants. Resulting from this stage of analysis were individual summarizing stories, which I shared with my participants for their input, feedback, validation and modification. The following chapter offers the complete summarizing stories.

Rigor and Validation

Strategies. Polkinghorne (2007) describes a particular threat to narrative inquiry, stating that by virtue of a lapse in memory, disparities between individual's experienced meaning and the stories that they depict about this meaning may occur. I will go into further detail on how I addressed this particular threat by providing my participants with their summarizing stories for feedback and input later on. Furthermore, due to the nature of narrative inquiry, issues surrounding the validity often revolve around the objectivity and trustworthiness of what

is written (Polkinghorne, 2007). In hopes of addressing these issues surrounding objectivity and trustworthiness, Polkinghorne (2007) maintains that the validity of a claim is based on whether or not the reader is convinced by the evidence and argument presented. In hopes of convincing my audience, I not only presented the findings, I described my procedures for reaching my conclusions and linked my findings to existing research about career development in adolescent mothers. I also highlighted the ways that my claims are supported by and/or contrast with previous research. Furthermore, I sought to ensure that the study was conducted as an interactive and collaborative experience, where participants retained ownership of their individual story (Maple & Edwards, 2010; Trahar, 2009). I also utilized the iterative process of data collection and analysis, returning to my "participants to gain clarification and further [explore the] questions that arise[d] during the interpretative portion of the research" (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 482). Only one of my participants asked for a modification to her summarizing story. The change was made to a sentence that was used to describe her boyfriend's secondary school pursuits.

My relationship with the topic. Evaluating the credibility of qualitative research can also involve considering the researcher's own relationship with the topic and pre-existing beliefs (Polkinghorne, 2007). My fascination with career development among teenage mothers stems from interacting with many teenagers who became pregnant during my high school years, and who subsequently dropped out of secondary school or chose to discontinue their academic or vocational career in order to raise their child. For example, upon my high school graduation, I knew more than a dozen teenagers who had given birth to children before graduating high school. After years of pursuing post-secondary and graduate studies, I often think about these women

who are approximately my age. Specifically, I wonder about their current academic or vocational situation and the barriers they faced throughout their pursuits. I also think of whether or not they are content with their current academic or vocational status, and if it at all reflects what they had hoped for and aspired towards as teenage mothers. My belief is that teenage mothers with little, if any, external support (e.g., financial, emotional and physical) would experience difficulty establishing a career, and that those who have more resources at their disposal would consequently struggle less. This belief is based on my experiences living in a small town, and seeing firsthand many of the struggles that some teenage mothers faced. These challenges that I witnessed revolved predominately around graduating from secondary school, and entering into the workforce.

As I was not a teenage mother myself, I do not know what it is like to be an emerging adult reflecting back on experiences as a teenage mother. However, I assume that many emerging adults who were teenage mothers are aware of the difficulties associated with establishing a career while parenting a child. This assumption is based on conversations that I have had with women I knew in high school who had children as teenagers, as well as comments that I have heard them state. Ultimately, prior to conducting this research, I believed that teenage mothers would be more likely to associate success with their experiences as a mother as opposed to their experience attempting to pursue a career. Despite my findings being transferable as opposed to generalizable, my experience interviewing my three participants has led me to maintain my belief that teenage mothers are more likely to attribute their overall success to their experience as a mother as opposed to their abilities to attain academic and/or vocational goals.

Findings

To depict the findings of this narrative inquiry, excerpts from the final individual summarizing stories of each participant are presented below. Although these summaries were written from the interview transcripts, they are the result of the analysis process rather than direct quotations from the original interviews. The summaries have, however, been reviewed by the participants and accepted as accurately representing their experience. Also, all personally identifying information has been removed, and pseudonyms are used throughout. The summaries presented below have been abbreviated due to page limitations.

Rachel

At that particular moment sitting in the bathroom, with the pregnancy test between my fingers, I decided to change my life for the better. I introduced myself to a more mature circle of friends, where I could avoid previous temptations, and subsequently regained motivation to graduate high school.

