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GREAT EXPECTATIONS: RECLAIMING EDUCATION FOR TEENAGE MOTHERS

A NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR TEENAGE MOTHERS TO COMPLETE SECONDARY EDUCATION IN MILDURA

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Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis presented by me for another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

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The Human Ethics Committee approved all research procedures reported in the thesis on ...

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I hope not to sound too clichéd, but I am reminded of the meditation by John Donne in the 16th century, "...no man is an island, entire of himself...". It is a philosophy I hold to in life and no less in thesis writing, and so I especially thank those who have shared this journey. First and foremost, my husband Philip for his unwavering love and belief in me, I couldn't do it without you. To my parents, I hope I do you proud, thank you for your love and support always; to my gorgeous children, who do me proud every day.

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Abstract

Mildura has the highest teen birth rate in Victoria, with the Indigenous teen birth rate six times higher. While local education retention rates have come under scrutiny of the government in recent times, and efforts have been made to ameliorate disengagement, teen mothers are significantly underrepresented at secondary schools in Mildura.

Both international and Australian research confirms that teen mothers face many challenges resulting in social exclusion from many spheres of life, including school. These range from personal challenges of coping with prejudice and stigma, to the practical barriers of accessing resources, such as affordable and accessible child care, transport, finance and housing and additional educational supports. Previous literature portrays teen mothers as making choices in the context of circumstances which are frequently beyond their control.

The aim of this needs assessment study was to address questions regarding the needs of teen mothers to complete secondary education in Mildura. The study sought to, firstly, identify barriers to education; secondly, to discover the needs of teen mothers to enable them to continue their education and understand the extent to which those needs are currently being met; and, finally, to consider how those needs might be met in the future. The study will inform the feasibility of establishing a multidimensional onsite child care and parenting centre at the Mildura Senior College to improve teen mothers' retention and completion of secondary school.

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List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AECCP	Aboriginal Early Childhood Community Profile
CBSC	Corio Bay Senior College
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEECD	Department of Early Education and Childhood Development
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
GRQ	General Research Question
IRSED	Index of Relative Socio Economic Disadvantage
JETCCFA	Jobs, Education and Training Child Care fee assistance
LGA	Local Government Area
MRC	Mildura Rural City
MSC	Mildura Senior College
NMLLEN	Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network
ORQ	Operational Research Question
PPPT	Piedmont Program for Pregnant Teens
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
YPAP	Young Pregnant and Parenting

Chapter 1. Introduction

Since the 1970s, teen pregnancy has been identified as a social 'ill', a problem that can have traumatic long-term outcomes for mothers and their children. Poverty, domestic violence, crime, low levels of literacy and numeracy skills in children, high levels of unemployment and social exclusion are all linked to single teen motherhood (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2009).

Teen mothers predominantly remain marginalised and disengaged from mainstream education, despite the demonstrated positive impact that education has for them and their children. According to Smyth et al. (as cited in Shacklock, Harrison & Angwin, 2007, p. 155), “parenting young women are not often found in mainstream educational pathways in schools and similar settings. More often than not, they are excluded or eased-out, or they self-select an exit, from pathways leading to the completion of Year 12”. While there is a wealth of research that correlates teen parenting with poor educational outcomes (Mollborn, 2007), other heterogeneous factors also need to be considered when exploring the causes of disengaging with education.

This current study was undertaken in Mildura, a rural city 550km north-west of Melbourne. Mildura Rural City Part A (consisting of Mildura, Merbein and Irymple) has the highest teen birth rate in Victoria, at 28.1 per 1,000 women aged 15–19 years. In 2008 there was a total of 59 births to teenage mothers. By comparison, the national teen fertility rate is 17.3 per 1,000 women aged 15–19 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2006; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2008). The Indigenous profile in Mildura Rural City adds context and complexity, with a teen birth rate of 180.4 per 1,000 Indigenous females aged 15–19 years (Aboriginal Early Childhood Community Profile [AECCP], 2009).

In 2008, Mildura reported a population of 28,743, within the surrounding Local Government Area (LGA) of 53,122. Indigenous people make up a relatively high proportion of the population in Mildura (5.39%) compared with Melbourne (0.4%) and Victoria (1.2%) (Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [DEECD], 2010, p.4).

Mildura is a city with high socioeconomic indicators for risk. It has relatively high unemployment at 7.3% (2008) compared to the national rate of 5.4%. It is ranked 12 out of Victoria's 79 LGAs in the ABS Index of Relative Socio Economic Disadvantage (IRSED), where the ranking of '1' is the most disadvantaged area in terms of "low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment and the proportion of work force in relatively unskilled occupations" (DEECD, 2010 p. 3).

Mildura Senior College (MSC) reports school retention rates of 69.9% in 2007–08 (Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network [NMLLEN], 2011), compared to 85.1% for Victoria. This means only two-thirds of young people attending MSC remain to complete year 12 (House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Education and Training, Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). MSC was selected as the focus school for this study as it is the only separate year 11 and 12 site in the region, and only one of three Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) colleges in the region. As an adult learning environment, MSC is ideally placed to support and manage the needs of teen mothers.

The Research Problem

The current study reported in this thesis was a needs assessment that sought to identify barriers teen mothers may experience to completing secondary education. Despite a current government focus on social inclusion and school retention for students who are 'at risk' of disengagement, and the delivery of multidimensional services for teen mothers at selected senior colleges around Australia (such as Corio Bay Senior College, Geelong, Victoria; Mable Park High, Logan City, Queensland; Canberra College Cares, Canberra, Australian Capital Territory; and Balga Senior High, Balga, Perth, Western Australia), teen mothers in Mildura are still at high risk of disengaging with education.

An evaluation of existing models of secondary school child care and parenting centres with published data of student outcomes (Harden, Brunton, Fletcher, Oakley, Burchett & Backhans, 2006) justifies this current study's support for this research for teen mothers in Mildura to improve education retention.

Social inclusion, according to the Australian Government, means "building a nation in which all Australians have the opportunity and support they need to participate fully in the nation's economic

and community life, develop their own potential and be treated with dignity and respect” (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2009 p. 5). This includes teen mothers.

Research Questions

The current study sought to address three general questions – relating to barriers, needs and actions – and a number of associated operational questions.

The first general question was: What are the barriers to teen mothers completing secondary school in Mildura? The operational questions flowing from this question were: What are the economic needs of teen mothers in Mildura? What are their housing needs? What are their transport needs? What are their child care needs? What are their additional educational needs? And finally, what are their psychological and emotional needs?

The second general question was: What do teen mothers need in order for them to complete secondary education at MSC? The operational questions flowing from this question were: To what extent are the economic needs of teen mothers being met and how? To what extent are their housing needs being met and how? To what extent are their transport needs being met and how? To what extent are their child care needs being met and how? To what extent are their additional educational needs being met and how? And finally, to what extent are the psychological and emotional needs of teen mothers being met and how?

The final general question was: How might the unmet needs of teen mothers be met in order to improve their opportunity to complete secondary education in Mildura? The operational questions flowing from this question are: How might the unmet economic needs of teen mothers be met? How might their unmet housing needs be met? How might their unmet transport needs be met? How might their unmet child care needs be met? How might their unmet additional educational needs be met? How might their unmet psychological and emotional needs be met?

The current study also sought key informants’ views about the potential for an onsite child care centre to meet many of these needs.

Key Concepts

There are a number of concepts embedded in the above questions. The first concept is that of 'teen mother'. Though various parameters of age are used in research, for the purpose of this current study 'teen mother' was defined as any female under 20 years of age who is the mother of one or more children. From the 1970s, research has tended to cast the 'problem of teen pregnancy' as the personal responsibility of the female (Lowe, 2008; Levine, Emery & Pollack, 2007). While some researchers incorporate male parenting issues, for the purpose of this current study the focus was on mothers exclusively.

'School completion' referred to students who complete year 12 in the VCE, Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) or Vocational Education Training (VET) or a combination of the three at secondary education level via a registered government approved facility.

For the purpose of this research, the concept of 'barriers' referred to factors that prevent teen mothers completing secondary school. These can be social, cultural, political and economic barriers expressed in terms of resources, attitudes and behaviour; they can be internal and external barriers.

'Child care' in this current study referred to a facility with accredited and qualified staff at government required ratios providing quality services for mothers to leave their children. 'Onsite' referred to child care provision at the school where teen mothers are being educated.

A further concept is that of need. There are several perspectives of 'need', including expressed need, comparative need, felt need and normative need. Expressed need is an inferred need that may be identified by observing the community's current use of services that respond to that need. This can be a vague indicator as service evaluation may not clearly identify the need being met. Comparative need explores services provided in one cohort and community to inform the services required in a similar cohort and community. Felt need refers to the perceived needs of a specific group. Normative need refers to researched informant opinion which defines something as need (Bradshaw, 1972 in Hawe, Degeling & Hall, 1990). It is this last perspective – normative need – that predominantly informed this study.

Significance of the Research

This current study seeks to understand the local circumstances of teen mothers in Mildura in the context of previous research. It is significant on several grounds. Firstly, it seeks to provide research to inform and support the implementation of effective services that respond to identified needs. Secondly, it aims to provide direction for a reference group that will seek to address the needs of teen mothers to complete secondary education in Mildura. Thirdly, this study fills a knowledge gap by providing an Australian rural context for studying the needs of teen mothers and school completion. Fourthly, policy change may be considered and recommendations developed to modify programs and services to better support teen mothers to complete secondary education (Alston & Bowles, 2003). Improved support has the potential to improve school retention rates and increase social inclusion of teen mothers in educational institutions and in the broader community, and reduce stigma attached to teen mothering in Mildura.

The importance of this study is underscored by the current government focus on social inclusion and school retention for students who are 'at risk' of disengagement. Commonwealth support for services for teen mothers has included a holistic multidimensional approach, including providing onsite child care facilities and parenting training at selected senior colleges around Australia. One of these colleges, Corio Bay Senior College (CBSC) in Geelong, has 350 Year 11 and 12 students, with 47 places filled in its onsite child care and parenting centre (CBSC, 2010). Of the 860 students currently at the MSC, only four are teen parents. This study provides an important opportunity to explore the outcomes for teen mothers who do not have access to the multidimensional services available at selected schools.

