

***Grandparents before time: Exploring the needs and experiences of parents whose children become teenage parents.***

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## **Abstract.**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore the needs and experiences of “the parents of teenage parents”.

**Methods:** A “grounded theory type approach” was used involving intensive interviewing of a purposive sample of 13 grandparents. A thematic analysis was conducted using grandparents’ transcribed responses to open ended interview questions.

**Findings:** A teenage pregnancy can be an immensely traumatic time for a family and some level of adaptation is required for all family members. Parents are forced to adopt a new, skewed or out of sequence version of life events for their child. This exploratory research unearths a comprehensive picture of the needs and experiences of these new grandparents as they pass through the 3 identified stages of the pregnancy- Disclosure Stage, The Antenatal to Short Term Post Natal Stage and The Long Term Stage.

Grandparents (maternal and paternal) are given the opportunity to reflect retrospectively on the implications of the pregnancy on their lives, highlighting a multitude of diverse and emotive issues. The pivotal role they play in mentoring and guiding their teenage children through the pregnancy and into parenthood is emphasised. Grandparents themselves have identified that focused support during the identified stages, can prepare them for possible challenging situations, and can help to move things in a positive direction.

**Relevance to clinical practice:** This research puts the parents of teenage parents in the spotlight, and highlights the diverse and emotive issues that present as a result of the pregnancy. Health and community based services could benefit by including these new grandparents in their interactions and assessments, to enhance the welfare of the teenage parent and their child, and to support the grandparents themselves with the various challenges that emerge for them in the process.

## **Introduction.**

Despite public perception, the number of births to women under 20 years in Ireland have decreased in recent years. Despite this however, teenage pregnancy and early motherhood is still a source of concern because of the poor life outcomes associated with it, such as poor educational achievement, poor physical and mental health, social isolation, poverty and related factors (Teen Parents Support Initiative 2002, Health Evidence Network 2007, Teen Parents Support Programme-TPSP 2006).

It is widely acknowledged that the family systems are viewed as critically important sources of social support for these young parents and their children (East 1999, Cronin 2003, Sadler & Clemmens 2004). The maternal-mother (mother of teenage mother) in particular is central in the provision of both tangible and emotional support to the young mum (Borcherding et al. 2005) and is more significant for teen-mothers than older mothers (Furstenburg & Crawford 1978). Cronin (2003) claims that maternal support was significant, even when the young mums lived with their partners and suggests that every effort should be made to support these informal carers in the community.

The paternal-mother (mother of teenage father) also plays a pivotal role in supporting her young son to take up the responsibility of fatherhood and enhances the involvement of young fathers with their children (Dallas, 2004).

## **Rationale.**

Little Irish research has been conducted on the experiences of the parents of teenage parents, and the processes that are effective as they assist their teenage children to negotiate the early years of parenthood.

It therefore seems plausible to explore the needs and experiences of this under-represented group and to offer some fresh insight into the real issues emerging in the event of a teenage pregnancy. The research also hopes to determine whether support is needed for these grandparents and if so, how best to provide it.

## **Aim of the Research**

To explore the needs and experiences of parents whose children have become teenage parents.

## **Objectives.**

- To explore the challenges and experiences of parenting teenage parents.
- To explore the implications of a teenage pregnancy on the rest of the family.
- To examine the adjustments made if any, in the life of the parents (the new grandparents) as a consequences of the pregnancy.

## **Methods.**

### **Study Design.**

The challenges and experiences of parenting teenage parents were explored qualitatively using a “grounded theory type approach”. Grounded theory methods were particularly suited to this type of exploration as little research has been conducted in this area (Burns and Grove 2003).

### **Ethical Considerations.**

Ethical approval was acquired from Ethics Committee of the University College Cork. Each participant received a leaflet detailing the aims, objectives and rationale of the research. An informed consent form was signed by all participants. Confidentiality was assured at all stages of the research process.

## Sampling Methods

### *Sampling type*

Purposive sampling was used whereby 13 grandparents were chosen by the researcher on the basis that they were the best available people to provide the data on the issue being researched.

### *Sample size.*

Theoretical sampling was used to determine sample size. Using this method the researcher recruited participants on the basis of the emerging theory. This sampling process continued until nothing new emerged, or categories reach saturation point.

