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

Student Parents in Higher Education Research

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).

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
- Need for Reliable Childcare
- Necessity of Campus Resources and Policies supportive of both parenting and student roles
- Intersecting parent and student roles

Black Fathers Project: 8 student-fathers
- Desire to be more involved than their own father discussed
- Emotional Intelligence
- Sacrifice
- Societal Expectations – single Black fathers

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?
635 parents

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

Student Demographics Continued

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

How many children do you have?
Respondents had between 1-4 children
- 45% have 2; 27% have 3; 6% have 1 (N=786)
- 33% have 2; 27% have 3; 10% have 1 (N=635)

What is your current student status?
- 482 fulltime 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
  - Parenting 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

Have more space. I don’t even consider campus childcare because the waitlist is too long. I also pay less off campus. 150 week extended day, 7am - 6pm.

Child care is extremely difficult to afford as a single parent, and it seems like the childcare center only can afford to pay for childcare during scheduled class time, study time, or fieldwork. The hours that I can afford to pay for are 0, and if it seems like the center would use extra funding to help me pay for my work hours as well. It’s hard to balance school, work, study, and fieldwork as a single parent.

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 wouldn’t had known they existed otherwise. Also, they are closed during the winter and most of the summers, which makes it difficult because I applied for a fellowship, childcare facilitated for the period. I was from out of state, so I couldn’t have found childcare nearby that I paid for. I would suggest bringing in more money and understanding the logic that as a master’s student whole program requires 1,200 hour internship in order to graduate and no guarantee that I will get a paid internship (which specialty is no more than $10,000) the cost becomes difficult. I am surviving off of loans right now.

Availability Of Childcare

Child care waiting list is unrealistic. I think current students should ALWAYS be a priority because I really benefit from the school’s support and income since they are done with school. The system is not helpful at all. In my opinion, current students should only benefit from physiology. After graduating they can be on their own like everybody else. During fieldwork I had a hard time. It was the most stressful time of my life because I had to figure out childcare on my own and the school was not helpful at all. I would suggest offering more programs for moms to be. It’s been really hard to find any help offered by the school. Only resource I was made aware of was the Child Development Center. It was hard to get in and hope you are able to get in. Help places for college parents to balance school work and time with their kids. Maybe play grounds with study areas.

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 just contacted the child care center just to check up on my waiting list status. I was told my daughter was not even on the list. I need 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

Other support programs for moms to be. It’s especially hard to find any help offered by the school. Only resource I was made aware of was the Child Development Center. It was hard to get in and hope you are able to get in. Help places for college parents to balance school work and time with their kids. Maybe play grounds with study areas.

I would say better availability since the waitlist for Isabel Paterson is very long. Also, understanding student’s needs is very important. I was very understanding professor when it came to my daughter but there were very few who were not as understanding at the multiple spheres I supplied student, worker, and mother.

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

I heard there is a study area near the children’s library. In 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 in complete a project. It would have been nice to have a place where I can study, have toys for my children and have a quiet space for them. I usually went to the CAF, but it was too loud and play area for their toys. My kids can get loud and a quiet place would be stressful for my children.
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 family-friendly spaces, have parenting groups host events after 4pm instead of midday when some parents have to work, host more family-friendly events so we can integrate our children into our campus life. It would also be nice to have more comfortable rooms for breastfeeding/pumping stations. Bathrooms also don’t smell the best, so having lactation rooms in only restrooms, is something I personally never enjoyed.

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Provide more family-friendly spaces, have parenting groups host events after 4pm instead of midday when some parents have to work, host more family-friendly events in ad. (Operator: Can you please provide more information on how to integrate family-friendly spaces into the campus life?)

I think outreach for parents would be extremely helpful because it's hard for parents to find programs and services for parents such as support groups, workshops, referral services, or extended opportunity programs. I did not know that the school offered childcare until a coworker mentioned it. Also, because there are no groups for parents it's hard to find another parent whose going through something similar to the problems you're having. (Operator: Can you please provide more information on how to ensure that parents have access to support groups and resources?)

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. They shared difficulties related to access to campus resources for parents. 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.

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Based on our Findings...

FCS Family Resource Center
Information on Campus Resources
Parenting Classes
Well being Workshops
Clothing Exchange
Child-friendly study lounge
Play 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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