My mother and sisters, who had and continued to represent a powerful source of support, helped me as I struggled through my first and second trimesters of pregnancy while balancing school-related responsibilities. Noticeably absent during these trying months, however, was my boyfriend and my baby's father John, who had 'conveniently' decided to move to Alberta where he was offered employment. This is typical John - never there when I need him.

It was January, at five months pregnant, when I was told that I had met the requirements to graduate with an adult high school diploma. I felt like I was a burden to the system and was consequently 'pushed out' after having only completed the very minimal requirements.

After welcoming my daughter in May, my life changed beyond expectation. I knew [more than ever] that I needed to continually strive to improve my life, not just for my sake, but more importantly for my daughter's sake. Consequently, I decided to apply to NBCC's Human Services program, [but soon found] out that the college would not recognize my diploma, despite my high school principal assuring me otherwise. [It has since been recognized, but I am now on a long waitlist]. Hoping to savor what little motivation I had left, I began job searching, which quickly resulted in me obtaining a less-than-fulfilling job as a health care worker at [a local health care facility].

John, who up to this point appeared uninterested in caring for our child any more than he had to, proclaimed that he could not babysit our daughter while I worked, [as he was] too tired from his night shifts to watch her throughout the day. This worried me for several reasons, one of which included the financial strain that paying for a daycare would inevitably cause. Despite the daycare subsidy that is provided through the Department of Social Development, I had calculated that the income I would obtain through my job would only cover the daycare bills. In addition to my already bleak financial situation [the Department of Social Development had recently revoked all of my funding, except for a portion of the daycare subsidy when I got hired] the lack of time that I could allot to complete daily chores and errands would make my life that much more hectic. John has [also] continuously demonstrated little to any support in all realms of our life together. This lack of support coupled with his frequent bursts of frustration has made me feel like a single mother walking on eggshells. I have tried leaving him, but cannot financially sustain a life on my own.

I would [still] like to one day fulfill my dream career of working with autistic children by completing a university-level degree in Human Services, [but] anticipate that these goals will not be attained without challenges.

Kate

Grade eleven *should* have been an enjoyable and relatively stress-free time in my high school career. I would quickly learn that being young and pregnant, living in an unfamiliar environment and having recently become estranged from my mother would prove otherwise. Despite the valid attempts from my high school's staff and teachers at trying to help me succeed academically, school just seemed so irrelevant to me. The only courses that I felt motivated to attend were those relating to my pregnancy and the eventual birth of my child.

Almost immediately after I gave birth, my boyfriend's mother and older brother offered to watch my daughter during the day in hopes of motivating me to return to school. Similar to my pre-birth attitude towards school, [however], my courses only seemed to add stress to my life, and I seriously lacked motivation to complete any school-related tasks, which consequently began affecting my marks and my desire to graduate.

Despite not feeling motivated to do well in school, I know that graduating is necessary. I really don't know what I want to do in the future and I have absolutely no one to help guide me. I have found myself on two very different ends of a spectrum: one day I want to establish myself as a stay-at-home-mom, and the next day I want to pursue an interesting occupation where I can create my own schedule.

Perhaps the lack of urgency that I feel in terms of seeking a career stems from my current financial situation. I receive a monthly income through family allowance from the government as well as money from the Department of Social Development, which is more than enough. This income coupled with the small number of bills that I currently have to pay has allowed me to spend money on other things such as baby toys, baby clothes and fast food. My social worker, who visits me once a month to teach me basic skills such as budgeting, cook-

ing and cleaning, advised me to re-think my spending habits and to begin planning for my future. This enlightening conversation that I had with her has motivated me to slowly start planning for a life on my own, with my little family.

Ava

The daycare that my daughter is enrolled in], which is located within and associated with my high school, does not require payment, [and therefore] faces a long waitlist, and subsequently has a high turnover rate. The daycare administrators decided that newborn babies are of a higher priority, and that they should, therefore, be guaranteed a spot over older babies. In other words, once a new baby comes along, the oldest baby in the daycare has to leave. This upcoming June is my baby girl's turn to make room for a new baby.