### **Grandparent variables:**

Maternal-grandmothers	Maternal-grandfathers	Paternal-grandmothers	Paternal-grandfathers
7	3	2	2

Sample size: n=13 grandparents

**Note-** one of the grandparents was a maternal-grandfather and a paternal-grandfather.

### **Grandparent status as determined by living arrangements.**

Traditional Grandparents	Co-resident/Co-parenting Grandparents	Custodial Grandparents
2	12	0

One of the grandparents was co- resident with his teenage daughter and traditional status with his teenage son.

#### *Inclusion criteria.*

- Parents of teenage parents in the Cork City and County area were eligible for the study.

#### *Exclusion criteria*

- Grandparents and Teenage parents who could not speak English.
- Parents who were involved in child protection proceedings because of confidentiality issues.

#### **Method of Data Collection.**

Intensive tape recorded interviews, of 60-90 minutes duration were performed with all participants. Intermittent notes were also taken during the interview and memos were written after the interview to document particular thoughts or interpretations of the acquired data.

#### **Data Analysis.**

When using grounded theory type methods data analysis begins at the first interview and this in turn informs the next interview. The data analysis process is therefore ongoing in that the emerging hypotheses being formulated inductively are constantly being reviewed (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

#### *Organisation of information:*

Line by line analysis was then performed which opened up the text for exploration or open coding. This microanalysis helped to determine the initial concepts. Because there was a larger sample of maternal-grandmothers, they became the focus of the research. The experiences of paternal-grandmothers, maternal-grandfathers and paternal-grandfathers were then explored.

### *Identification of patterns and developing ideas*

Once the concepts began to emerge from the data, they were grouped into categories (the phenomena). Axial Coding then related these categories to subcategories. These categories and subcategories were explored according to the dimensions and properties within them.

It became apparent early on in the analysis that grandparents' interpretations of their experiences were governed by where they were in the transition period.

The analysis was therefore divided into 3 stages

1. Disclosure Stage.
2. The Antenatal and Short Term Post Natal Stage.
3. The Long Term Stage.

### *Formulating conclusions*

Once the categories were developed, theoretical sampling was used to get a comprehensive view of the phenomena emerging. This process focused the research in a particular direction and consideration was given to the different perspectives. Comparisons were made between experiences at property and dimensional level and then grouped and placed into categories. This process helped to shape the reality of the situation.

### **Enhancing Rigor/validity.**

To overcome the potential for subjectivity, multiple viewpoints were acquired from grandparents who had experienced teenage pregnancy, but in different contexts and circumstances. Although the focus of the research was from the maternal-grandmothers' perspective, the inclusion of grand-parents from both sides of the family, helped to add different interpretations of the situation, to form a more complete picture.

The credibility and rigour of the study was enhanced through the complete immersion of the researcher in the emerging data, constant questioning of what seemed apparent and an awareness of possible confounding factors. An expert review by those working in the area of teenage pregnancy helped in this verification process.

Literature retrieved on the subject was also a source of stimulation on the possible properties and dimensions within the collected data. The main literature review was performed after the data analysis and was therefore an extension of the research process rather than the focus of it. Auditability was provided by the provision of a comprehensive and accurate audit trail of the whole research process.

## **Findings.**

For the purpose of the interview all participants had to reflect in order to relay their experiences in relation to the pregnancy.

### **1. Disclosure of the Pregnancy.**

- ***Mixed Emotions.***

The Maternal-grandmothers interviewed, recalled feeling a plethora of mixed emotions and reactions when they heard of their teenage daughter's pregnancy. For maternal- grandmother-2 it was final confirmation that her daughter was "out of control", and that she had been "heading in that direction for a while". Maternal-grandmother-1 stated that the disclosure of the pregnancy was like a "death in the family" as she mourned for the loss of her child's innocence and childhood. Some grandmothers had outwardly expressed their feelings and "shouting and roaring matches" ensued. Others were so shocked that they needed time on their own to get to grips with the revelation. Most mothers felt that they were in uncharted waters and were unsure where to turn. Some stated that they were angry at being denied the pleasure of becoming a grandmother under less controversial and happier circumstances.

Blame was noted to be a significant feature of the disclosure stage of the pregnancy. It varied in intensity and form and was targeted at their daughter, her friends, the baby's father and his family as well as themselves.

Grandmothers' own experiences of being pregnant as a teenager also influenced the way they initially reacted. Maternal-grandmother-08 did not feel the extreme emotions that others felt. She remembered "the drama" with telling her own mother she was pregnant and consciously



did not react the same way. In contrast maternal-grandmother-2 was upset as she herself knew of the challenges her daughter faced.

### ***A child with a child.***

The idea of their teenage daughter being physically pregnant and parenting, while still looking so child-like was particularly traumatising for maternal grandmothers.

