ON-SITE DAYCARE’S EFFECTS ON ATTENDANCE OF TEEN MOTHERS

On-Site Daycare’s Effects on Attendance of Teen Mothers

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Professional Responsibility: This project has been reviewed by collegial professional peers and has been submitted for on-line publication before being evaluated by faculty members from Portland State University. I am the author and take full responsibility for the project’s contents and quality. This work serves as a baseline for my professional school counselor skills and demonstrates what I have done to develop and/or assess my actions directed toward serving students and schools. In other words, this is a snapshot or one indicator of my work at this stage of my career.

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to answer the question of whether the presence of an on-site daycare would improve the attendance of teen mothers enrolled in school.

Introduction

Teen pregnancy is not a modern problem. For many years, society has struggled with how to deal with the situation of young women who are pregnant. Each year in the United States, many young women become pregnant, and about half of those give birth and will become parents. Not surprisingly, the concentration of the population of teen mothers is found in urban centers, such as Portland, Oregon. The risks involved with teen parenthood are many, and research has supported long-term and short-term consequences to teen parenthood. Williams and Sadler (2001) cite that “early childbearing has been associated with decreased likelihood of future employment and subsequent greater dependence on public assistance.”

Lack of safe and consistent daycare has been targeted at the reason for so much absence on the part of teen mothers, and seems to contribute to the decision to drop out of school. By having daycare on the same campus as the teen parents’ classes, theoretically attendance rates would improve, and teen mothers would have less reason to be missing school.

The school year of 2004-2005 saw the building and opening of an on-site daycare midyear at Clinton High School in Rose Public Schools. This was a perfect opportunity to look into the attendance rates before and after the daycare was available to these young mothers.
Program and School Background

The Department of Teen Parent Services for Rose School District argues this mission statement and vision:

“The Mission of Teen Parent Services is to support teen parents in achieving their highest potential, personally and academically, while preparing to contribute to society as citizens of a diverse, multicultural and international community.”

“The vision of Teen Parent Services is to help close the achievement gap, facing many teen parents, by providing services that remove barriers to academic success.” (2001)

In addition to the Mission and Vision Statements, Teen Parent Services also articulates six Value Statements that guide their decisions and working process. They are:

- Every teen parent has the right to expect assistance with continuing her/his education.
- All teen parents can learn
- When teen parents are assisted with barriers to attendance and instruction they can realize their full potential and contribute to their families, schools and communities.
- All teen parents are valuable members of the learning community.
- Involving community stakeholders in decision making leads to better services for teen parents.
• Adult behavior is a powerful teacher for young parents. Modeling good
citizenship, love of learning, and concern for others helps teen parents become
better parents, students and citizens.

It seems clear how the incorporation of an on-site daycare fits in with the mission, vision
and value statements of Teen Parent Services of Rose Public Schools.

Area of Focus Statement

The purpose of this study was to determine if attendance rates of teen mothers
would improve if an on-site daycare were developed at the high school of those mothers.
Taking away the barrier of unsafe and inconsistent childcare would seem to lead to better
attendance by the mothers, but this study took a closer look.

Review of Literature

A 2001 report of the Institute for Children and Poverty found that almost half of
homeless heads of household in New York City were teenage mothers. In 1996, Homes
for the Homeless, who published that report, first acknowledged that the largest growing
population of homelessness were families that were headed by young mothers who
became pregnant in their teens and dropped out of school. The common thread for
success is school—keeping the teen mothers engaged in school and providing them with
the resources needed seem to be the key to stopping the cycle of teen motherhood.

In 2001, a study was done with teen mothers enrolled in a school that built an on-
site daycare in New Haven, Connecticut. They looked at many measures of outcomes,
and one interesting one was the attendance rates. Unfortunately, because pre-daycare
attendance rates were not available, they were unable to compare how the daycare
affected attendance. They could make generalizations about attendance, however. They
found that absenteeism rates were at 32%, consistent with absenteeism rates of similar
cohorts of adolescent parents. Due to the consistency of those numbers, they made the
logical assumption that those absences were due to student or child illness. A most
interesting discovery is that those teen parents whose children were enrolled in the
daycare had high rates of school completion and continuation (Williams & Sadler, 2001).

In her landmark book, Pregnant With Meaning—Teen Mothers and the Politics of
Inclusive Schooling, Deirdre Kelly addresses some of the difficulties teen mothers have
with staying in school, even when support systems are in place for them. She addresses
the variety of labels they must endure for the sake of political discourse among peers,
teachers, administrators and the community at large. Some of the labels that Kelly
examines are “Stupid Sluts”, “Children Having Children”, “Welfare Moms”, “Dropouts”,
and “Neglectful Mothers”. She points out that although there can be truth to any
generalization, that each teen mother is an individual with individual life circumstances
that led her to this point (2000). These underlying issues of judgment are secondary to
the dual responsibilities of schoolwork and motherhood that create stress and time-
management conflicts in the lives of teen mothers. Often, young women find the relief to
their stress is to drop out of school.

