Planned pregnancy, planned parenting: evidence for policy and practice.

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Research Objectives

- To describe the experiences and perspectives of parents with intellectual disabilities themselves;
- To describe the perspectives of those parents on their interactions with support workers and professionals on the barriers to effective support;
- To describe the perspectives of support workers and other professionals on the barriers to effective support;
- To analyse the contribution of different perspectives to an effective support relationship;
- To identify the specific difficulties experienced by support services in supporting parents who have an intellectual disability, and the barriers to adapting services to take account of the parents’ intellectual disabilities;
- To identify the indirect effects of legal, policy and resource factors on effective support in New Zealand.

Christine

Christine learnt most about periods, sex and pregnancy from being in a large foster family.
Christine was in her twenties when she became pregnant. Her partner was living in a different town but they talked about what to do on the telephone.

Christine was using contraceptives most of her life. She had been on depo provera for about five years. She stopped the depo provera six months before becoming pregnant.

Christine didn’t plan to become pregnant.
When we asked her how she felt at the time she said:
"I was happy as. I went back and told all my classmates and my tutors at the time."

Christine hadn’t talked to anyone about wanting to be a parent.
Other people seemed to recognise that Christine might need extra help but Christine doesn’t remember them talking about this with her.
Christine went to an antenatal class that is designed for teenage women.

After Christine’s baby was born they both went to a place for her to learn to look after the baby.
This meant going to another city, even further away from her partner.
The place that they stayed is a house set up as a safe home for young women while they are pregnant and after they have their baby.
Christine thought that she did “everything” for her baby but that is not what others said. After three months she was told that her baby would be going into foster care. They returned to their own town. Christine was able to decide who she wanted to foster her daughter.

Christine is happy with the foster parents that her daughter lives with. Her choice of foster parents has meant that she has not always been able to live near her daughter. When they are living in the same town Christine is able to do things with her daughter at the foster home. However when not in the same town Christine finds it hard to visit.

Molly and Peter
Molly and Peter decided to have a child seven years after they were married. They talked about it with other people. Peter’s parents did not want them to have a child. Some other people were less worried. Molly and Peter decided to go ahead with their plan to have a child.

Molly went to the doctor early in her pregnancy to have it confirmed. She had a midwife. Molly and Peter went to antenatal classes. Other people started planning the support that Molly and Peter would get when the baby was born.

Molly went into labour a month before the baby was due. She had to go to another town to have her baby. Peter was able to go. He was there for the birth. When the baby was born he needed to go into the Special Care Baby Unit.

Before Molly and Peter could get the baby home they had to have support arranged. This meant that they had to travel each day to visit their son. They were given petrol vouchers to help with the cost. When the baby went home Molly and Peter had 24 hour support. This continued until the baby was nearly one.
It was decided that Molly and Peter should be looking after their baby with less help. They found this hard. One of them hit the baby and then told the support worker. Service policy meant that this was reported to the child protection agency. Their child went into foster care. He gets to see his Mum and Dad once a week.

What do these stories illustrate?
- Pre-pregnancy planning
- Support and planning during pregnancy
- Early parenting support

Pre-pregnancy planning
- Knowledge of contraceptives.
- Parenting education.
- Responses to planning a family.

Support and planning during pregnancy
- Need for support identified early
- Support available
  - ‘fit’ for purpose
  - Small town
- Assessment of needs for parenting

Early parenting
- Assessment
  - In home
  - Away from home
- Putting the plan into action
  - When should it be reviewed?

Conclusion
- Policy and practice implications
  - Young people with intellectual disability should be able to make an informed decision about parenting (education, contraception available)
  - Family and social support assist parents with intellectual disability to succeed (advocacy role as well as support)
  - Support options need to be flexible and informed, with resources readily available to assist the local providers of services
  - Assessment of parenting should occur within the home and the parent be clearly informed of the process.
  - Parenting support needs to be planned with regular review by all parties.
References


Strike, R. & McConnell, D. (2002). Look at Me, Listen to Me, I have something important to say, Sexuality and Disability, 20, 1, 53 - 63.

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November, 2008