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Examining Emotional Resilience of Adolescent Parenthood and the Role of School Counselors

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Adolescent motherhood can be a struggle for many youth who lack healthy social and family involvement. Distress related to academic, personal, and social difficulties may increase the risk of school dropout by more than three times (Bemak, Chung, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005). Significant supportive structures for adolescent mothers may contribute to the emotional resilience for youth. Adolescents receive support (informational, emotional, and instrumental) primarily from parents, classmates, and teachers (Hombrados-Mendieta, Gomez-Jacinto, Dominguez-Fuentes, Garcia-Leiva, & Castro-Trave, 2012). Contrary to the increased number of young mothers who are not married or actively dating the child's father, having the support of the father decreases psychological success and enhances social support (Laghi, Baumgartner, Riccio, Bohr, & Dhayanandhan, 2012). Adolescent mothers with depressed symptoms who receive increased social support are less likely to experience depression (Brown, Harris, Woods, Buman, & Cox, 2012).

Young mothers who experience difficulty with the nurturing role of parenthood may depend highly on an older and significant caregiver to guide them in parenting (Paschal, Lewis-Moss, & Hsiao, 2011). Thus, there is an increased need for adolescent mothers who struggle with role conflict between motherhood and adolescence to receive intervention and supportive services from relatives and community agencies. Adolescent mothers with limited education and poverty may negatively impact their offspring (Tucker, 2012). Adolescent mothers who experience conflicting parental relationships may feel strained and isolated, increasing the likelihood of discovering alternative methods of attachment (Jacobs & Mollborn, 2012). Such alternative methods of attachment may include school personnel (e.g., teachers). Increased support and encouragement from teachers and the experience of a welcoming school environment may increase school retention for adolescent mothers (Erdmans, 2012). The purpose of the present study is to examine whether protective mechanisms at the school level (e.g., relationships with school counselors) have an impact on psychosocial development (e.g.,

participation of growth development programs, student's emotional resilient qualities, and long-term aspirations) among teenage mothers.

Early intervention for adolescent mothers may contribute to academic completion (Johnson & Perkins, 2009) and healthy life satisfaction. Adolescents who do not receive needed intervention and supportive services to help them achieve may experience increased feelings of isolation and lower educational aspirations (Valaitis & Sword, 2005) that may contribute to chemical dependency, multiple pregnancies, and crime involvement (Johnson & Perkins, 2009). Thus, lower educational aspirations of teenage mothers may impact college aspirations (Barr & Simons, 2012) and socioeconomic empowerment. Supportive structures through intervention strategies (e.g., prenatal care in school) have prepared adolescent mothers for motherhood and increased school aspirations and retention (Griswold et al., 2012). Given the multiple academic, personal, and social factors impacting adolescent motherhood and success, there is an increased need for educators to identify young mothers in the school system and to provide continued supportive structures to buffer against academic and psychosocial challenges. For adolescent mothers who present with unique challenges uncommon to the general student body, school counselors may play an essential role in the intervention process by providing or referring youth for mental health services.

Counselors are pertinent in the leadership role of empowerment, goal obtainment, and reflection of self and students' adjustment (Dollarhide, Gibson, & Saginak, 2008). School counselors play an important role in the treatment of mental health for at-risk youth (Behnke & Kelly, 2011). With increased knowledge and training of school counselors to adopt the three domains of academic, personal/social, and career development (Anctil, Smith, Schenck, & Dahir, 2012), at-risk youth, such as teenage mothers, may receive additional support to maximize their potential. Adolescent parents, who accept their maternal responsibilities, may demonstrate increased health standards through increased school attendance, improved grades, and healthier peer/social relationships. Students who have higher confidence levels have higher satisfactory grades and are more likely to be engaged in school-related activities and organizations (Caraway, Tucker, Reinke, & Hall, 2003).

Resiliency has been used to examine a person's adaptation skills and/or their ability to overcome life challenges during adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000) through the examination of risk and protective factors (Masten, 2001). Youth emotional resilience examines the extent to which emotional problems hinder academic success. Young parents with emotional resilience may experience fewer emotional problems despite their current circumstances (Bowes et al., 2010). Individuals who display resilient adaptation become stronger over time by learning new skills, developing creative methods of coping, and overcoming life challenges (Luther & Zelazo, 2003). School counselors can contribute to youth resilience by promoting positive relationships with students and significant/supportive family members through psychoeducation to increase self-regulation and adaptive skills (Masten, 2001). Supportive adults who nurture the social and emotional development of teen parents can increase positive career outcomes (Velsor, 2009).

Protective factors can modify, change, or improve individuals' responses to adversity. Protective factors can occur at the individual, family, and/or community level. Individual or personal protective mechanisms may include an increase in self-esteem,

communication, and internal locus of control. Family protective factors may include parental warmth, family cohesion, and a close relationship with a caring adult. Individual and family support can be strengthened through community efforts which may include positive support from peers, educators, and community leaders.

There is an increased need for school counselors to provide structured experiences consisting of psychoeducation and counseling to teenage parents (Turner, 2007). Family, group, and career counseling are essential in the process of student retention, social support, and healthy parenting. Young mothers who participate in family, group, and career counseling may be more likely to have decreased depression and support second-order lifestyle changes (Shanok & Miller, 2007). In regards to increased academic retention, adolescent mothers with increased intervention services are more likely to experience increased motivation (Masten, Herbers, Cutuli, & Lafavor, 2008), increased school attendance, and earn a higher grade point average (Harris & Franklin, 2003). Career counseling can benefit adolescent mothers by examining vocational interests to increase postsecondary aspirations.