This study is also significant because of the data collection tool used, a relatively new computer program called 'Zing'; which is described later in chapter 3.

Limitations

This study was a 'needs assessment', which refers to a systematic inquiry into needs, looking at causes and using the knowledge to inform priorities and develop programs with a higher probability of effectiveness (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). Witkin & Altschuld (1995) acknowledge that even highly skilled researchers are plagued with complexities that challenge the needs assessment process.

As the methodology chapter shows, focus groups were the major means of data collection. Focus groups offer challenges of ambiguity, insufficient background information about values, preferences and interests of the key informants, and limited time (Forester, 1989 in Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). These limitations are acknowledged and were addressed through the use of a data collection tool that allowed for anonymous input.

A second limitation derives from the sample size employed. The size in this study was small because the key informants selected were required to have sufficient experience working with teen mothers and they were drawn from a geographically dispersed rural community. Although the size was small, the informants were well placed to provide quality input.

A third limitation is that teenage fathers were under-represented in this current study; however this is consistent with existing research presented on teen parenting in the literature review.

A fourth imitation is a temporal one. Had more time been available for this current study, additional methods may have been used to strengthen findings, including in-depth interviews with teen mothers and a community attitude survey. Posavac and Carey (1992) suggest a needs assessment should not rely on less than two or more approaches, nevertheless there has been little research done in Mildura investigating the needs of teen mothers and school retention, so the value of this research is justified.

Thesis structure

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 critically reviews relevant literature and previous research and discusses how it informs the current study. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology chosen for the study. It identifies and justifies the type of study, presents the general and operational research questions and the means by which data was collected and the sample group chosen. It also refers to the ethical considerations of the study. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the operational research questions (ORQs) and general research questions (GRQs), and critically analyses these against the findings presented in the literature review in chapter two. The fifth and final chapter presents the summary of findings, discusses the implications of the findings and suggests possible future research evolving from this study.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to place the current study in the context of relevant literature pertaining to teen mothering and the barriers experienced in completing secondary school. The review compares the scope of teen motherhood internationally and nationally with Mildura, with special reference to the local Indigenous community. It concentrates on the complex data pertaining to teen mothers generally and considers the politics of teenage parenting and long-term welfare dependency. Various educational perspectives are examined and the stigmatisation of teen mothers is considered. The construction of the 'problem' of teen parenting and associated negative long-term outcomes are addressed and the notion of teen mothers' 'choice' and 'agency' is explored. The review considers practical resources, including child care, as determinants of educational engagement, and reflects on additional educational needs for the retention of teen mothers. Finally, the review critically analyses previous research methodologies and findings and places the current study in the context of previous research.

Theoretical Literature

Scope of Teen Motherhood

In discussing the scope of teen motherhood, this section describes overseas and Australian statistics and compares these with Mildura. The social exclusion experienced by teen mothers is reviewed, and the debate surrounding teen parenting and social disadvantage is considered. Choice and agency are discussed and the cost of early parenting on educational attainment is addressed.

Previous research which informs the current study is drawn from the United States of America (US), the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia. In 2010 there were 41.9 births per 1,000 teens aged 15–19 years in the US (Guttmacher Institute, 2010) and 30.6 per 1,000 in the UK (Department for Children, Schools and Families, UK, 2010). The latest available Australian figures show 17.3 births per 1,000 teens aged 15–19 years (ABS, 2008). Australia's relatively low teen birth rates have been used to rationalise lower levels of government welfare intervention; nonetheless, "teen mothers can be expensive for governments" (Moorehead & Soriano, 2005, p. 65).

Teen mothers experience significant social exclusion (Moorehead & Soriano, 2005; Harden et al., 2006). Harden et al. (2006) identify five recurrent themes in relation to the social exclusion experienced by teen mothers in the UK. These are: “diverse needs and preferences but limited choice” in everyday life; marginalisation due to stigmatisation; strong reliance on family support; the “continuity of existing problems prior to motherhood, relating to disengagement from school, low expectations, poverty and violence; and the costs (versus) benefits of education and employment” (p. 54).

Australian studies also report that teen mothers feel excluded from many spheres of community, social and family life due to stigmatisation (Moorehead & Soriano, 2005). Most teen mothers in Australia are single or in relationships with limited support (Shacklock, Harrison & Angwin, 2007; Moorehead & Soriano, 2005). There is a generational pattern with daughters of teen mothers more likely to become mothers as teenagers (Kahn & Anderson, 1992 in Manlove, 1998). Teen mothers are frequently socially isolated, separated from friends who find them “boring” in their new role, and from the baby's father who has little role during the pregnancy and often none after the birth (Moorehead & Soriano 2005, p. 68). Those mothers with a good relationship with the father of the child tend to live more stable lives and have a greater ability to plan for the future.

Long-term reliance on welfare, health issues, crime and generational poverty are all probable outcomes of becoming a mother in the teen years. “Overall, teen mothers and their children tend to fare ...poorly on several key economic, social and health indicators (compared to) other mothers” (Moorehead & Soriano, 2005, p. 65). A recent Commonwealth Government report concurs; single parenthood is linked with higher levels of poverty, abuse, domestic violence and crime and lower levels of literacy and numeracy skills in offspring, with greater levels of joblessness and social exclusion (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2009). An alternative view is held by Weatherley and Cartoof (1988), who challenge the discourse of cause and effect of teen motherhood and social disadvantage, stating the “deleterious outcomes associated with early childbearing... reflect the adverse effects of poverty and racism ... rather than youth” (cited in Lesko 1995, p. 196). The UK report makes a further important contribution to the debate as to “whether it is teenage mothering itself that leads to adverse outcomes or the social exclusion associated with it” (Lawlor & Shaw, 2002; Wiggins et al., 2005a cited in Harden et al., 2006, p. 67); in fact many teen

mothers describe having a baby as positively transforming, giving their lives purpose and direction (Harden et al., 2006).

The Australian study by Moorehead and Soriano (2005) refutes the notion of the 'choice' teen mothers make, reporting that teens perceive their pregnancy as "... an accidental side effect of having sex ... things happen to you" (p. 67). They found most young mothers do not plan the future and are not committed to a specific preference in managing their roles of mothering and work or study. Other researchers concur; there is little evidence that pregnant teens have positive long-term vision for their lives (Hudspeth, Canada, Lim, & Jennings, 1998 in Benson, 2004).

Along with education, practical resources are a consistent indicator of positive long-term outcomes for teen mothers. Indeed, studies emphasise lack of resources as a causative factor for the negative effect of teen motherhood on educational attainment. Resources such as affordable and quality child care, secure housing, transport and money are shown to turn the tide of entrenched poverty (Mollborn, 2007).

As long-term social and economic wellbeing correlate with school completion, schools have a unique opportunity to implement retention interventions that seek to ameliorate the frequent negative life outcomes for teen mothers and their children (Shacklock, Harrison & Angwin, 2007).

Mollborn (2007) reports the primary area in which teens suffer is in educational attainment. Teens pay a penalty for becoming parents, but practical resources can protect them from inferior life outcomes. The UK report highlights the value of individual supportive rather than punitive interventions based on need rather than on a service provision (Harden et al., 2006).

Welfare Politics

This section turns its attention to welfare politics to highlight the social and political aspects of teen mothering and welfare.

Supports offered to teen mothers to remain or re-engage in education are developed within a political framework that shapes the welfare design. In other words, the supports and services and consequent rights and responsibilities of those who benefit from them are designed by government

to manage welfare concerns. However, within this welfare design is the contested concept of the 'problem' of teen parenting, addressed in more detail below. Lesko (1995) argues “the construction of the problem of teen mothering is part of a broad social engineering toward reprivatisation and dismantlement of the welfare state’s support of women and children” (cited in Luttrell, 2003, p. 34). Whether this is a deliberate political objective or not, teen mothering cannot be separated from political will and social structures of the liberal welfare state.

While acknowledging political differences, the US, UK and Australia all function as liberal welfare states. Each welfare model impacts on the approach taken by government to ameliorate the social disadvantage associated with teen mothering, including school retention. The US, in particular, operates welfare as a safety net of last resort, commodifying and motivating citizens into the employment market in order to survive (Esping & Anderson in Smythe, 2006). Australia is not dissimilar.

Australia offers welfare benefits such as child care through the Jobs, Education and Training Child Care fee assistance (JETCCFA). The government provides affordable child care so that parents can participate in employment or training with the aim to lower unemployment and increase skilled labour. This welfare benefit potentially reduces social exclusion experienced by teen mothers, ameliorates poverty and inequality, improves education and employment outcomes, promotes health and wellbeing, and grants access to social supports and services (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2009).

Educational Discourses

Blame is a common feature of debates regarding social disadvantage and occurs in educational discourses regarding teen mothers. This section discusses causes of disengagement from education, stereotyping of teen mothers as the 'problem', and the need for individualised approaches to education.

The causal nature of teen mothering in relation to social disadvantage is depicted in recent welfare reports by the Australian Government (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2009). Disengagement from mainstream education is part of the chain of events common to teen mothers. Research by Manlove (1998) challenges the assumption that pregnancy causes disengagement from education, suggesting that disengagement may have occurred prior to pregnancy. Her US study reveals 28.2% of pregnant teens had dropped out of school prior to pregnancy, while 30.3% dropped

out after pregnancy. Manlove's study demonstrates student retention is likely to reduce the risk of pregnancy. Interestingly, her data findings concluded weekly sex education class attendance is associated with an increased risk of teen pregnancy (Manlove, 1998).