*“She will be a child with a child. What is she going to do with her life?” (Maternal-grandmother-06)*

This was followed by concern for her daughter’s physical ability to carry a child and the anticipated embarrassment of being seen in public with “a bump”, while looking so young.

- ***Uncertainty and isolation***

This stage of the pregnancy was particularly difficult, if a termination was a considered option. Being part of the decision process was stated as being very emotional and stressful.

*“It was an extremely private matter, especially if she was going to have an abortion. I didn’t want anybody to know about it....Not telling anyone was extremely isolating (Maternal-grandmother-03)*

- ***Other family members.***

The reaction of other siblings was a concern. Feelings within each family varied. Some siblings expressed joy and excitement. Others however, were embarrassed and afraid of being picked on, or singled out, because of the pregnancy. Grandparents found such emotions difficult to address. Disclosure to the school or training centres was also difficult, but parents acknowledged that they were generally supportive.

- ***Other grandparents' experiences at disclosure stage.***

A feeling of being “disconnected from the pregnancy” was felt by the **paternal-grandmothers**. They believed that the focus was on the teenage girl and her family, with limited support for the teenage boy’s family.

*“I want my son to be a good father, I think he will. He is doing his best now but he is not included by the social at all” (Paternal-grandmother-2)*

For paternal-grandmother-11, fatherhood for her son was eventually appraised as a relatively positive thing as it “calmed him and made him be responsible”. She perceived fatherhood as being a protective factor against more negative behaviour.

The emotions felt by the three **maternal-grandfathers** at the disclosure stage, was generally very strong and significant. Grandfather-07 felt that he had the right to protect his daughter but felt helpless to do so. The fact that the father of the child, lived nearby compounded the problem.

*“She was only a child and he knew it..... It was like a violation of the family”. I really felt like going for him.....and he only lives across the road” (Maternal-grandfather-07)*

This experience highlights the potential for conflict between the two families of teenage parents from the same neighbourhood

Maternal-grandfather-09 stated that the pregnancy was a complete shock to their family. Teenage pregnancy was not the norm in their world.

*“I kept on thinking..... where did I go wrong? I got some sense of relief when the family up the road had a teenager who became pregnant soon after. I know it is awful, but I consoled myself by saying it is not just us” (Paternal-grandfather-09)*

This grandfather also felt guilty for not having allowed his daughter to go on the pill. He felt at the time, it was like “giving her a license to go out there”,

**Paternal-grandfathers** also questioned the maturity levels of their sons and their ability to take on the extra responsibilities.

*“I want him to be supportive and standby his partner, but he is so immature”*  
(Paternal-grandfather-13)

## **2. Grandparents Experience in the Ante-natal and Short Term Post-natal stage.**

- ***The Reality of the Pregnancy***

Some maternal-grandmothers claimed that gradually acceptance began to sink in. Practical issues such as ante-natal care and school/college had to be managed. As plans were put in motion, the reality of the pregnancy in some cases brought grandmother and daughter closer together.

*“We had our shouting and roaring matches but in time we grew close. It brought us all together you know”. (Maternal-grandmother-04)*

- ***Increased Anxiety and Stress for Grandparents***

Grandparents were concerned about their daughters' health during the pregnancy and their ability to cope with parenting at such a young age. There was a collective fear that the pregnancy would deprive their daughters of a normal adolescence and limit the choices for the future.

Disruption to education and the challenge of keeping their daughters motivated to stay in school was a concern. It appeared to be a particular issue for grandparents who had specific aspirations for their daughter's future.

Some grandparents viewed the pregnancy as a permanent attachment to what they believed to be “an unsuitable partner”. They were also anxious about being connected to a relatively “unknown” family, by their grandchild.

*“She was going to split from him before the pregnancy but she couldn’t. The child is going to make it harder to finish up now as he has a connection to her”.*  
(Maternal-grandmother-07)

Four grandparents stated that their daughter was not in a relationship. They were therefore worried about how she would cope as a single mother without a partner. Some grandmothers generally felt they were more worried and stressed than their teenagers, anticipating worry even when things were calm.

- ***The Pregnancy and Birth- A Life Changing Event?***

The pregnancy in some cases put family life and plans into disarray causing tremendous stress and disappointment to the families. Grandparents often felt very isolated and ill equipped to deal with a crisis at this level.

For other families, the pregnancy was only another of life’s many dramas, for example, violence in the neighbourhood, dysfunctional relationships or struggling to pay the rent After the initial shock of the pregnancy, they often seemed to adapt fairly quickly.

