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Teenage mothers: a long-term view on their well-being

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Background:

This study aims to address the lack of information about teenage mothers in different stages of their lives by exploring how they are doing in the long term and the social support they receive.

Methods:

From December 2018 to February 2019 teenage mothers in the Netherlands were recruited by Fiom (an expert centre for unintended pregnancy), via social media and a website for

teenage mothers ($n = 248$). Using an online survey, data were obtained to assess various outcomes, such as well-being, education, work, income, housing and social support. Respondents were divided into three groups: 0-3 years after teenage childbearing (short-term), 4-12 years (medium-term), >12 years (long-term). Results were analysed using univariate and bivariate descriptions in SPSS.

Results:

Almost 80% of the respondents reported that they were doing well and were satisfied with their life. 63.3% had a job, and 17.0% was enrolled in education. Short-term mothers worked fewer hours per week compared to long-term mothers ($p < 0.001$). 85.1% of the respondents reported that they received benefits, short-term mothers receiving more benefits than long-term mothers ($p < 0.001$). The majority (78.2%) was satisfied with their living conditions; short-term mothers were less satisfied than long-term mothers ($p = 0.031$). 36.3% of the respondents smoked cigarettes. Most support was given by family (83.1%), mainly from female relatives. About 24% of the respondents received formal support.

Conclusions:

This study shows that teenage mothers, on average, were doing well and were satisfied with their life, in both the short and long term. Regarding income and housing, short-term mothers were in a less favourable position. These results suggest that as the years pass, teenage mothers overcome difficulties. Since the association between well-being and social support on the long term is unknown, we advise investigating the effect of social support on the outcomes of teenage childbearing.

Key messages:

- Both in the short-term and the long-term, most teenage mothers were doing well and satisfied with life.
- Regarding housing and income, short-term mothers function less well compared to long-term mothers.