

Research: Pregnant teens want to go to college, need support

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The United States has the highest adolescent pregnancy and birth rate among developed countries in the world. Many mistakenly believe that teens who become pregnant do not have aspirations of going to college or finding a good job.

A study recently released by researchers at Women & Infants Hospital of Rhode Island shows that pregnant teens have aspirations and dreams to go to college and get a good job. Whether or not the [pregnancy](#) was intended did not influence these aspirations.

Maureen G. Phipps, MD, MPH, interim chief of obstetrics and gynecology at Women & Infants, headed the research team that spent two years interviewing 257 pregnant teenage girls in the hospital's Women's Primary Care Center to gather information for the study "Career aspirations and pregnancy intentions in pregnant teens."

The goal was to see if there was a correlation between a teenager's intention to get pregnant and her career goals. College aspirations were determined based on whether the girls' career goals required a college education.

"Although educational achievement is lower for teen mothers, their aspirations do not necessarily differ from those of teens who do not become pregnant during adolescence," Dr. Phipps began.

The majority of adolescents who participated in the study reported that

their pregnancy was unintended. They had career aspirations requiring at least a college education, and they planned to go back to school after the baby was born.

"Fifty-nine percent of the girls we questioned aspire to a career that requires at least a college degree," Dr. Phipps explained.

The study was designed to test the research team's hypothesis that pregnant teens with career aspirations requiring at least a college education were less likely to report that their pregnancy was intended compared with pregnant teens whose career aspirations did not require higher education.

"What we discovered is that career aspirations were not significantly associated with planning the pregnancy or emotional readiness for pregnancy and parenting," Dr. Phipps said.

Among those girls taking part in the study whose career aspirations did not require a college degree, 15 percent reported that they wanted to be pregnant, and 10 percent reported that they had been trying to get pregnant for a while. Of those with career aspirations requiring a college degree, 17 percent reported they wanted to be pregnant, and 14 percent reported that they had been trying to get pregnant for a while.

The average age of the girls taking part in the study was 16.8 years. Seventy percent had never been pregnant before. The majority (46 percent) were of Hispanic descent.

The study also led the researchers to draw a separate conclusion. Because teen mothers have significantly lower rates of educational achievement than women who delay childbearing, the study determined that there is a clear need for tailored intervention programs that will help pregnant teenagers graduate from high school, attend college and follow their

career aspirations.

"The high proportion of adolescents intending to continue their education and pursue careers requiring college emphasizes the importance of both teen pregnancy prevention programs and programs that aid parenting teens," Dr. Phipps said. "In addition, counseling and support programs focused on pregnant adolescents should incorporate practical information on how to continue their education and their pursuit of a career following their pregnancy."

Provided by Women & Infants Hospital

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