*“It is life, nobody died and we will get over it”.*  
(Maternal-grandmother-08)

Three grandparents stated that adapting to a new baby in the house may have been easier for them having recently had a baby themselves. They had not moved away entirely from the parenting of small children. The baby seemed to blend in with the pre-existing family and the mother and daughter parented their children simultaneously, often learning from each other along the way.

In contrast, grandmothers who had older children and/or had returned to the work force found the presence of a new baby in the house a complete shock. Their own children now had a completely different set of needs. One family had to put on an extension and redecorate to accommodate twins causing extra financial pressures.

- ***Parenting Teenage Parents - in the ante-natal and short term post natal stage:***

After the disclosure of a teenage pregnancy, it seems that all grandparents at some stage questioned their own parenting style and ability. Some struggled to find the right balance in relation to discipline for their daughter. This became particularly challenging if they were in school and a routine was needed. In some cases conflict remained an issue throughout the pregnancy as both mother and daughter grappled with shifting boundaries and ground rules.

*I'd say to myself and I'd be crying about it saying....why do I have to be so hard on her? But I was easier up until then and look where it got her!"*  
(Grandparent-01)

It was also now apparent to the grandmothers that their teenage daughters had been sexually active so there was a heightened awareness of their daughter's behaviour. Trust had been breached and would be difficult to restore.

***Other Grandparents' Experiences at the ante-natal and short term post natal stage.***

**Paternal-grandmothers** were very concerned about access to their grandchildren. They were aware that if the couple split up in the future, contact with their grandchild could be severed. The fact that single fathers in Ireland have no automatic guardianship rights over their child was a concern for the paternal grandmothers. They felt the balance of power was very much on the mothers' side.

**Maternal-grandfathers** highlighted some possible effects of the pregnancy on the rest of the family. They were concerned about the potentially bad example to younger siblings and the challenge of prematurely addressing the topics of sex and sexuality with them.

*"We told the older two children early to prevent any surprises in school. We told the younger kids afterwards and the six year pipes up "how is that .....sure she's not married!"* (Maternal-grandfather-09)

**Paternal-grandfathers** also reported feeling a sense of being “disconnected” from the pregnancy. One of the interviewees was grandfather to both his daughter and son’s children. He felt more involved and concerned during his daughter’s pregnancy. He believed his son’s actions were dictated by his partner and her family.

### **3. Long term challenges for grandparents.**

- ***Parenting teenage parents after the birth***

If the teenager’s behavior prior to the pregnancy had been a source of conflict, the pregnancy and issues surrounding it, often became an extension of this conflict. Grandparents commented on the fact that the teenagers’ behavior had the potential to disrupt the whole family and their efforts to support them were taken for granted. Grandparents felt that they had less control over their daughters than before and they felt limited and ill equipped to deal with the frequent power struggles that ensued.

*“As soon as my daughter turned 18yrs and had money of her own we had less control over her. We found it harder to bargain and negotiate with her. She actually wanted us to kick her out” (Maternal-grandmother-09)*

The possibility of a repeat pregnancy was also a concern for most grandparents. Despite the strains however, most grandparents acknowledged how difficult it was for their teenager to balance the conflicting roles of being a parent and a teenager at the same time.

- ***Sharing the Workload.***

As time went on the challenge of encouraging the teenager to take responsibility became a reality. This is often a normal challenge for the parent of a teenager, but it is more so when the teenager is themselves a parent. There was a general expectation that the teenager should

now be able to act responsibly and make the transition to early adulthood. The grandmother's frustration came with the realisation that this did not always happen.

- ***Transition to the Grandparent Role.***

For most, the idea of being a young grandmother did not register straight away. Most of the grandparents stated that the parenting role took precedence and presented the most challenges.

*"It got a bit annoying after a while when people get excited about me being a grandmother at 31. Regardless of becoming a grandmother you are still a parent. The role of the parent is a bigger role in this case" (Maternal-grandmother-11) .*

For grandparents who had children and grandchildren living with them the role of grandparent became somewhat blurred at times. Grandparents stated that while they were happy to be involved and glad to help, they sometimes felt taken for granted.

- ***Childcare Issues.***

All the grandparents were involved in the care of their grandchildren at some level. 8 of them provided full time care when their teenager went back to school, 2 of whom gave up employment to do so, thus reducing their own income. Although most grandparents said that they enjoyed caring for their grandchildren, some of the older grandparents said that they found it physically and psychologically demanding and often socially restrictive. Trying to balance their own children's needs on top of intensive needs of the baby was also challenging. Most co-residing grandparents also stated that they found it difficult at times, not to comment or get involved in the way their daughter cared for child. This sometimes led to arguments and tensions in the family.