Australian research suggests other contextual factors, such as pre-existing economic status and educational engagement, make it more likely a teen mother will enter the workforce (AIFS Submission, 2005; Baxter, 2005b; Cass, 2002 cited in Moorehead & Soriano, 2005). Several studies demonstrate that better education results in better employment options and improved long-term outcomes for teen mothers (Mollborn, 2007; Luttrell, 2003; Moorehead & Soriano, 2005; Geronimus, 1997; Levine et al., 2007; Benson, 2004; Cohen, 1998).

Luttrell (2003) proposes a need for reappraisal of educational discourses, challenging the notion of teen parenting as a 'problem'. She argues that schools are sites of "profound anxiety for students, teachers and teen mothers, all of whom worry about fitting in, being judged and measuring up to their respective roles" (p. 173). The 'problem' of teen mothering is contested by Petchesky (1984, cited in Luttrell, 2003), who refutes the framing of a teen mother as the "wrong girl"; rather, it is a "...wrong society". The notion of 'problem' is complicated by the fact that "high schools are a close second or third as the most pathological social institutions in our society after public health hospitals, and prisons" (Elmore, 2002 cited in Luttrell, 2003 p. 173). Pillow (2004) refers to the problem of pregnancy in the school context as either a "cold", that is, something you get over, or a disability/disease, something you do not (p. 97). These perspectives are important because education interventions are constructed on the perspective and philosophy embraced by educational providers.

Moorehead and Soriano (2005) question the degree of self-determination employed by teen mothers and the extent they may choose not to work or study. Historically, blame is attached to the mother for her bad 'choices', as represented in Pillow's account of teen mothers engaged in the US education system; in the 1970s, pregnant students were expelled for "gross personal misconduct" (2004 p. 85). A 1989 study in 12 US schools exposed educators' "discomfort with, disavowal of, and consequent neglect of teen pregnancy" (Snider, 1989 in Lesko, 1995 p.190). Minimisation and unrealistic expectations of academic attainment are results of the denial of teen parenting by some educators (Adler, Bates & Merdinger, 1985 in Lesko, 1995). The literature informs the current study

in recognising that the attitudes of educators affect the ability of teen mothers to remain engaged in school and so impact on outcomes for teen mothers.

Research by Benson (2004) highlights the need for individualised approaches in working with teens. Support is warranted to “scaffold” a teen mother’s ability to plan in terms of health, coping, regret or autonomy, due to adolescent lack of “incomplete formal operational thinking” (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969 cited in Benson, 2004 p. 450). The danger of this approach, however, is to focus blame on the teenage mother as the ‘problem’, while removing or denying any responsibility of the state or community and, in particular, the education system, to meet her complex needs.

This literature concerning education discourses informs the current study by challenging potential professional attitudes toward teen mothers. The literature exposes the blame directed toward teen mothers, and potential attitudes of educators regarding teen mothers’ ability to engage in study. The issue of teen mothers as the 'problem' will now be addressed in light of the stigma it induces.

Stigma and the 'Problem' of Teen Mothering

Stigma of teenage mothers is an issue addressed by several researchers. Luttrell (2003) submits teen mothers are members of marginalised and stigmatised groups who “sift through representations of themselves and perceive themselves as good or bad...powerful or powerless...vulnerable or not... in the process of self-making and being made” (p. 37). “...Shaming practices and undue hostility...require teen mothers to deal with psychological and social isolation from her 'tainted identity'” (p.20). This marginalisation occurs not only at school; many teen mothers talk of demoralising public and private responses to their pregnancy. They experience rejection from parents, partners, hospitals, schools and the community, even in public places such as shopping malls. Their identity is fragile and could be “disassembled very easily... in a glance” as they go about their everyday lives (Moorehead & Soriano, 2005, p. 70). These studies illuminate the stigma many teen mothers experience, with subsequent isolation and disengagement from social networks, including school.

Luttrell (2003) confronted the issue of stigma, asking her cohort of pregnant teen students: “how does it feel to be a problem?” Their responses identified issues of “self worth, value, and respectability” and a desire to control their surroundings (p. 171). Similar results are found in the Australian study by Moorehead and Soriano (2005). Labelling teenage mothers as a problem is a

contested notion. Literature demonstrates that problem saturation is unhelpful and instead there needs to be a focus on teen mothers' resilience (Henly, 1993 in Benson, 2004).

Debold et al. (1999, cited in Luttrell, 2003) and Mollborn (2007) argue against individuating research that identifies a 'wrong girl' or 'bad girl' approach to teen parenting, which denies contextual issues such as the lack of resources, political expediency, social rejection, existing poverty, race or class factors. Geronimus (1997) underscores the contribution of the absentee father figure to problems associated with teen mothering, including the stigma and isolation of single parenting.

This literature informs the current study as it demonstrates the marginalisation experienced by many teen mothers as they seek to make their identity within the context of pressure and disapproval.

Practical Resources

Recent studies show a need to examine the broader practical context for teen mothers in order to identify causes of the problems they confront (Henly, 1993 in Benson, 2004).

Housing and transport issues are identified as stressors in a teen mother's life, creating a "day at a time" approach to survival (Moorehead & Soriano 2005, p. 69). The UK report confirms this and identifies four major problems teen mothers commonly face: poor quality housing; "rough estates" with high crime, poverty, drug use and vandalism; isolation; and relationship breakdown combined with domestic violence (Harden et al., 2006 p. 55). While independence is desired by most young mums, it is neither always possible nor positive.

Studies show that teen mothers generally budget well with what they have, though this may involve compromising on nutritional or safety needs for their child(ren) and themselves (Hall et al., 2003 and Speak, 1995 in Harden et al., 2006). Literature shows that reliance on supportive families "mask(s) the true extent of teen mothers' poverty" (Harden et al. 2006, p. 56). The complex relationship between a teen mother and her parents often results in conflict; while desiring her independence, she is reliant on their support. Teen mothers in the UK review were poorly informed about available supports and were angry about being stereotyped as "sponging off the welfare system" (p. 56).

The reviewed literature advances the argument that offering practical resources and supports to teen mothers improves the likelihood of better outcomes for education and amelioration of long-term social disadvantage (Levine et al., 2007; Cohen, 1998; Mollborn, 2007; Luttrell, 2003; Moorehead & Soriano, 2005; Geronimus, 1997).

Child Care

Previous research examines child care, education and outcomes for teen mothers, reporting that care needs to be quality, accessible, affordable and close to the teen mother.

Teen mothers have different preferences for child care, with most relying on family, often a choice driven by financial constraints (Evans, 2003; Gibbin, 2003; Hall et al., 2003; Speak, 1995; Wiggins et al., 2005a, all cited in Harden et al, 2006). Reliable, quality child care can be a gatekeeper for teen mothers enabling or frustrating those keen to learn. The lack of child care, coupled with anxiety over leaving children, makes returning to school difficult (Harden et al., 2006). A US longitudinal study presents the benefits of providing free educational day care for children of single teen mothers. Analysis of the data concludes that teen mothers are more likely to complete high school, go on to tertiary training and become self supporting when they are supported with free developmental day care, onsite health care and dependable free transportation. The research concludes, “A good childcare program can make the difference between success and failure for single, teen mothers” (Campbell, Breitmayer & Ramey, 1986, p.67).

Some teen mothers find letting go of their role as parent to family or a child care worker difficult, and expressed a desire to have their children close to them, for example, in onsite child care (Harden et al., 2006). Australian research by Moorehead and Soriano (2005) also found that where incentives are offered, such as onsite child care at schools, mothers do respond. “One focus group comprised teenage mothers who had returned to high school to complete their studies. The school environment was specifically structured to offer support to the mothers, and the on-site childcare centre was fully booked” (p. 71). According to Harden et al. (2006), programs for teen mothers that encourage return to school after birth and provide help with child care successfully promote a quick return to education, at an increase of 213% (Harden et al., 2006). The UK report concurs, finding that young mothers engaged in school regarded “reliable, affordable and trustworthy childcare (essential) *before* they went back to education or employment” (italics mine) (p.67). Onsite child care is popular with teens “who did not want to be far away from their children” (Hosie & Dawson,

2005, in Harden et al., 2006, p.59). Other research agrees that "acceptable, reliable child care made it easier for women to return to education" (Harden et al., 2006 p. 58). Conversely, when teen mothers do not have choice or access to child care they are comfortable with, they value their children's wellbeing over their own education and defer returning to education (Harden et al., 2006).

According to research at CBSC Geelong (Shacklock, Harrison & Angwin, 2007), a multidimensional approach, including child care, is essential for a successful teen parenting program. Assisting teen mothers, encouraging and supporting their sense of "educational competence and motivation" are critical ingredients for school success and completion (p. 155). A flourishing program is one that:

...provides child care; equity in treatment; health services, including contraception, prenatal care and nutrition; social support, including transport and case management; mentoring and counselling. It also fosters high aspirations and supports opportunities to graduate through negotiated, realistic, supportive academic programs (p.155)

Additional Educational Needs

Additional and alternative educational practices are thought to be beneficial in supporting teen mothers to complete secondary school. Several studies evaluate models of school-based mothering programs; some are inclusive in mainstream schooling, some are supplementary, and some are non-curricular programs.

Zellman (1981, cited in Luttrell, 2003) refers to the paradoxical nature of "inclusive" school programs based on a medical model that treats teen mothering as "trauma". He suggests supplementary school programs keep teen mothers engaged in mainstream schooling with creditable subjects, alongside extracurricular subjects relating to mothering. Zellman's study shows school-based programs that separate teen mothers from mainstream education pathways "foreclose" the student's possibility of education and career success regardless of their ability. Academic learning is viewed as secondary, as staff believe that teen mothers are a "lost cause...having wasted her potential, many staff do not want to invest a great deal of effort in her" (Zellman, 1981 in Luttrell, 2003, p.18). Zellman concludes that retention rates improve when structural factors such as education pathways, mentoring and tutoring supports, and child care facilities are considered and monitored (in Luttrell, 2003).