This situation would not worry me if my finances were not so unstable. [My boyfriend] Gavin and I try to live the best we can off of the income that we obtain through the Department of Social Development and family allowance. With these two incomes, we are still only left with two hundred dollars at the end of the month for emergency spending money. After researching daycare costs, Gavin and I found out that after we factor in the subsidy provided through the Department of Education and Childhood Development, daycare will still cost us a total of two hundred and fifty dollars a month.

Ever since I was a child, I have been motivated to create the best possible life I can for myself. Consequently, I have always performed well in school, and knew that post-secondary education was something that I wanted to pursue. Even after finding out that I was pregnant, I knew that my plans for success would not be compromised, and I continued to flourish in school.

Although my desires to graduate high school, and to pursue post-secondary education are deeply engrained, I am currently unsure of how those plans will unfold. Without the certainty of a safe and affordable daycare service, my future as a high school graduate and as a pharmacy technician is up in the air. This reality makes me sick to my stomach.

Discussion

All three of my participants communicated, in some capacity, a desire to pursue a career that requires post-secondary education. The career goals included human service worker, pharmacy technician and nurse. Kate receives income from both the Department of Social Development and the government's family allowance. She has minimal financial responsibility as she lives with her infant's father and his family, and consequently appeared less pressured to establish a career. She was also the only participant who seemed uncertain in regards to her occupational goals. Rachel and Ava also both receive some form of financial assistance either through the Department of Social Development, Department of Education and Child Development and/or family allowance. They both live independently with their infants' fathers and consequently have more financial responsibility. Contrary to Kate, they both expressed an increased sense of urgency when they spoke of their desire to pursue a career, and were both more certain of the occupation that they wanted to obtain.

Within her narrative, Rachel expressed a number of positive experiences that stemmed from early motherhood. For example, she stated that becoming a mother had improved her life, which is something that Al-Sahab et al. (2012) and Clemmens (2003) maintained in their articles. Rachel mentioned that before becoming pregnant for the second time, she surrounded herself with people who she considered to be bad influences. After finding out she was pregnant once again, she quickly reconstructed her friendship circle to include people who would have a more positive influence on her life. In addition to Rachel's

daughter helping improve her life, her mother and sisters have played an important supportive role as well. Rachel also maintained how her sense of resiliency has increased since given birth. Among the positive aspects of her situation, Rachel also discussed a number of barriers prohibiting her from fulfilling her career goals. These barriers, which revolve around her personal demands, social networks and opportunity structures (Savickas, 2011) included lacking the qualifications necessary for admission into college and university programs related to her career goals. In addition, her infant's father has demonstrated volatile behaviors towards her and their child and has been generally unsupportive. This has increased her personal demands, which has resulted in significant time constraints. Stiles (2005) reinforced the unique challenges that teenage mothers experience as a result of balancing their varied demands (i.e. student, mother and employee). Lastly, as Stiles (2005) highlighted, many teenage mothers remain in abusive relationships because of a financial dependency. Unfortunately, Rachel is unable to terminate the unhealthy relationship she has with her baby's father because of her inability to financially sustain a life on her own. As Rachel maintained, daycare expenses and insufficient funding at the level of the government are predominant reasons why she experiences this financial turmoil, which has ultimately prevented her from fulfilling any career-related pursuits.

Similar to Rachel, Ava also mentioned positive aspects to her situation, which stemmed from early motherhood. For example, once she found out she was pregnant, Ava was able to register in a high school that catered to both pregnant and parenting teenage mothers. Consequently, throughout her pregnancy and into the first few months of parenthood, Ava's unique needs were adequately addressed by the high school personnel. One of the ways that this high school was able to address Ava's needs included providing her with free daycare, up to a

certain point. Among the positive aspects of Ava's situation included a number of barriers to fulfilling her career-related goals. Predominately, the lack of money for daycare expenses has and continues to act as a significant barrier to fulfilling her educational goals. Consequently, she has had to reevaluate and reprioritize the personal demands inherent in being a student and a mother (Savickas, 2011). For example, Ava must begin paying for daycare six months before she is expected to graduate from high school (she does not currently have to pay because the daycare that her daughter is enrolled in has a no-fee rule up to a certain age). She is uncertain as to whether or not she will have the financial means to keep her daughter enrolled in daycare at that time. She continued to explain that if she is unable to afford daycare, she will have to postpone completing high school, and consequently her post-secondary training to becoming a pharmacy technician.

