

TO PATHS PERSEVERANCE

How some young women succeed in putting together an academic and professional project despite teen pregnancy and the arrival of a child¹



DESCRIPTION

Research conducted by members of RIPOST (Recherches sur les impacts psychologiques, organisationnels et sociaux du travail) of the Centre de santé et de services sociaux de la Vieille-Capitale focused on the paths of 48 young women who became mothers before the age of 20. At the time the study was done, each would have had a single child under the age of three. The objective of the study was to better understand why some of these young women managed to pursue their studies and contemplate having a career. The suggestions for action concerned the school and community as well as the health and social services network. An analysis of the interviews also made it possible to distinguish four paths adopted by these young mothers.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study based on accounts of personal experiences. Young mothers were recruited in three Québec regions: Mauricie—Centre-du-Québec, Montérégie and Outaouais. The choice of these regions takes into account the number of births, the fertility rate and various characteristics of the territory and population. The participants had to have spent at least one period of time in school since the announcement of their pregnancy. The interview with each young woman lasted from two and a half to three hours and was structured around three time periods: before and during the pregnancy and after the child's birth. This made it possible to gather information on the objective conditions of the young women's academic, working and family experiences, and on the manner in which they experienced them. A chronological reconstruction of the material gathered established the chain of events and the behaviours adopted. A longitudinal analysis of the 48 personal accounts was carried out in order to identify the conditions most conducive to academic success and student retention.



SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

- Create conditions that help young women stay in school during their pregnancy and return more quickly to their studies afterwards (e.g. access to elevators, freedom to leave the classroom to attend to basic needs and to put off work until a later date).
- Make available a list of community resources, so that young women can easily find the help they need close to home.
- Provide information on contraception, teaching young people how to use it effectively. Also provide information on abortion, in order to demystify the procedure.
- Inform young fathers of their legal responsibility with regard to the child, and do so in a manner that encourages prevention.

FOUR PATHS OF YOUNG MOTHERS MONITORED BY THE STUDY

	Before	During	After
ONE MORE PROJECT	<p>Followed an educational path without dropping out</p> <p>Planned for the future: knew the type of job they wanted to do and wanted to have children</p>	<p>Found out about the support available to them as soon as the pregnancy was confirmed</p> <p>Were proactive in school and met with their teachers and the principle or vice-principle</p>	<p>The interruption of studies due to childbirth did not last long.</p> <p>Adapted their academic and work-related project to their situation</p> <p>Wanted other children, but first wanted to stabilize their job situation</p>
THE FAMILY CAST IN THE ROLE OF ANCHOR	<p>Had little interest in school</p> <p>Had partners much older than themselves.</p> <p>The pregnancy was planned or quickly accepted</p>	<p>Dropped out of school or quit their jobs.</p> <p>Some had another baby soon after the first.</p> <p>The relationship with the child's father broke up before the child was born.</p>	<p>Work was seen as an opportunity to socialize.</p> <p>Maternity could become a spur to change or a source of disorganization.</p>
A SPUR TO CHANGE	<p>Had little interest in school</p> <p>Had problems in secondary school related to drug and alcohol abuse</p>	<p>Found themselves alone with the child</p> <p>Became aware of their responsibilities once the child was born</p>	<p>Were highly motivated to obtain good job qualifications and a decent job</p> <p>Received help from a guidance counsellor to define their academic and work-related project</p> <p>Their perseverance led to increased support from their family.</p>
AN ADDITIONAL SOURCE OF DISORGANIZATION	<p>Had little interest in school</p> <p>Dropped out of school repeatedly</p> <p>There was conflict in family and work relationships.</p> <p>Came from disadvantaged areas or had mental health problems</p>	<p>Dropped out of school or quit their jobs</p>	<p>Were not very autonomous and had problems taking care of their child</p> <p>Planned a longer period of time off (up to two years)</p> <p>Their academic and work-related projects were unrealistic and not thought out.</p> <p>They received more services after the birth.</p>