Education programs that take girls out of ordinary school programming can create a self selection process into and out of mainstream education. This can have the effect of targeting teen mothers, who are often from lower socioeconomic and racial minorities, resulting in further stigmatisation. Meanwhile, families with financial independence and resources are able and likely to choose programs that are less likely to stigmatise their daughters, such as home internet learning (Zellman, 1981; Weatherly et al., 1985; Nash & Dunkle, 1989 in Luttrell, 2003).

Harden et al. (2006) report several indicators for mainstream school retention or re-engagement, including good relationships with peers and teachers who make them feel “normal”. Some teen mums who feel stigmatised prefer a special program, though many feel the subjects taught in the non-mainstream sector are not challenging enough or are “for dunce people” (p. 58). Some girls are frustrated by others who appear unmotivated to learn (Corlyon & McGuire, 1999 in Harden et al., 2006 p. 58). Tutoring is sometimes an option with limited subjects and where it is not convenient to learn at home.

A common argument in the research literature is that education offers teen mums the opportunity for redemption, to “deliver themselves from their problematic status as teen mothers” (Lesko, 1990 in Luttrell, 2003, p. 22). McDade’s study (1992 in Luttrell, 2003) was undertaken in a school that did not separate the student and pregnant mother identity and created a more hopeful outcome where teen mums saw “graduating high school...as a key to their baby’s future” (p. 22). Australian research shows schools that include teen parent students within senior college programs face hurdles around policy, public relations, economics, welfare and education streaming (Shacklock et al., 2007).

Choice and Agency

'Choice', 'preference' and 'agency' are concepts embedded within the discourse of the 'work and family debate' (Moorehead & Soriano, 2005). The choice to study or not, where to live, how to travel, how to afford and manage child care, among other choices a teen mother might make, are constrained by issues other than age itself. Choice is limited and is framed by social, political and economic structures, as research illuminates.

According to Moorehead and Soriano (2005), few teen mothers experience any sense of empowerment to choose their futures; life “happens to them” (p. 67). Rather than “good or bad choices”, social inequalities “...shape the range, quality, meaning of and conditions under which

choices are made..." (Petchesky, 1984 cited in Luttrell, 2003 p. 29). The notion of "choice making" evokes a picture of autonomy which locates a teen mother as the "architect of (her) own life" (p. 29), which Luttrell decries. Instead, teen mothers wrestle with themselves as "victims of stereotypes and mistreatment, vulnerable to men's deceit, daughters who fear disappointment and loss and as decision makers who have not chosen the conditions under which they must take action" (Luttrell 2003, p. 116). This literature informs the current study by challenging the presumption that teen mothers make empowered choices to disengage from school.

In contrast to this concept of victimisation, the Australian study finds teen mothers use the word 'responsible' often to describe their reasons for continuing with the pregnancy. "They justified (it)... as proof of a 'worthy' side of their identity; they were acting in a responsible manner" (Moorehead & Soriano, 205 p. 67). Several recent studies cited in the Social Exclusion report identify young mothers returning to education with a "greater level of commitment to defy negative expectations of them" (Harden et al., 2006). As one teen said, "I'm making sure that I do my education and get a good job so that I can support her for the rest of her life" (p. 58). The sense of responsibility for better outcomes is reiterated in Luttrell's (2003) five-year ethnographic research. She reports pregnant and parenting students see their lives as having been "compromised...school had split their student self from their pregnant self, (which) limited their sense of possibility" (p. 175). Luttrell's work reveals much about the discourse of choice and agency, labelling the teen mother's choice a defence of the moral self. The participants in her study framed their pregnancy as an opportunity to better themselves, rather than as a problem. Moorehead and Soriano (2005) similarly find many teen mothers take the opportunity to change self-destructive habits, get healthy and focus on education. This literature challenges the notion of self agency and portrays teen mothers as making choices in the context of circumstances beyond their control.

Previous Research: Methodologies and Findings

This section critically analyses previous research and the methodologies employed, noting similarities and differences to the current study. The research draws on data collected from focus groups comprising teen mothers or key informants, semi-structured interviews, large scale ethnographic studies in school settings, and analysis of secondary research material.

Two longitudinal ethnographic studies from the US provide an in-depth understanding of barriers to education confronting teen mothers. The first, by Luttrell (2003), is a five-year activist research study of six groups of teen mothers who attended the Piedmont Program for Pregnant Teens (PPPT) in Centerville, South Carolina. Centerville is a culturally diverse industrial city of 200,000 residents. Luttrell enters the world of teen mothers and seeks to understand life, and specifically education, from their perspective. The second study is by Pillow (2004), whose research combines a qualitative study in a series of unstructured interviews in the mid-1990s in the US with a review of policy and the history of teen parenting. Pillow presents “educational stories of pregnant/mothering teens from their point of view, through their voices... to counter prevalent stories about teen mothers constructed by ‘official’ policy talk and policy discourse” (p. 1). Her work primarily challenges the Title IX bill of 1972 which states all pregnant and mothering teens ought to be treated equally and receive an equal education along with other students. Her findings show teen mothers are not given equal ground or expectations for academic success, and though policy may determine equal treatment, it does not guarantee it.

The UK Social Exclusion Report, produced by Harden, Brunton, Fletcher, Oakley, Burchett and Backhans (2006), presents a systematic synthesis of 669 research studies on the social exclusion experienced by teen mothers in the UK and US from 1966–2005. The report evaluates interventions designed in response to the research and compares these results with the views of the teen mothers themselves. The studies chosen had strict quality criteria, with many proffered studies failing to meet the required standards and thus disregarded. Interestingly, some included studies are now 40 years old, raising the question of datedness and cultural relevance. The synthesis sought to answer two research questions: “What research has been undertaken that is relevant to informing policy and practice in the area of young people, pregnancy, parenting and social exclusion? What is known about effective, appropriate and promising interventions that target the social exclusion associated with teenage pregnancy and parenting, which might therefore have a role to play in lowering rates?” (Harden et al, p.2, 2006). The report highlights the significant impact of social exclusion on teen mothers and instructs the need for appropriate, effective interventions.

Two pieces of Australian research are reviewed in the current study. Firstly, 'The Australian Teenage Mothers Study' by Moorehead and Soriano (2005), conducted between November 2004 and May 2005, incorporated focus groups informed by 41 teen mothers, rather than key informants as in the current study, with additional data collected via eight in-depth interviews with service providers. The

study concluded teen mothers need a strong identity and supports, including practical resources, to be secure enough to make decisions for their life.

The second of the Australian research, by Shacklock, Harrison and Angwin (2007), identifies the “dilemma of difference” for parenting and non-parenting students in school settings (p. 155). The data and analysis is taken from a study at Corio Bay Senior College (CBSC) for Young Pregnant and Parenting (YPAP) students. Twelve young mums and ten school staff members were interviewed in a combination of focus groups and individual interviews (Shacklock et al., 2007). The research also undertook case study inquiries into the establishment of a child care centre (Harrison et al., 2004; Angwin et al., 2004) and the YPAP at CBSC. The sample size and use of key informants are similar to the current study. The Shacklock research provided a perspective of needs from interviews with teen mothers and concluded that a multidimensional approach is necessary to engage and retain teen mothers in education.

Mollborn (2007) presents research based on regression analyses of US survey data from the 1988–2000 National Education Longitudinal Study of 356 teenage parents. The research highlights the positive difference material resources make to teen mothers seeking education and to consequent outcomes. Mollborn (2007) concluded that meeting needs such as housing, child care and transport, coupled with a stable relationship, make a significant difference to the retention of teen mothers in education. The ORQs in the current study have been shaped by the resources defined in Mollborn’s research.

Campbell’s (1986) longitudinal study explored a group of 29 teen mothers: 14 assigned to an experimental day care group and 15 to a control group. The study shows that when teen mothers have access to affordable quality child care they are less likely to be reported for abuse or neglect; more likely to complete high school or continue education and, as a family, to become economically self-supporting.

Previous research reviewed spans over 40 years and various methodologies, including quantitative, qualitative methods, longitudinal and ethnographic, and secondary data analysis. All inform the current study, shaping the questions posed for the focus groups or providing a foundation for the analysis provided in the final two chapters.

The Current Study and Relationship to Previous Studies

A far cry from the large scale synthesis reviews or longitudinal studies based on national data collection and derived in big cities, the current study is small, undertaken in a rural city and is informed by key informants in a focus group setting. Though the Australian study by Shacklock et al. (2007) utilises the views of key informants, it also canvases the views of teen mothers through in-depth interviews. The Social Exclusion Report (2006) evaluates interventions for teen mothers and compares perceived outcomes with the views of teen mothers as recipients of these interventions. Both studies investigated whether those views held by teen mothers are mirrored by key informants. Each study concludes this is frequently not so. Although the current study only provides the views of key informants, it begins to shed light on the lack of local information regarding teen mothering and barriers to education.

The study by Moorhead and Soriano (2005) draws from semi-structured interviews and focus groups with teen mothers and informs the issues of single parenting, isolation, stigma, choice and agency, all issues addressed in the current study. Mollborn's (2007) research exposes the necessity of practical resources for teen parents to complete secondary education. The ORQs in the current study pertaining to stigma, choice and agency were informed by the longitudinal ethnographic studies by Luttrell (2003) and Pillow (2004).

The following chapter presents the methodology of the current research.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Introduction

This chapter intends to “forge a path through the maze of approaches” (Creswell, 2007, p. 45) that could be employed to answer the research questions outlined in Chapter 2. It describes the research approach chosen; namely, a needs assessment informed by a quantitative paradigm and facilitated by a qualitative data collection method. As a descriptive study, a quantitative paradigm is the most appropriate, and the qualitative data collection method fills a gap of knowledge pertaining to the needs of an underrepresented group, in this study teen mothers in Mildura.

Study Outline

Mildura Social Context

The context of this study was Mildura Rural City Part A, which incorporates Mildura, Merbein, Irymple and Nichols Point in north-western Victoria. The secondary schools that are the major feeder schools for Mildura Senior College (MSC) are located within this area. Mildura was chosen as the site of this current study due to the challenges it faces, which include locational disadvantage, defined as a relatively small population in a rural setting which struggles to deliver high quality services, resulting in disparate levels of social inclusion (DEEWR, 2009).