Positive aspects of Kate's narrative were also evident throughout the interview. Supportive figures, such as her boyfriend's family, high school personnel and her assigned social worker have significantly helped Kate throughout the first few months of motherhood. In terms of helping guide her in her personal life, Kate mentioned how influential and motivating her experience with a social worker has been. In addition to the understanding that school administration have demonstrated, Kate's boyfriend's family have acted as a key support in caring for the infant as Kate attends classes. Despite have several supportive figures, Kate discussed how the lack of knowledge and guidance pertaining to post-secondary education in particular, and the subsequent uncertainty that it has caused, has acted as a challenge to her career-related pursuits. Stiles (2005) and Zippay (1995) both reinforced how a lack of knowledge and guidance in terms of formal education can negatively impact teenage mothers' career-related pursuits. Kate also mentioned that her lack of interest in school subject matter has resulted in a lack of motivation to graduate high school.

Overall, this pattern of findings reveals that, as suggested by the narratives of three teenage mothers living in urban areas in New Brunswick, teenage mothers do desire careers that require post-secondary education. For those participants who had more financial responsibility (i.e. living independently with their partner), there existed a sense of urgency to establish a career. For the teenage mother who resided with her boyfriend and his family, and who consequently had less financial responsibility, less urgency was expressed in regards to establishing a career. Furthermore, despite teenage motherhood acting as a general motivator to improve their lives, this population of at-risk youth also experienced a number of barriers, such as financial and time constraints, lacking motivation to graduate high school, uncertainty related to a lack of knowledge and guidance surrounding formal education, lacking qualifications and lacking supportive figures. These barriers appeared to interfere with the teenage mothers' attempts to pursuing their career goals.

Implications

Despite the varying rate of teenage childbearing across provinces in Canada, I believe that all provinces should consider implementing my suggestions in hopes of increasing support to this population of at-risk youth. My recommendations, which stem from the barriers presented by my participants, implicate both the daycare and education systems. As these systems are provincially regulated, it is the responsibility of the provincial governments to implement these recommendations. In the following section, a detailed account of these suggestions is offered.

Recommendations for secondary school counsellors as well as administrators at the school board level include providing parenting teenagers with access (whether through their school or through correspondence) to courses that are relevant to their day-to-day life experiences (i.e. basic parenting skills, budgeting and time management). Incorporating courses that cater to this population of at-risk youth is likely to increase their interest and motivation to attend school. An additional recommendation stems from Zippay's (1995) discussion of the positive impacts that mentors have on parenting teenagers. Implementing a mentoring service within a high school would, in my view, help inform and guide teenage mothers in areas including: educational planning, educational and employment-related activities, and life skills (i.e. decision-making and problem solving). This belief is reinforced by Kate's positive experience with her social worker, who acted as a mentor for more home-related responsibilities. Lastly, it is crucial that school counsellors reach out to local colleges and universities in order to find out if the diploma with which a teenage mother is graduating qualifies her for admission into their institution. Alternatively, if the school diploma does not qualify the parenting teenager for admission into colleges or universities, the counsellor can inform the young mother of possible transition programs that are available that can help qualify her for admission into post-secondary programs.

Kennedy and Bennett (2006) maintain that school participation, both at the secondary and post-secondary level, can be compromised if the teenage mother is exposed to partner abuse. These authors continue by stating that "practitioners working with adolescent mothers should acknowledge the possible exposure to different forms of violence among many of these young women, identify its potential role as a barrier to school performance and participation, and tailor interventions and programs accordingly" (Kennedy & Bennett, 2006, p. 768). Carlson (1997) provides three general goals that a counsellor can use as a guide to

