The Lived Experiences of Student Parents at a 4-year Institution of Higher Education
National Student Parent Symposium
June 20, 2018
Nancy Dayne, EdD

Today more than one in four students on college campuses are parents (Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froener, 2014a; 2014b), which is an increase from 23% in 2008.

The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) identifies 71% of student-parents as women (Clark, Mpare, & Martinez, 2011).

Student parents feel marginalized in the classroom, stigmatized by the larger campus and as a result end up feeling isolated (Brown & Nichols, 2013).

Student Parents in Higher Education Research

Demeules and Hamer (2013) found that college students who are parents need services and resources to avoid dropping out.

Lovell (2013) found that a “familial-centered” campus also would assist with retention.

Research Team

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Background

Most of the parenthood & education literature focuses on teen parents. How does parenthood impact the lived experiences of college students?

Pilot 2014 Study: 11 female student parents
- Importance of Emotional Support to Student Parent Success
- Necessity of Campus Resources and Policies supportive of both parenting and student roles

Black Fathers Project: 8 student-fathers
- Desire to be more involved than their own father focused on providing
- Emotional Intelligence
- Sacrifice
- Societal Expectations

Online Survey-Spring and Summer 2017

Student Demographics

Are you a parent of a dependent child under the age 8 years old or currently expecting?
- 151 expecting
- 635 parents

- Identify your ethnicity/race:
  - 54% Hispanic/Latino
  - 20% White
  - 10% Asian American
  - 5% African American
  - 6% Multi-racial
  - 5% Other Categories

- Identify your gender:
  - 526 women
  - 198 men
  - 2 transgender
  - 3 self-identify

- How many children do you have?
  - Respondents had between 1-5 children
  - 45% have 2; 21% have 1; 24% have 3

- What is your current student status?
  - 482 full-time students
  - 217 part-time

Findings Cont.
Findings

Findings Cont.

- Significant relationships identified between
  - Parenting stress & Anxiety and Depression
  - Relationship with Other Parent
  - Relationship with Father
  - Relationship with Mother
  - Relationship with the other Grandfather

- 26% of the change in Anxiety and Depression can be predicted by
  - Parental stress
  - Relationship with Other Parent
  - Relationship with Father
  - Relationship with the other Grandfather

- 24% of the change in Parental Stress can be predicted by
  - Anxiety and Depression (worried and little interest)
  - Relationship with Other Parent

What are your main challenges as a student parent?

- 20% Coordinating family schedule
- 27% Time to study and complete assignments
- 13% Finding quality affordable childcare
- 16% Cost of college/loss of income
- 6% Isolation
- 18% Balancing school and educational demands

What could we do as a university to better serve you and your childcare needs?

- Lack of Information on Childcare Services
- Issues with Affordability
- Availability Of Childcare
- Support Services for Student Parents and their Families
Lack of Information on Childcare Services

I honestly did not know there was a child care center on campus, so I think there should be better advertisement for those student parents in need. There was no information as an incoming transfer student. I had to figure it out on my own. The first week of the semester I went to the child care center, and they said the waitlist is months away. I needed care asap. There should be information given to students at SOAR or sometime before the semester starts.

Before the spring semester was over I put both of my kids on the waiting list at the daycare on campus. I found out about the daycare on my own. It was never brought to my attention that they had this kind of resources on campus. To help me and others I would like the school to inform students about daycare at school and since I understand there’s a long waiting list they can provide us with information about other daycares near the school or maybe give us referrals. Thank you!

Issues with Affordability

I really like the center but I heard about them during my undergraduate years because I was a child development and family studies minor. I would’ve had my kids on the waitlist otherwise. Also, they are closed during the winter and most of the summers, which makes it difficult because I had to find alternative childcare facilities for the whole semester. I was from out of state and I had to pay off campus for daycare, which was expensive. I think more information should be given about the resources they have. I understand they did a volunteer project last year with the library, so I am willing to help.

Availability Of Childcare

I had the unfortunate experience to be placed on a waiting list for the child care services that are offered at school. I applied a year ago and never heard back. I had to find a different option to have my son taken care of while I went to school and work.

Support Services for Student Parents and their Families

I heard there is a study area near the children’s library, by my ideal world there would be a play area with study area, it would be beneficial for when I needed study time. Sometimes I needed extra time for studying or to finish off a paper or complete a project. It would have been nice to have a place where I can study, have lunch, do my children work, play and warm up for the days. I really want to be at 100% all the time for my kids. My kids can get loud and a quiet place would be stressful for my children.

I would say better availability since the waitlist for Isabel Paterson is very long. Also, understanding faculty when it comes to childcare issues. I had some very understanding professors when it came to my daughter but there were a few who were not as understanding at the multiple spheres I juggled as student, worker, and mother.

Offer more information and awareness such as workshops for parents and parents to be. Perhaps childcare programs with more benefits.

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Support Services for Student Parents and their Families

It would be nice to have more areas around campus suitable for children. Sometimes children are not attending the center and children are brought to campus by parents. It would be nice to have more areas for children to play outside or have a dedicated area inside the buildings that they could attend. It would be nice to have more areas that parents can use to debrief with children on campus. It would also be nice to have more comfortable rooms for breastfeeding/pumping stations. Not just hidden inside bathrooms that nobody knows where to find. Bathrooms also don’t smell the best, so having lactation rooms in only restrooms is something I personally never enjoyed. Provide more family-friendly spaces, have parenting groups host events after 4pm instead of mid-day when some parents have to work, host more family-friendly events so we can integrate our children into our campus life. Provide parking spaces for expecting mothers and parents with small children on campus. Better advertise the center and truly ensure students are the priority on waiting lists, post more images of parenting students in media to make us visible.

I think outreach for parents would be extremely helpful because it’s hard for parents to find these types of services. Problems also happen when there are no programs or services for parents that are well-organized or advertised. They shared difficulties related to an absence of campus policy for pregnant and parenting students. Participants suggested developing trainings for staff and faculty regarding the needs of student parents, and also suggested development of support groups for student parents on campus.

Small Break Out Group

Based on the findings of this study, brainstorm ideas about next steps for the college campus in regard to the following themes:

Lack of Information on Childcare Services

Issues with Affordability

Availability Of Childcare

Support Services for Student Parents and their Families

After 10 minutes, Choose a group member to report out.

Additional Survey Findings

Participants described their negative experiences with lack of empathy from faculty. Unfamiliarity with or lack of campus resources in place for student-parents. They shared difficulties related to an absence of campus policy for pregnant and parenting students.

Participants suggested developing trainings for staff and faculty regarding the needs of student parents, and also suggested development of support groups for student-parents on campus.

Based on our Findings...

FCS Family Resource Center

Information on Campus Resources

Parenting Classes

Well-being Workshops

Clothing Exchange

Child-friendly study lounge

Plunge groups

Private Lactation room

Referrals to campus and community resources

Family-friendly campus events

Support Groups

Faculty/Staff Training

Additional Child Care options for Students and Faculty
Across Campus Collaborations

Dean of Students Office
Student Child Care
Women’s and Gender Equity Center
Ombuds
Veterans Services
President’s Office
Multicultural Center
CAP’s
Family & Consumer Science Department

2018 Graduate and accepted to a Clinical Psychology program in Fall 18!

Thank you for being here!

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