Needs Assessment

The purpose of this study was to assess the needs of teen mothers and identify barriers to their completion of secondary education in Mildura. Kaufman (1988, 1992, cited in Witkin & Altschuld, 1995) defines 'need' as the difference between “current and desired results or consequences” (p. 4). A 'normative' needs assessment was used for this study, as distinct from comparative, expressed or felt needs assessments, with key informants providing information based on their experience of the target group (Alston & Bowles, 2003). A normative needs assessment was chosen due to the likely ethics complications of accessing teen mothers.

A needs assessment seeks to discern and define differences in perceptions of need, as well as the causes of need. The aim is to enable goals to be prioritised that offer the greatest potential to ameliorate the problem or meet the identified need (Posavac & Carey, 1992; Witkin & Altschuld, 1995). Witkin and Altschuld (1995, p. 10) also suggest that a needs assessment can be used to “determine the needs of the people for whom services exist” so that barriers to those services may be reduced and also to identify service needs that are not met, that is, where services are non-existent or limited. The focus of this study is teen mothers, “...(who) are the heart of the needs assessment process” (ibid).

Data Collection Method

The study asked focus groups a series of ORQs to identify the needs of teen mothers in order for them to complete secondary education.

A focus group consists of a small group of people who are asked to share their views about a given subject. Focus groups comprised of knowledgeable or key informants were chosen to draw out information about the target group. In this setting, specific needs in domains such as housing, transport, onsite child care, additional educational needs, economics and psychosocial supports were enabled to ‘emerge’. In this context, key informants were the gatekeepers of the data elicited, in order for ethical problems to be minimised (Maxwell in Creswell, 2007).

Focus groups provide an opportunity for research to identify the way “individuals collectively make sense of phenomenon and construct group meanings around it” (Bryman, 2008, p. 476). Kitzinger (1994, in Bryman, 2008) highlights the ability of focus groups to find out not just *what* people thought, but also *how* they thought and *why* they thought as they did. The researcher requires skills to explore differences of opinion, to probe deeper and discern meanings for opinions.

Each focus group session began with an introduction, thanking key informants for their participation and outlining the research. The format for the time allocated to the focus group, the data collection tool and the process were explained. The group members were asked to sign a consent form (as per attached Appendix II) and information and confidentiality agreement. All participants were encouraged to raise their views and opinions and were advised that there was no 'right' answer. The session began with limited open ended questions to stimulate discussion.

According to Alston & Bowles (2003), analysis of the data generated ought to be shared by the group as part of the process. Various barriers, needs and ideas for possible solutions arose from the shared analysis of themes. One of the hazards of focus groups, 'group think', where individuals may experience restrictions to expressing differing opinions, was largely alleviated by the data collection tool used, as described below (Alston & Bowles, 2003).

Collection Tool: 'Zing'

This study used 'Zing', a computer program, as the data collection instrument. 'Zing' is designed to simultaneously collect individual ideas anonymously, collate the data and allow analysis for immediate reporting.

Each participant had a computer keyboard linked to a shared screen, enabling everyone to see all input data instantaneously. This has key benefits when compared to typical focus group work as it reduces the possibility of dominant voices and gives equal access to data driving as it can be anonymous. Each group was limited to nine 'voices' as there were only nine keyboards. There were 18 participants in total in the study, the first group had nine people, the second group consisted of five, and the third had four. Each session was structured to begin with a series of prepared open questions presented on the shared screen. Participants were asked to talk about the question for a few minutes then type whatever came to their mind. By pressing 'F9' their input was added to the shared screen chronologically and anonymously. This effectively reduced peer pressure and group think, increased autonomy and potentially enabled a broader collection of thoughts. 'Zing' collated the data, while allowing for another layer of questions, which added depth and flexibility to the semi-structured process.

'Zing' was efficient as it transcribed and collated the group data immediately on the shared screen. It also allowed for 'member checking', a process that presented statements to the whole group and involved them in identifying and agreeing on themes.

Research Design

Focus group members were recruited using a purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell, 2007) comprising selected key informants or 'gatekeepers', that is, informants who could "purposefully

inform an understanding” of the needs of teen mothers (p. 125). The key informants were a non-probability selected sample of professionals, experienced and knowledgeable stakeholders, who work closely with teen mothers. A mix of government and non-government, educational and non-educational participant views were sought.

The focus group questions were piloted in August 2010 and alterations were incorporated following feedback to provide clarity and reduce misunderstandings (Alston & Bowles, 2003). The data collection took place in three focus group settings over a six-week period during November and December, with the same instructions, process and time allocated to ensure reliability.

The key informants, or focus group participants, were all members of a small rural community with varying backgrounds including medical practitioners, midwives, maternal and child health nurses, social workers, welfare workers, teachers, a chaplain, youth workers, playgroup teachers and general nurses. There were 18 participants over three sessions, including two men and 16 women; all over 18 years of age.

Ethics approval from the Faculty of Health Science Ethics Committee Latrobe University (granted on 30 September 2010) required an independent body to source key informants. Consequently, key informants were sourced with assistance from Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network (NMLEN) as a facilitative partner. Information sheets and informed consent procedures and voluntary participation were sought by NMLEN.

Trustworthiness

Validity is a contested value in qualitative research, in terms of definition, description and the procedures required. This contest has to do with recognition of equivalence to quantitative research and sound scientific, rational and measurable methodology. Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Creswell, 2007) suggest an alternate term to validity, such as credibility. There are other options.

Trustworthiness criteria include dependability, reliability, confirmability, transferability and credibility. This study proved valid through trustworthiness, which occurred through member checking, a process that involved focus group participants in the analysis of themes and was enabled by Zing.

Credibility criteria are met when the data analysis yields an accurate interpretation of the participants' intentions and when all views are heard. Member checking supports and encourages credibility (Creswell, 2007 p. 208). Simultaneous thematic analysis played an important role in the credibility of the data collection process. As the group reviewed individual ideas (or 'meaning units') on screen, categories were developed and themes determined. This gave the group opportunities to clarify, adjust, reinterpret and suggest 'alternative language'.

Data Analysis

Focus groups and thematic coding allow for a questioning approach, which is observant, interpretive, curious, creative and speculative (Wadsworth 1997, p.45). Ryan and Bernard (2003 in Bryman, 2008) suggest themes will evolve from repetition of topics, metaphors or analogies and transitional material and that similarities and differences will be noted. When key informants use words such as 'because' or 'since', they cue a causal relationship which will be specified.

The Zing data collection tool enabled thematic analysis of the data at the time of the focus group, and involved the informants in the analysis. Zing scanned the data for 'meaning units', that is, individual statements made anonymously by participants in answer to the focus group questions. These were viewed by the whole group on the screen, coded by the group, then categorised so that similar points were grouped until a theme emerged. The themes were then added to the summary column on the screen, in view of all participants. The researcher led the discussion collating the data as suggested by the group and sought their consent for the summary.

Limitations

Witkin & Altschuld (1995) acknowledge that though there should be a systematic way in which a needs assessment can be carried out rationally, with data collected and analysed and logical priorities determined, in reality even highly skilled researchers find this a challenge. As a researcher using a focus group, there were challenges of ambiguity, insufficient background information about values, preferences and interests of the key informants, coupled with limited time and the developing skills of the researcher (Forester, 1989, p. 50 in Witkin & Altschuld, 1995, p. 18). There were moments of inaccurate anecdotal information or statistics presented by participants, potentially influencing the group's perceptions, which the researcher did not think appropriate to

refute at the time. While recognising that limitations exist, useful data were gathered from the thematic analysis.

The researcher acknowledges that teenage fathers are not the focus of this study, consistent with research presented on teen parenting in the literature review. As mothers are the student cohort most affected by pregnancy and parenting, this seemed a reasonable gender bias to the researcher.

Some researchers suggest avoiding focus groups as they believe that in groups where participants are known to each other, findings may be open to contamination (Bryman, 2008). In a small rural locale, key informants had a high probability of knowing one another. This may have had both advantages and disadvantages driven by competitive personal or professional agenda. However, the possibility was all but eliminated due to the anonymity provided in the data collection tool used.

Had more time been available for this study, two more methods would have been used to strengthen the study findings: semi-structured in-depth interviews with teen mothers and a community attitude survey. Posavac & Carey (1992) suggest a needs assessment should not rely on fewer than two or more approaches to provide transferability. Nevertheless, there has been little research in Mildura investigating the needs of teen mothers and school retention, making this research worthwhile.

The following chapter presents the findings of the research questions posed to the three focus groups in the current study.

Chapter 4. Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings in relation to the operational research questions (ORQs) posed in this study and discusses these findings in relation to previous research as set out in the literature review chapter. The first section reports the findings of two questions asked of the key informants at the beginning of each focus group regarding their awareness of teen pregnancy in Mildura and barriers teen mothers face to completing secondary education. The findings of the ORQs are then presented in three sections. The first set of ORQs focus on the needs of teen mothers to complete secondary education in Mildura, specifically their economic, housing, transport, child care, additional educational needs, and psychological and emotional needs. The next section presents the findings of the second set of ORQs on the extent to which the identified needs are currently being met. The third section presents the findings in relation to the final set of ORQs, that is, how the identified needs of teen mothers to complete secondary education might be met in the future. The chapter concludes with a discussion section that considers the findings of the current study in relation to the findings of previous research.

Findings

Key Informants' Awareness of Teen Pregnancy in Mildura

Each focus group session began with an introductory question on the key informants' awareness of teen pregnancy in Mildura. That question was: What do you know about teen pregnancy in Mildura?

The consensus from the three groups was that Mildura has a high teen birth rate and a significantly higher Indigenous teen birth rate. This perception reflects the reality; Mildura has higher than national teen birth rates.