helping support teenage mothers who want to leave abusive partners but feel unable to because of a financial dependency. These goals include: (a) the development of a safety plan (e.g., a concrete plan that can be implemented when the abuse is imminent); (b) enhancing the teenage mother's decision-making and problem-solving skills (e.g., exercises that reinforce the woman's right to make decisions for herself, as well as highlighting existing options or alternatives); and (c) reducing isolation and increasing the teenage mother's social support (e.g., assisting the young mother in acquiring social support outside of therapy). Facilitating a referral to a local transition home for abused women may be a way of addressing the first and/or second of these goals ("Transition Houses for Abused Women," n.d.). As an extension to the third goal provided, Tutty, Bigood and Rothery (1993) suggest encouraging the teenage mother to attend a support group for women victims of domestic abuse. As Tutty et al. (1993) maintain, victims of domestic abuse who attended support groups showed "significant improvements in self-esteem, belonging support, locus of control, less traditional attitudes towards marriage and the family, perceived stress, and marital functioning" (p. 325).

Barriers, such as high daycare expenses, in addition to more general financial and time constraints, appeared to challenge my participants in their pursuit of a fulfilling career. For instance, daycare expenses caused a significant financial strain for two participants and consequently increased the stress involved in trying to balance personal demands (i.e. student, employee and mother). Daycare has also been identified as a barrier in previous research (Stiles, 2005; Zippay, 1995). Daycare-related barriers need to be addressed at the level of government policy. One recommendation is for governmental agencies to decrease daycare costs or increase the subsidy provided to teenage mothers in high school, as well as expand the sub-

sidy to include young parents pursuing post-secondary endeavors. Providing more affordable daycare to teenage mothers is likely to substantially increase their chances of future career success. In order to provide adequate support for the members of this population who are most at-risk, an overall increase in financial assistance to teenage mothers living on their own and who are trying to establish themselves in the workforce should be implemented.

In addition to utilizing the above-mentioned recommendations aimed at decreasing the career-related barriers that teenage mothers face, counsellors working within or outside of the school system should also become aware of some of the positive experiences that may stem from early motherhood. As described by my participants, teenage motherhood has helped them cultivate a general desire to improve their lives through academic and vocational training in hopes of acquiring a fruitful career. In addition, particular participants also highlighted gaining an increased sense of resiliency and obtaining support through family, school personnel and governmental figures such as social workers. By understanding both the positive and negative experiences that may accompany teenage motherhood, counsellors will be equipped to provide a more complete picture of possible futures when working with these kinds of clients and provide them with a sense of hope in relation to their educational and occupational plans.

Limitations

The small number of participants in my study limits the application of my findings. Only including three participants in my study, as opposed to the four to six that is typically recommended in narrative research, limits the pool of people that may be able to relate to the stories depicted by my participants. In other words, fewer participants represent a smaller range of the kinds of experiences that may exist for Canadian teenage mothers. With this

being said, Caucasian Canadian teenage mothers who are between seventeen and nineteen years of age, who are currently enrolled in/or graduated from high school, and who are in a relationship with their infant's father are likely to find my results relatable.

Younger teenage mothers (i.e. fifteen and sixteen year olds), on the other hand, may think of career development and the issue of pursuing post-secondary education in a different way than my three participants. Similarly, teenage mothers from different cultures and ethnicities experiencing difficulty accepting my findings, as my participants are English speaking Caucasian Canadians living in Atlantic Canada.

Similar to the consequences related to the absence of younger teenage mothers in my study, the fact that all three of my participants were either enrolled in or graduated from high school eliminates the chances of understanding the unique challenges presented to those who have dropped out of high school. In addition to the career-related goals and anticipated/present barriers of this population of teenage mothers going unnoticed, teenage mothers who have dropped out of high school may not view my findings as relevant to their situation.

The fact that my participants were all in a relationship with their baby's father also makes it unlikely that this study adequately reflects the unique challenges presented to a single teenage mother. Rachel's description of the difficulties that she experiences as a result of living with a volatile and unsupportive boyfriend would, I believe, most closely resemble the challenges that single mothers face on a daily basis as the lack of support has resulted in her raising their child predominately on her own. However, a firsthand account of the struggles related to being a teenage mother without any involvement from the baby's father is necessary to more completely understand the full range of experiences that are possible for teenage mothers.