The purpose of the present study is to examine whether protective mechanisms at the school level (e.g., relationships with school counselors) have an impact on psychosocial development (e.g., participation of growth development programs, student's emotional resilient qualities, and long-term aspirations) among teenage mothers. In the current study, emotional resilience refers to the extent to which one has fewer emotional conflicts in the face of adversity. An adolescent who demonstrates increased emotional resilience may identify good mental health and increased social competence. Research indicates positive emotions, such as feeling inspired, enthusiastic, strong, and/or proud function to assist in resilient attributes in individuals' ability to recover and/or bounce back from adverse life circumstances (Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti, & Wallace 2006). More specifically, the following hypotheses were addressed:

H1: Adolescent mothers' participation of growth development programs are positively related to relationship with school counselor.

H2: Adolescent mothers' positive personal development are positively associated with relationship with school counselor.

H3: Adolescent mothers' aspirations and goal orientations are positively associated with relationship with school counselor.

Method

Participants

Data in this study was selected from the fourth follow-up wave of the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS: 88) conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 1990b). NELS of 1988 consisted of a longitudinal study of 8th grade students from public and private schools. The length of follow-up ranged from two years to six years. In NELS fourth follow-up (Curtin, Ingels, Wu, & Heuer, 2002), longitudinal participants consisted of adults, many with postsecondary and technical education. Participants were interviewed through the use of a computer-assisted telephone interview system. The participants included females who identified themselves

as an adolescent mother of one child or as pregnant (N = 372). The participants of the fourth follow-up of NELS 88 were of adult status, out of high school for the past eight years. Many participants in the follow-up identified attending postsecondary education and trade schools after completion of high school.

Sample demographics.

Race	White = 51%
	Hispanic = 23%
	African-American = 22%
	Native American/Alaskan Native = 3%
	Asian Pacific Islander = 2%
Residency	Rural = 39%
	Urban = 31%
	Suburban = 30%
SES	Low Quartile = 50%
	Second Quartile = 29%
	Third Quartile = 15%
	Fourth Quartile = 5%

Measures.

Participants were asked questions during the fourth follow-up that identified academic success (school experiences, perceptions of effective schools), work-related factors (transition from school to work), and family factors (marital status, children). This study examined participants' participation of various growth development programs, their emotional resilience, future goals, and relationship with their school counselor.

Participation in growth development programs.

Sample Items:

- "I went to family counseling."
- "The school counselor offered to arrange outside counseling."
- "I received individual and group counseling."
- "I received career counseling."

Emotional resilience:

Sample items:

- "I don't have control over my life."
- "I feel useless at times."

Future goals.

Sample items:

- "My plans hardly ever work out."
- "When I try to get ahead I am stopped."
- "What are the chances that you will go to college?"

Relationship with counselors.

Sample item:

“I called the school counselor.”

Results

A regression analysis was performed. The regression analysis was appropriate because it allowed examination simultaneously of the contribution of each type of variable (participation of growth development programs, emotional resilient traits, and long-term aspirations) to relationship with school counselor. Collectively, all of the factors accounted for 72% (R^2 adjusted = .71, $p < .001$) of the variance in relationship with school counselor. The beta values (β) indicated perceiving control over one's life ($\beta = .05$, $p < .001$) were unique predictors. Adolescent mothers who perceived more control over their lives were more likely to establish a relationship with their school counselors.

Discussion and Implications

Currently, school counselors are increasingly challenged to provide guidance to young people to overcome emotional and psychological issues (Brown, Dahlbeck, & Sparkman-Barnes, 2006). Given the role overload on school personnel, there is an increased need for school counselors to collaborate with school-based and community-based mental health agencies (Roberts-Dobie & Donatelle, 2007).

As adolescent mothers perceive their home, school, community, and peer environments as supportive, they are more likely to increase their success by developing and maintaining resilient characteristics such as competence, problem-solving ability, and sense of purpose. Adolescent mothers who have higher levels of trust and respect with school counselors may be more likely to increase their involvement at school and within the community. This information is particularly important for counselors/intervention specialists to understand the need for on-site program intervention development and maintenance.

In addition, providing counseling and intensive case management for the entire family may enhance individual and family involvement. Given that many teen mothers oftentimes rely on parental support, there is an increased need to strengthen the mother-teen daughter relationship. Family support is linked to greater resilience, life satisfaction, and positive parenting behaviors (Benson, 2004; Bunting & McAuley, 2004). While most adolescent parents name their mother as a very important source of support, some adolescent parents state that their mother is a source of conflict. Therefore, adolescent daughter-parent relationships should be carefully examined due to their vital role in the adolescents' functioning and continued success. In addition to individual and family factors, cultural factors must be examined to provide maximum services. Hess, Papas, and Black (2012) found that minority adolescents reported the mother-daughter relationship as the most significant source of support towards parenthood as they are more likely to continue their educational efforts and delay marriage (Bunting & McAuley, 2004).

Despite the negative public perception of adolescent parenthood, many teen parents experience a positive, life changing mentality and behaviors for self and child. Thus, it is pertinent for school counselors and other mental health professionals to help adolescents maximize educational attainment beneficial to the teen and their child. Children of adolescent parents are less likely to experience life satisfaction (Lipman, Georgiades, & Boyle, 2011) and have a higher likelihood of premature school dropout (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001). The power and exercise of mental health advocacy for at-risk students by providing resources to help stabilize lives, build resilience, and increase self-efficacy can be provided by educators, administrators, and school support personnel (Suh & Suh, 2007).

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