Key informants reported they were aware that teen mothers had significant financial and relational challenges which were made worse if combined with limited family support, resulting in teen mothers' dependence on welfare and professional services. While key informants suggested data are predominantly hidden, the common opinion was that teen parenting has generational

tendencies and, in many cases, exacerbates social disadvantage. Further, most participants believed there are not enough supports available for teen mothers in Mildura.

Barriers Faced by Teen Mothers

The findings of the focus groups regarding barriers teen mothers face may be grouped into seven areas: support issues, social and emotional needs, affordable child care, the choice between education and the welfare of their child, existing educational ability, transport, and flexible learning options.

Key informants reported that teen mothers with limited family support for schooling are often from families who experience long-term unemployment, who place little emphasis on the value of education, and who view early child bearing as normal. Key informants also reported teen mothers are largely unaware of available supports. Teen mothers face barriers to completing secondary education due to their social and emotional needs. Confronted by ostracism from peers and prejudicial community attitudes, coupled with personal relationship issues, teen mothers are vulnerable. The lack of affordable onsite child care is another barrier to completing secondary education, particularly for teen mothers who have no family support to care for their child while they attend school. Some key informants believed mothers face a difficult choice between caring for their children, particularly when sick, or attending school. A teen mother's academic ability and degree of motivation were seen as reasons why teen mothers may disengage from school. Transport was reported as a barrier, making teen mothers dependent on friends or family or public transport, which was reportedly inadequate. Transport difficulties impede teen mothers' ability to access services, agencies and education, which increases their isolation and risk of harm. Finally, key informants saw a lack of flexible learning models as a barrier for teen mothers to complete secondary education.

Key informant responses to the ORQs in relation to needs are now examined in more detail.

Needs of Teen Mothers in Mildura

The first set of ORQs asked what key informants saw as the general needs of teen mothers in Mildura. These were questions regarding: economic, housing, transport, child care, additional educational needs, and psychological and emotional needs.

Economic

Key informants agreed that teen mothers live with high economic needs due to the costs of raising a child with limited resources, driving a need for teen mothers to learn how to budget. As one informant stated, "... high needs with a low income..." and another, "... having to stretch (it) out. Supports are mostly family and friends with money or in-kind offerings, for example, time or child care". Key informants believed teen mothers need to be informed about the economic supports available at school and in the community.

Housing

According to key informants, teen mothers need stable, secure and affordable housing close to transport and services. Supported accommodation was also seen to be a need for mothers with little family support. As one informant reported, "housing is an enormous barrier for a young person with a child (and) no previous rental history, (on) a Centrelink income and (a) lack of independent living skills".

Transport

Key informants noted that teen mothers need transport that is affordable, safe and accessible, and suitable for a pram. Transport is fundamental for young mothers to engage in education, "...getting the young person and their baby to and from school". Public transport needs to provide greater flexibility of routes and timetables for teen mothers to access education, medical services, training and employment, and child care services.

Child care

Key informants indicated teen mothers need affordable, accessible and onsite child care in order to access education. Informants also identified that teen mothers, particularly those who are breastfeeding, want to have their children nearby. As one informant reported, "Education-based child care is unavailable at this time. Therefore, parents have to make a choice between continuing with their schooling or parenting, that is, there is no option to continue breastfeeding while studying".

Additional educational needs

Key informants reported that teen mothers have additional educational needs, in particular relating to parenting skills, life skills and budgeting. There is also a need for greater flexibility in the curriculum and the way it is delivered to assist them to manage their dual role of student and parent. Informants reported a need for diversity in the education model to meet differing academic levels. One informant stated that teen mothers "...need to be able to also continue academic

programs for longer term employment aspirations so they can become independent". Tutoring and mentoring to support students re-engaging was also reported as a need.

Psychological and emotional needs

Key informants perceived teen mothers, particularly those who are socially isolated, as having high psychological and emotional needs. Substance abuse, domestic violence and relationship breakdown were reported as some of the causes of this high need, with one informant stating, "Those that are isolated because of family rejection or low self worth struggle for a lifetime". The findings show teen mothers need non-judgmental mentoring to support them in their parenting role and in personal development.

Other needs

A serendipitous finding of the study was that the medical needs of teen mothers and their babies can put pressure on education engagement. Health concerns and medical appointments, including maternal and child health appointments, impinge on a mother's time, while transport constraints make it difficult and time-consuming to attend these appointments as well as school.

Extent to which Needs are Met and How

The second set of ORQs asked if and how the needs of teen mothers are currently being met so that they may complete secondary education in Mildura. Again, the findings are presented under the topics of economic, housing, transport, child care, additional educational needs, and psychological and emotional needs.

Economic needs

Financially, teen mothers manage differently depending on their socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Informants stated that educational needs create additional financial pressure which was often met through dependence on family with limited additional support options such as scholarships. Few mothers are aware of the economic supports available to them. Though Family Allowance and parenting payments are accessed, as one key informant stated, teen mothers have a "fantasy of government payments like the Baby Bonus versus the reality of how far the money actually goes". In terms of the direct costs of education, participants reported it is all about priorities. Teen mothers find text books and other educational costs are beyond their daily living means. According to one key informant, teen mothers "cannot afford to return to school". Others stated: "...the cost of books and stationery to return to education would be overwhelming..." and "...finances are really the issue that stops teens going back...".

Housing

In Mildura, inadequate or inappropriate housing presents daily challenges for many teen mothers. Teen mothers largely rely on family or friends to accommodate them or on public housing. As one participant reported “...teen parents are forced to live in unsuitable, often crowded environments which create an additional set of complex issues that impact on their ability to parent well”. “Couch surfing” from one friend’s house to another is an option used by some mothers, increasing vulnerability and risk for themselves and their children.

Teen mothers face two major hurdles to renting in the private property market: their age and affordability. As one informant stated, “rental is darn near impossible to achieve...there are extremely long waiting lists” for teen mothers. “Caravan parks are also difficult to get into and expensive. Bond is difficult to achieve and (requires) advanced rent”.

Though administrative processes are changing to improve housing support, and teen mothers get priority once the baby is born, there is limited availability in public housing. Few housing models provide the support needed for teen mothers to manage. Supported accommodation, such as provided by the Mallee Accommodation Support program, involves welfare workers assisting teen mothers with daily activities. This facility has a long waiting list.

Transport

Key informants reported the transport needs of teen mothers are not adequately met in Mildura. Teen mothers old enough to get a licence often cannot afford a licence or a car; they rely on family, friends, public transport or welfare services to get around. Public transport in Mildura is limited, difficult to access and not “mother friendly”. The bus service has a restricted timetable and routes and, according to key informants, a policy of “one pram on the bus at any time”, with no driver assistance. Taxis are an expensive option, although some use them when funds are available. Many teen mothers “...walk everywhere which takes lots of time and is constraining in the heat and cold”.

Child care

While some teen mothers have help with child care from family or friends, access to affordable and accessible child care is limited in Mildura. Long waiting lists, costs and transport difficulties restrict teen mothers’ use of child care services.

Teen mothers are a low priority in existing child care facilities as they compete with working mothers. There are limited carers and places in Mildura, with some services requiring permanent

bookings to secure a place. Though child care financial assistance is available at Centrelink, it is viewed as a complicated system making access difficult.

Key informants reported that some teen mothers are disinclined to leave their babies in child care for cultural reasons, that is, some Indigenous groups collaboratively care for children, attributing shame to a mother who uses child care.

Additional educational needs

Currently, MSC offers some flexibility in curriculum courses with VET, VCE and VCAL options available. However, informants believed that teen mothers require more than is offered. As one informant stated, “disengaged mums go back to school less educated, making it difficult to re-engage”. In these cases extra supports, such as tutoring, are seen as essential to help with re-engagement. Tutoring and mentoring are additional needs not being met.

Psychological and emotional needs

Key informants expressed ambiguity as to whether the psychological and emotional needs of teen mothers are being met. Informants indicated that isolated mothers’ needs are generally not met, while the needs of those connected to family are met to some degree. Professionals tend to be involved when teen mothers do not live with families.

Multiple partners and relationship breakdown create instability for some teen mothers, as does substance abuse. Some teen mothers live with substance abuse and/or domestic violence, and fear drives “survival strategies” or “band aids” where “school becomes the last option”. However, some informants were more hopeful, discussing a teen mother’s resilience if given basic care and support. Others suggested that meeting psychological and emotional needs has to do with the level of “wrap around supports” or integrated services available. There was general consensus among the informants that current resources are not adequate.

How to Meet Unmet Need

The third set of ORQs gathered views regarding how teen mothers might access and complete education in the future. The informants suggested actions to remove barriers and create incentives for teen mothers to re-engage in school.

An onsite facility at MSC that provides child care and diverse supports was uniformly seen as a necessary step toward meeting the needs of teen mothers. A model that operates as a hub for other services was perceived as a practical and useful idea. Ideally, the service would incorporate a

'mother and baby friendly environment' with onsite child care, a program to develop parenting skills, holistic mentoring, home supports, and external visiting services such as Maternal and Child Health, and "outreach services to interact and bridge the gap" for isolated teen mothers. Informants were clear that child care is essential to re-engaging in education, along with a space for breastfeeding.

Both educational and emotional supports were seen as necessary to support school engagement. A flexible curriculum was proposed to cater for the diverse academic abilities of teen mothers and offer individual assessment and pathways, along with mentoring, tutoring and peer educators.

Informants reported that additional training in life skills and parenting are vital. As one suggested, "transition support back into education programs after birth" along with "an individually tailored education plan that allows the parent to manage the responsibility of being a parent with that of wanting to achieve in education" are essential to successful return and engagement. Another informant suggested a "... focus in curriculum on special additional needs for teen parenting, for example, classes in budgeting, how to apply for/maintain housing, childhood development etc".

Flexible timelines are considered important in supporting re-engagement in education. More time may be required to complete year 12; as one informant stated, "...she may need to extend schooling by a year or two ...maybe learning part time?"