- ***Accommodation- to move out or not?***

Some grandparents reported feeling the strain of having “two mothers in the house”, especially if there was conflict over childcare responsibilities or ground rules. For some allowing their children go their own way was the only option to restore peace in the house.

*“After 7 months, I couldn’t take it anymore..... I was crying so much. I said before we start hating each other you need to move out and get a house”.*  
(Maternal-grandmother-03)

Grandparents sometimes were torn between the need for their daughter to move out and their own concern that she may not be equipped to live independently.

*“If she didn’t have the baby we would just cut her loose, but we are worried that the child would suffer”.*  
(Maternal-grandmother-08)

Co-residency for some grandparents did not present a problem when the teenager and her child blended in with the rest of the family. This seemed to occur most in situations where the grandmother provided the overall care and was not challenged, or when the mother and grandmother had very clear boundaries and roles which they adhered to as much as possible.

- ***Identification of Supports.***

Family and friends were mentioned as being the biggest support as they attempted to put things in perspective. The support from the GP was also acknowledged. Some families stated that they preferred to settle their private problems themselves, without accessing outside services. Other grandparents however felt that they needed someone who was neutral and would not make judgements about them.

*“Parents need someone to listen to them. I felt my shoulders were not big enough to carry that load on my own. (Maternal-grandmother -05)*



Suggestions included one-to-one support in the early stages, and a group situation when they were less emotional and more ready to ask questions and make plans.

Information on how to manage and cope with parenting a pregnant or parenting teenager, information on rights and entitlements, how to organise going back to school, and just having somebody to talk to about their own particular concerns, were some of the supports the grandmothers identified as being necessary.

- **Inter-family Conflict.**

All Grandparents were fearful that conflict between the teenagers' families could result in the child being used as a bargaining tool. Access arrangements maintenance payments, parenting style or ability, or feelings about the other partner, were the main issues that cause inter-family conflict. This conflict affected the grandparents' long term peace of mind. They felt that they needed support to deal with these types of situations as they emerged, as they had the potential to be extremely traumatic.

### **Discussion and recommendations for further research.**

The birth of a baby and passage into parenthood is a significant and sometimes challenging milestone, irrespective of age. However, when a teenager becomes pregnant the family becomes actively involved in the event as the majority continue to initially reside at home (Sadler & Clemmens 2004). The findings show how a pregnancy and birth of a child, disrupts the life plans made by parents, for their teenager. The parents are forced to adopt a skewed or out of sequence version of life events for their child. Shock, anger, disappointment, loss and blame feature strongly for parents. The intensity of these emotions may change over time or replaced by others, as they move through the three stages; The Disclosure Stage, Antenatal and Short Term Post Natal Stage and Long Term Stage.

The findings are similar to those of Dempsey et al. (2001) where, despite the parents' perception of their daughter as being irresponsible and immature, in some cases the pregnancy can move the parent/daughter relationship to a deeper level. Supportive parents can also be instrumental in changing the young expectant mother's attitude to an unplanned pregnancy, towards acceptance of impending parenthood (Finlay *et al.* 1997).

It was apparent that grandparents often formed a deep attachment with their grandchild once they have resolved the initial shock of the pregnancy and the ambivalence of becoming a young grandparent (Borherding et al. 2005, Maposa & SmithBattle 2008). Grandparents fulfilled the role of mentor or coach for their parenting teenagers, endeavouring to compensate for their lack of life skills. The Maternal grandmother support in particular, was shown by (Kalil *et al.* 1998, Teen Parents Support Initiative 2002 & Eshbaugh 2008) to correlate with positive maternal outcomes, including mother's educational progress and mental health. The research reinforces the pivotal role grandparents play in the lives of their pregnant or parenting teens. However it also highlights the need for service providers to acknowledge this, and to offer support to these grandparents to help them cope with these unforeseen challenges.

Maposa & SmithBattle (2008) point out however in certain situations grandparent support can be a mixed blessing. Conflict can arise over household tasks, baby care practices, discipline and boundaries for the teenager. Grandparents report increased stress and anxiety levels as a direct result of this conflict (East, 1999) which is perpetuated by lack of control over situations generally (SmithBattle 1996, Paskiewicz 2001). The challenging situation of "Parenting a Parent" resounded through all stages of this research and could therefore be a research topic in its' own right.