**Human Subjects (HSRRC)**

Since attendance data is collected and organized through Teen Parent Services,
this researcher never had to interact with subjects. All of the data was second-hand and
all names were concealed from the researcher, and assigned with random numbers. The
four criteria were met to apply for ‘Review Not Required’ from Portland State HSRRC.
The application was turned in after all the appropriate signatures were obtained, and word
was received less than 1 week later that the proposal had been approved and could move ahead. This was by far the most expeditious way to have this project done. By taking out any direct contact with students, and choosing a project that had data previously collected, the Human Subjects process was easily navigated.

**Data Collection/Methodology**

Subjects were chosen based on simple criteria. All subjects had to be enrolled in Teen Parent Services, and their child had to be enrolled in the on-site daycare. As the criteria tightened to get more specific results, the pool of subjects was narrowed. In order to have a fair study, all subjects had to be enrolled in school in both the Fall and Spring semesters. This was damaging to the pool, due to transfers mid-year, retrievals of students not enrolled, and Seniors who had enough credits to be done in January. Additional criteria about parents had to be established as well. The students had to be parenting, not just pregnant by the time school started in September, in order to gauge fairly the impact of childcare on both semesters. This narrowed the pool as well, since many children were born over the course of the year, some of them soon enough to be enrolled in the daycare. When all criteria were established, there were only six suitable subjects left.

Days were counted on either side of the opening of the daycare to come up with an even number of school days where attendance was expected. Next, total absences were counted for each section, noting the variances in attendance records by teachers at all points in the year (as the data were previously collected, numbers had to be adjusted by the counselor for Teen Parent Services).
Data Analysis

One does not have to have a degree in statistics to know that a sample of six will neither prove nor refute anything. Therefore, all results must be considered just as they are, and no generalizations can be made from this data. With a sample size of six, no implications can be inferred, as the individual circumstances of each person could have directly affected the results.

Of the six students whose records were checked, two students had fewer missed days after the daycare had opened, while four students had more missed days.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Random Student Number</th>
<th>Days missed prior to daycare opening</th>
<th>Days missed after daycare opened</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
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</tr>
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<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the differences are stark in comparison (31 more days missed, 3 less days missed), without interviews with each specific young woman, there is no real way of understanding the trend in these numbers. Possible answers will be addressed in the limitations section. The results expected—that missed school days would decline—were not presented, rather, quite the opposite. If one was to pull any conclusions from this
data, thinking it was a scientific sample, they might conclude that on-site daycare in fact increases the number of days absent from school.

**Limitations**

There were significant limitations in this study. First and most importantly was the small sample number identified after the criteria were set. This small number creates a mess when trying to make generalizations about the results. If one knew in advance that the number was going to be so small, it might have been better to do individual case studies about attendance, rather than simple data recovery. The information provided by each individual young woman would have given a richer picture of the challenges faced by teen parents each day.

Second, due to the criteria identified to obtain objective numbers, many important details in the story of Teen Parent Services are missing. For example, out of 36 identified teen parents at Clinton High School, 11 of them were retrieved this year back into Rose School District, lured by the daycare for their child. With safe and consistent childcare set in place, these 11 young women felt they could face the challenge of returning to school and finishing their diploma. In addition, the story of graduating Seniors goes by without mention. Again, due to the criteria, we miss the acknowledgement that about 5 young women had enough credits to stop school after finals in January, and chose not to come back just to ‘kill time until graduation’. Both of these numbers are vital to the mission and vision of Teen Parent Services and the success of teen parents, but due to the confines of this study, are not able to be fully explored.

Finally, anecdotally, this researcher has learned that there are a myriad of issues facing teen mothers as they forge through with their educations, many of them addressed
by Dierdre Kelly in her book, “Pregnant With Meaning”. For future studies with this population, this researcher would suggest in-depth interviews with each young mother to find out from them which issues are most pressing in their academic quest for completion. What one finds might be very different than what is expected going into the process.

One might also benefit from tracking these students over time, longer than two semesters of their high school career, and over many issues present to them. This researcher believes there were reasons the results were somewhat skewed, and an ongoing relationship with the women would have allowed for direct communication about why they were missing school, rather than making assumptions. Stressors tracked across their lives—interpersonal, physical, emotional, academic, etc. could have been followed more closely and given us more informative results. Finally, I would make my sample size larger, possibly including students across the district, not just at Clinton High School.

Conclusion

The need for more comprehensive research about teen mothers goes on. The outcomes after not receiving a high school diploma are clear, but more research is needed on what works to keep these students in school. Although one might look at this study and think that it failed in its scientific basis, it has at least begun the conversation to do more research next school year.
References