Education needs to be economically viable for teen mothers to remain or re-engage. Financial assistance was a recurring theme throughout the focus groups, and the concept of scholarships was raised by several. Suggestions were made for developing incentives, such as financial rewards and recognition of achievement, to encourage teen mothers to remain engaged in education. Effort is needed to improve teen mothers' awareness of available supports and educational options.

To meet the critical need for accessible and affordable transport, one informant suggested "group transport, for example, a special bus".

Other suggestions included making contraception advice available and educating boys "on the needs of teen mothers in schools". Key informants advised that the community needs to be more aware of the needs of teen mothers and that advocacy to educate the community on behalf of teen mothers needs to be supported.

Onsite Child Care at the Senior College

The key informants were asked their views regarding the value of developing an onsite child care centre at MSC as a means of meeting many of the needs of teen mothers. This question reflects the emphasis on onsite child care in the literature review and in previous research. It is a potential solution that many informants reported due to their awareness of existing Australian and international models.

As highlighted earlier, the key informants unanimously supported an onsite child care centre. Their comments included: "it is a strong concept...should have been done ages ago... about time...yahoo... great...sensational... fantastic idea...excellent idea...Positive discrimination for teen mums would improve engagement and completion rates for this cohort".

Some key informants were aware of existing models elsewhere in Australia. Participants expressed the need for such a centre to be well-resourced, well-planned and positioned for mothers to be close to both her baby and her peers. As one participant stated, "...onsite would be more likely to succeed than distributed through the community which involves separation".

Informants stated, "appropriate child care is essential for (teen mothers) to be able to concentrate on their studies". They believed that integrated service delivery would provide an opportunity to deliver parenting education. An onsite child care facility would need to integrate with other service providers, such as housing, with one participant suggesting onsite housing facilities would be helpful. An onsite child care centre was seen as a potential site for employment and education for students undertaking child care courses.

MSC was considered a suitable venue for a child care centre as it provides an adult learning environment "mature enough to manage the social issues raised by such a centre". The newly established Trade Training Centre at the college was referred to as having "potential (positive) impact on course choice", that is, providing access for teen mothers to a range of relevant subjects.

Though the onsite centre was positively viewed by all key informants, caution was expressed regarding the potential backlash from the community as some people may believe that such a facility condones teenage sex. In response, the informants highlighted the need for community education to develop support for the facility.

Discussion

The aim of this needs assessment study was to address questions regarding the needs of teen mothers to complete secondary education in Mildura. The study sought to, firstly, identify barriers to education; secondly, to discover the needs of teen mothers to enable them to continue education and understand the extent to which those needs are currently being met; and, finally, to consider how those needs might be met in the future. The answers to the ORQs are now discussed in the light of previous research.

As the literature review illustrated, the scope of teen motherhood is complex and is impacted by many forces, including welfare politics. The supports offered (or not offered) to teen mothers by government can deter or encourage engagement in education, but these supports are constrained by other areas of need, including housing, transport, child care and additional educational support.

International and Australian research confirms that teen mothers face many challenges, resulting in social exclusion from many spheres of life, including school. These range from personal challenges of coping with prejudice, stereotyping and stigmatisation to the practical hurdles of lack of resources, including affordable and accessible child care, transport, finance and housing.

The current study findings are consistent with those of the previous research. Their 'problematic' status limits teen mothers' choice and agency, including in regard to education. They also have additional educational needs, such as parenting, budgeting and life skills development, which should be addressed if teen mothers are to remain engaged at secondary college. These needs are now discussed in more detail.

The current study concurs with the findings of the UK synthesis of studies, that teen mothers experience isolation and social exclusion, have diverse needs with little choice, are confronted by stigma, are dependent on family for support, are frequently products of low family expectations of education attainment, are at risk of poverty and find it difficult to afford education, housing or transport (Harden et al., 2006).

As discussed in chapter one, Indigenous teen birth rates in Mildura are six times higher than non-Indigenous rates. Interestingly, one health professional in the current study raised the notion that young Indigenous women giving birth as teenagers is in their health interests, that is, it is the

optimum age for them to physically give birth. This is similar to the findings of Geronimus (1997) that poor Black women reduce health risks by giving birth in their teens, rather than waiting until their late twenties. This information acknowledges the complexity and intertwining of health needs and cultural difference for some teen mothers, impacting on their ability to complete education to achieve better long-term outcomes (Luttrell, 2003). Geronimus and Korenman (1992) concur, arguing class and race are more pertinent indicators for high teen pregnancy rates and linked social outcomes.

Though the subject of the relationship between teen mothering and social disadvantage raised by several previous studies was not the focus of the current study, the informants' comments tended to blame teen birth for the social disadvantage experienced by teen mothers (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2009; Harden et al., 2006).

While teen mothers often follow a pattern of inter-generational teen parenting, are isolated and single, this study found that those with family support fare better than those without, a finding consistent with those of Moorehead and Soriano (2005). As the current study did not address crime, the link between teen mothering and crime locally is unknown. While presented as issues in the Stronger, Fairer Australia Report (2009) and in the findings of Harden et al. (2006), substance abuse and domestic violence were raised by only one focus group as issues confronting teen mothers.

Socioeconomic status and family support impacts on teen mothers and is a determining factor in whether they remain engaged in education, according to the current study and the findings of previous research. Middle class teen mothers are more likely to manage study with family support rather than seek professional intervention, whereas teen mothers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds require professional supports (Moorehead & Soriano, 2005). The current study findings correspond with those of a previous study noting teen pregnancy places additional stress on family relationships, while dependency creates further conflict in the family home (Moorehead & Soriano, 2005).

In keeping with the findings of many overseas and Australian studies (Levine et al., 2007; Cohen, 1998; Mollborn, 2007; Luttrell, 2003; Moorehead & Soriano, 2005; Geronimus, 1997), teen mothers in Mildura experience high needs for practical resources and receive inadequate support. Both the current study and previous studies found that housing and transport are "daily stressors" in the lives of teen mothers (Moorehead & Soriano, 2005, p. 69). This may underpin the findings that pregnant

teens struggle to have positive long-term vision for their lives (Hudspeth, Canada, Lim, & Jennings, 1998 in Benson, 2004), because they are so taxed responding to today's needs.

The current study findings concur with previous research regarding choice and agency. Teen mothers in Mildura find their choices limited, framed by social, political and economic constructions. For example, teen mothers are too young to drive and lack the funds to get a licence or own a car. Their mobility is constrained by public buses, which offer a limited timetable and routing, and a restriction on the number of prams carried at any one time. This 'choice' limits whom they may travel with, when they may travel and in what way they may travel. Teen mothers may prefer to spend money on a taxi simply for convenience when they have funds and, when they do not they rely on friends or family or, as more often is the case, they walk. Housing is another example of limited choice. These limited choices increase vulnerability and risk for teen mothers.

Both this current study and previous research strongly make the case for accessible and affordable child care to enable teen mothers to complete secondary education. The lack of affordable and flexible child care, combined with transport limitations, creates additional barriers to services. As the Corio Bay research showed, "...even if places were available in community child care, the logistics of taking up an available place without access to transport created a disincentive to school attendance" (Shacklock, Harrison & Angwin, 2007). Key informants reported the lack of onsite child care as a deterrent for teen mothers to complete secondary education in Mildura, concurring with previous findings (Harden et al., 2006; Moorehead & Soriano, 2005; Shacklock et al., 2009). The research findings in relation to the medical and health needs of teen mothers and their children, which impacts on school engagement, are consistent with the research by Campbell, Breitmayer and Ramey (1986), showing that onsite health care, along with child care and transport, promote a teen mother's return to study.

Additional educational needs reported by key informants as necessary for successful completion of secondary college include a flexible curriculum and method of delivery, and the availability of parenting, life skills and budgeting training and mentoring supports. These findings concur with previous research (Luttrell, 2003; Pillow, 2004; Shacklock et al., 2009; Moorehead & Soriano, 2005; Harden et al., 2006). While the Social Exclusion Report found that home education reinforced the isolation experienced by teen mothers, it was mentioned by a participant in the current study as an option for education delivery.

The findings of the current study are consistent with the majority of findings from previous research, with the exception of the subjects of crime amongst teen mothers and educational policy. While previous studies found that teen mothers need understanding, acceptance and support from teachers and friends for them to believe in themselves, the current study did not address this. Key informants did, however, mention the resilience found in teen mothers and, as Henly (1993, cited in Benson, 2004) argues, work with them needs to be based on this aspect of their natures.

In the current study, student disengagement due to, rather than prior to, pregnancy was unknown. Previous research indicates a third of students drop out due to pregnancy, a third are already disengaged, while a third are retained in education (Manlove, 1998).

In summary, the findings of this needs assessment are consistent with previous research. Teen mothers experience isolation and social exclusion, they have diverse needs with little choice, are confronted by stigma and are dependent on family for support. Teen mothers live with low family expectations of education or employment attainment, find it difficult to access education, housing or transport and do not have the financial resources to do so. The findings concur with the emphasis in previous research on the need for an onsite child care facility and a multidimensional approach to education that includes mentoring, flexible curriculum and course completion times in order for teen mothers to complete secondary education.

The following, final chapter summarises the major findings of the current study, directly addresses the general research questions, discusses the implications of the answers offered, and address possibilities for further research.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

The final chapter of this study summarises the major findings of the operational research questions (ORQs), provides answers to the general research questions (GRQs), discusses the implications of the findings and provides direction for further research.

Summary of Major Findings

The major findings of the ORQs and GRQs are summarised below. The first GRQ probed to find the barriers teen mothers face and what they need to enable them to complete their secondary education in Mildura. The second GRQ asked whether those needs are currently being met and how, and the final GRQ asked how those needs might be met in the future. The answer to each GRQ is effectively the sum of the answers to the relevant ORQs.