All grandparents interviewed were involved in some form of childcare. Research in this area would be worthwhile in order to determine exactly how many grandparents are actually providing childcare in Ireland at present. Additionally, information is needed on the personal and financial implications for grandparents of providing this childcare, and whether or not outside employment has been forfeited because of it. Alternative forms of affordable and accessible childcare may need to be explored if according to Gray (2005) there could be a reduced availability of these grandparents for childcare, due to an increased demand for older women in the workplace.

The "power of the baby" managed to permeate through the findings of the study. From the time the baby was born there was the possibility of it being embroiled in some sort of power struggle. The baby can be used as a powerful tool to punish and manipulate within families, or for the mother to gain emancipated minor status as a parent (Maposa, SmithBattle, 2008). Research into this notion of Power and Teenage Pregnancy might be of interest from a sociological

perspective, to give another dimension to complex nature of family dynamics and teenage pregnancy.

This research explores teenage pregnancy mainly from the perspectives of the maternal-grandparents. However, it manages to acquire a snapshot of the potential value of expanding future research in this area to include the other grandparents. Findings in this research concurred with those by Dallas (2004) that positive paternal-grandparent involvement, had the power to encourage and support their sons to be good fathers. These paternal-grandmothers distinctively felt that their role was not acknowledged as significant by health or social services. Access to their grandchild was a particular concern for paternal-grandparents, in light of the present guardianship legislation. The study confirmed the analogy made by Dallas, (2004) regarding the paternal-grandmothers' perception of the maternal-grandmothers as "Gatekeepers" to the child and highlighted their feelings of "powerlessness" and "disconnection". Inter-family conflict was a reality faced by some families as they struggled to negotiate access, maintenance and childcare practices. In some cases, mistrust and fear contributed to a "them and us" mentality.

The particular challenge of parenting in combined and multigenerational families was highlighted as challenging. Further research exploring the issues and implications for all family members within this setting, could greatly enhance service providers understanding of modern day family structures and facilitate effective ways of engaging with them.

### **Implications for Practice.**

Teenage parents can be a difficult target group to engage from a health services perspective. It is therefore practical for those working in the front line healthcare provision e.g. public health nurses, GP's and community based services, to encompass grandparents (maternal and paternal) in the care of teen parents. Healthy eating interventions, smoking cessation, sexual health, parenting skills can also all be indirectly targeted at young parents, through these grandparents.

A teenage pregnancy in a family requires some level of adaptation for all family members. This research emphasises the benefits of including the grandparents, in focused and flexible interventions that build on their pre-existing skills and address the challenge of parenting teenage parents. It also highlights the need to address the changing dynamic between a parent and teenager when they have a child, up to date childcare practices, communication skills and information on rights and entitlements. Grandparents could also benefit from exploring ways of

preserving their own physical and psychological well being, as they juggle roles and responsibilities, very often in challenging circumstances.

Adequate and appropriate conflict resolution and mediation intervention was highlighted as a need in situations where the teen couple and/or their families cannot negotiate maintenance, childcare or access issues.

### **Limitations of the study.**

Although it was felt that saturation was reached from the maternal grandmothers' perspective, a greater sample size would be needed from the paternal-grandmother and the maternal and paternal-grandfathers. As all the participants were clients of the Teen Parents Support Programme. It is difficult to determine if the perspectives held were similar to non- service users. A mixed sample is recommended for future research.

### **Conclusion.**

This exploratory research unearthed a comprehensive picture of the needs and experiences of the parents of teenage parents as they passed through the 3 identified stages of the pregnancy- The Disclosure Stage, Antenatal to Short Term Post Natal Stage and The Long Term Stage.

Co-residing grandparents experienced increased anxiety, caused by the challenges of parenting a parent, juggling the needs of other family members and concern for their daughter' future. Supports from family and friends helped grandparents re-appraise the situation and facilitate coping. Grandparents identified a need for flexible, localised services to support them and prepare them for possible outcomes. Paternal-grandparents expressed feelings of being disconnected from the child, and felt their role as grandparents was not always acknowledged by maternal side of the family, or by service providers. Conflict management and mediation may be needed in certain complex circumstances.

Grandmothers' position, as a role model and educator of her daughter and grandchild should be pivotal in any health promotion interventions. However, teen parents' and their families do not necessarily form a homogenous group. Consequently strategies, policies and health promotion interventions need to encompass this diversity and be malleable enough to be shaped into different contexts.

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