A final limitation was created when weather and transportation issues required one of the interviews to be conducted using the telephone as opposed to a face-to-face meeting. I found that the necessary level of comfort conducive to obtaining an organic and evolving narrative was not attained with my phone interview. In other words, I found that the phone interview, at times, resembled more of a question and answer session than an opportunity for the participant to construct a fluid story. Despite my participant feeling the same way about our interview, she stated that email correspondence for any future communication was preferred because of her busy schedule. Although I do not believe that the telephone compromised the findings that emerged from this interview, I do believe that it interfered with the participant's experience in telling her story. Consequently, this participant may not have fully benefited from the meaning-making, career constructive component that is offered through the Narrative Inquiry method, as embedded in Life Design.

Future Research Directions

The preceding limitations clearly suggest that it would be beneficial to conduct additional narrative research on this phenomenon, but with a wider range of teenage mothers from across Canada. Specifically, future research could build on the present findings by exploring the educational and occupational goals of teenage mothers who are (a) younger than 17 years old, (b) from rural and Northern communities, (c) who have different cultural backgrounds, (d) who have dropped out of high school, and (e) who do not have any involvement with their baby's father. Conducting studies with these kinds of participants may reveal career development themes that were not part of the experience of the women in the present study.

Another potential future research direction is to study of the career-related goals and barriers of adult mothers who had their children as teenagers. The present findings clearly revealed that these teenage mothers seek careers that require post-secondary education. My participants' ambition and strong desire to improve their lives by establishing a career was nothing short of uplifting. However, it is not clear whether and how these individuals will achieve their goals to pursue post-secondary education while parenting their children. Indeed, other researchers have suggested that early parenthood may prevent women from attaining post-secondary education (Dryburgh, 2000). Consequently, it would be fruitful and enlightening to extend the present study to the population of adult mothers who had her child as a teenager. Exploring adult mothers' previous career-related goals, current employment situation and the trajectory to reaching this current situation would be beneficial in shedding light on actual barriers that were encountered in attempting to enter and complete post-secondary education. It would also be advantageous to investigate how the now adult mother attempted to reduce or eliminate her experienced barriers in her pursuit of a desired career, and whether or not she was successful.

A further research direction could potentially involve identifying and evaluating existing initiatives aimed at removing barriers that teenage mothers face in pursuit of their careers across different provinces and different locations within provinces. The participants' accounts of their current and anticipated barriers to establishing a desired career indicates that existing services, even for women living in urban settings where there were educational and social programs designed specifically to assist teenage mothers, are either not advertised or accessible enough, or quite simply not enough of a support. Evaluating these services in hopes of understanding their level of effectiveness in supporting teenage mothers in Canada may help illuminate possible areas of improvement. In addition to highlighting deficits in the services, it would also be informative and beneficial to conduct research on effective components of these services.

In summary, I believe that by conducting similar narrative studies with a wider range of participants, the varied career-related goals and barriers present among Canadian teenage mothers are likelier to emerge. In addition, by evaluating current services aimed at supporting teenage mothers in Canada as well as investigating the career-related trajectories of adult mothers who had their children as teenagers, an increasingly comprehensive understanding of ways to decrease barriers prohibiting fulfillment of teenage mothers' career-related goals will be attained.

Conclusion

Despite the variance in eagerness to enter the workforce, it was evident that all three of my participants desired to one day pursue a career outside of the home. All career-related goals that were discussed, which included human services worker, pharmacy technician and nurse, require post-secondary education. Upon reflection, my participants indicated that financial and time constraints, lacking supportive figures, lacking qualifications, lacking motivation to graduate high school, and uncertainty related to a lack of guidance and knowledge surrounding formal education were some of the barriers impeding fulfillment of their goals. Potential ways to overcome these barriers include: incorporating secondary-level courses that cater to the needs of teenage mothers, developing a mentorship service, guidance counsellors reaching out to post-secondary institutions to ensure that the diploma that the teenage mother graduates with qualifies her for admission, and increasing/expanding daycare subsidies and/or decreasing daycare costs.

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