Current needs

The key informants reported that to support their engagement with education, teen mothers need:

1. assistance managing the limited resources they have to enable them to pay the costs of education, such as books, fees, transport and child care.
2. housing that is stable, secure, safe and affordable, close to transport and other services; isolated mothers need a supported housing model.
3. access to reliable and affordable transport so they can get to school and services with their children.
4. access to affordable child care located between school and home or, ideally, as an onsite facility offering a range of established and visiting services.
5. parenting and life skills training to meet their specific needs as well as tutoring.
6. emotional and psychological support, including mentoring for those struggling with substance abuse, domestic violence or other emotional stresses.

Are current needs met?

The study explored the extent to which, and how, the above needs are currently being met.

It found:

1. For some teen mothers economic needs are met through family; however, many struggle financially and cannot afford child care. Financial constraints mean that education becomes a low priority.
2. Many teen mothers are unaware of financial assistance available, while others have a sense of "fantasy" regarding how far government payments such as the baby bonus will go.
3. Affordable, accessible, stable and safe housing is a daily challenge for many teen mothers. There is limited public housing in Mildura with long waiting lists and supported accommodation, when available, is short term.
4. Age and lack of finances cause teen mothers to depend on family or friends for accommodation, often sleeping on couches or in temporary accommodation, placing them and their children at increased risk of harm.
5. Transport is unreliable, inadequate and costly, resulting in isolation and further social disadvantage for teen mothers. Lack of transport makes the use of external child care centres impractical.
6. Child care needs are currently not met for teen mothers who wish to study, unless family members offer this support. Places in external child care centres are competitive, with children of working mothers given priority, and inflexible due to the requirement for permanent bookings.
7. Flexible education delivery options and additional curriculum to assist teen mothers to manage their dual student and parenting roles are not available. Schools do not offer parenting training or additional tutoring.
8. When a mother is disconnected from her family, professional services are more likely to be involved. Isolated mothers' emotional and psychological needs are not being met adequately. Current supports and services do not meet the complex needs of individual teen mothers, including those who live with domestic violence and substance abuse.

How needs might be met

The informants were clear about how the needs of teen mothers might be met to optimise opportunity to complete secondary education in Mildura. They recommended:

1. Provision of an onsite child care facility at MSC that operates as a hub for diverse onsite, visiting and outreach services and supports, such as maternal and child health, psychological and emotional support, skills development in parenting and budgeting, and other government services and programs. The facility would enable teen mothers to complete their schooling and offer positive discrimination. It could also be a site for employment and training.
2. Additional financial incentives, such as scholarships, and provision of advice and support to help teen mothers' access child care benefits and government support.
3. Supply of stable, secure and affordable housing to alleviate the problems associated with temporary or inadequate housing and free teen mothers to pursue education.
4. Supported housing as an ideal method of responding to the needs of teen mothers who do not have family or other social supports.
5. Establishment of a bus service for teen mothers to travel to and from school with their babies.
6. A flexible timeline and curriculum to accommodate the academic abilities and personal needs of individual teen mothers as well as access to additional tutoring.
7. Advocacy to promote the rights of teen mothers and their children and to raise awareness and support amongst the school community and the community at large.

Answers to the general questions of this study identified the barriers teen mothers face, including stigmatisation, lack of adequate housing, transport, child care, financial support, emotional and psychological support and flexibility in educational programming. Informants agreed that these needs are not being met satisfactorily. They identified possible ways to meet these needs, such as establishing an onsite child care and parenting centre, providing supported housing and affordable transport for mothers attending school, and providing financial and parenting training.

Implications

This study clearly shows that teen mothers in Mildura experience barriers to remaining and re-engaging in education. The findings of this study reinforce those of previous studies and informant opinion both here and overseas, acknowledging the link between continued education and positive outcomes for teen mothers and their children.

By identifying and describing the needs of a small group of people in a specific location, this study has sought to advance knowledge of that group within a rural setting. It also builds a compelling case for developing policy and programs that can have positive outcomes for teen mothers, their children, and the wider community. Specifically, this study strongly points to the value of investigating the feasibility of establishing an onsite facility at MSC.

When teen mothers battle with low self-esteem, education and the notion of possibility and choice seem limited.

Future Research

The findings of this study suggest that further research would be valuable in developing a greater understanding of the needs of individuals as well as improved insight into the role of other factors in teen mothers' engagement with education. Such research could include in-depth interviews with teen mothers both engaged and disengaged from education. A comparative analysis of existing models of onsite child care facilities at secondary schools in Australia could also enlighten current findings. Further study could include longitudinal ethnographic work that would improve understanding of teen mothers' outcomes specifically considering cultural issues and influences.

As the study found that medical and health needs impact on teen mothers' engagement in education, further semi-structured interviews with teen mothers may identify ways these needs may be met to reduce interruption to schooling.

The current study was undertaken at a time when the government is seeking innovative solutions to improve access for disparate cohorts of students who do not fit the 'mould' that education systems require. The Australian Government recognises the need for diverse education models,

acknowledging that full-time mainstream schooling may not be the most appropriate form of education for students at risk (Youth Connections Program, DEEWR, 2010).

The time is right to reflect on needs and possible solutions in order to ameliorate “long term barriers to participation and limited choice and opportunity” for teen mothers (DEEWR, 2009 p.5). Removing these barriers offers teen mothers and their children hope for the future. Education offers a path to independence and choice. In the long term, they and the community they live in benefit socially and financially.

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Appendices

Appendix I Information Sheet



SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY

Needs Assessment for Teen mothers to complete Secondary Education at Mildura Senior College

INFORMATION SHEET

Chief Investigator:	Anne Webster
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Supervisor:	Professor Allan Borowski
Contact Details:	School of Social Work and Social Policy La Trobe University Victoria 3086 E-mail: A.Borowski@latrobe.edu.au Telephone: (03) 9479 2413 Facsimile: (03) 9479 3590

The aim of the study is to examine the current barriers confronted by and the needs of teen mothers in order to complete Secondary education at Mildura Senior College. The study will be informed by key informants, professionals in the field of teen mothers, education, and welfare.

It is a needs assessment focusing on the primary needs of teen mothers and aims to contribute to considerations of policy and practice and future implementation at Mildura Senior College.

Your participation in interviews, focus groups or a survey

As part of this project, you are being asked to participate in a focus group to outline your views on issues and challenges facing teen mothers which preclude them from completing secondary education at the Mildura Senior College.

Relevant staff from government and non-government agencies working with teen mothers will be asked to participate (e.g. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Mallee Family Care, Mallee Accommodation and Support Program, Department of Justice, Mildura Rural City Council Youth Workers, advocacy groups and other community agencies).

At the completion of the project findings may be presented at relevant conferences and published in appropriate academic journals.

All the responses that you provide will remain confidential and will only be used for the purposes of establishing the key issues, challenges and possible future directions for education and supports for teen mothers.

The researcher will also take notes during the focus group and these written comments will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at La Trobe University Mildura Campus. These notes will be destroyed after a period of five years. Only members of the research team will have access to these notes. At all times your anonymity will be safeguarded. No individual will be identified as the source of any comments or opinions in any report, presentation, or publication of these research results.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You do not need to answer any question in the focus group unless you wish to do so.

Withdrawal of consent

You are also free to withdraw your participation in this research at any time until four weeks after the focus group. A 'Withdrawal of Consent' form is attached to this information sheet.

Questions and Complaints:

If you have any further questions or complaints about the research please contact:

Professor Allan Borowski

Telephone: (03) 9479 2413 or

E-mail: A.Borowski@latrobe.edu.au

The research will be conducted in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If you have any further concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the research project you should contact the Secretary, Faculty Human Ethics Committee, Faculty of Health Sciences, La Trobe University, Victoria, 3086, Email: health@latrobe.edu.au), phone 9479 3583

Privacy statement:

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and / or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded.

For further information consult Professor Allan Borowski on Telephone: (03) 9479 2413 or E-mail: A.Borowski@latrobe.edu.au.

Appendix II Consent Form



SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY

CONSENT FORM – FOCUS GROUP

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the attached information sheet and in particular that:

- I understand that my involvement in this research will include participation in a focus group to discuss my views about teen mothers and barriers to education in Mildura
- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction
- I understand the risks involved are low
- I understand that all the responses that I provide in the focus group will remain confidential and will be used for the purposes of establishing key issues and challenges for teen mothers and access to education in Mildura
- I understand I will not be identified as the source of any comments or opinions in any report, presentation, or publication of these research results
- I understand that the researcher (Anne Webster) will take notes on my comments during the focus group, and that these notes will be stored in a locked cabinet and not be accessed by anyone apart from the research team
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary
- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team
- I understand that I am free to withdraw up to four weeks following the focus group, without penalty and through use of the withdrawal form.
- I understand that I can contact the Secretary, Faculty Human Ethics Committee, Faculty of Health Sciences, La Trobe University, Victoria, 3086, Email: health@latrobe.edu.au, phone 9479 3583 if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project
- I agree to participate in the focus group.

Name _____ (Informant)

Signature _____

Date: ____/____/____

Name Anne Webster (Researcher)

Signature _____

Date: ____/____/____

Appendix III Withdrawal of Consent for Use of Data Form



SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL POLICY

WITHDRAWAL OF CONSENT FOR USE OF DATA FORM

This form is to be used by participants who wish to withdraw consent for the use of unprocessed research data until four weeks after their interview, focus group or survey return.

Project Title: **Needs Assessment for Teen mothers to complete Secondary Education at Mildura Senior College**

I, (the participant), wish to WITHDRAW my consent to the use of data arising from my participation. Data arising from my participation must NOT be used in this research project as described in the Information and Consent Form. I understand that data arising from my participation will be destroyed provided this request is received within four weeks of the completion of my participation in this project. I understand that this notification will be retained together with my consent form as evidence of the withdrawal of my consent to use the data I have provided specifically for this research project.

Participant's name (printed):

.....

Signature:

.....

Date:

Please mail the completed form to the Chief Investigator: Anne Webster, PO Box 5074, Mildura, 3502. Any concerns to Professor Allan Borowski, School of Social Work and Social Policy, La Trobe University Victoria 3086

Date Received:

Signature: