"When I was having my baby": Learning from young mothers’ birth stories

We interviewed 81 pregnant women and young mothers between the ages of 16-24.

The median age of young mothers was 19 years old.

Ethnicity
- Indigenous: 31
- White: 28
- Indigenous & White: 6
- Asian: 6
- Latin American: 3
- Black: 2
- Other ethnicities: 5

Number of Children
- Expecting first child: 11
- 1 child: 52
- 2 children: 16
- 3+ children: 2

Education Level
- Some high school: 16
- Currently in high school: 45
- Graduated high school: 10
- Attending post-secondary: 8
- Completed post-secondary: 2

Key Findings

1. Capable, Confident, Mature

Young mothers frequently feel judged as being ill-prepared for motherhood. Their stories about preparing for labour, birth and parenting emphasized that they have the necessary qualities to be good mothers.

2. ‘Bearing Up Under Pain’

Young mothers said being able to handle pain gracefully during labour and delivery helps demonstrate that they are ready for motherhood.

3. Managing the Delivery Room

It is very important for young mothers to decide who should be present during their labour and delivery. Family, friends and health care providers who are supportive of young mothers’ wishes and decisions help make this experience more positive and boost their confidence in their ability to be good mothers.
How Service Providers Can Support Young Parents

Young mothers are frequently stigmatized because of their age, ethnicity, social class, or family background. Health care providers can better support young mothers by:

- Taking additional training to better understand and meet the needs of early-age mothers preparing for or giving birth; and

- Practicing women-centred care regardless of the age of the mother or her background (e.g., ethnicity or social class).

For more information about young mothers' birth stories, please see:


The Young Parents Study

The Young Parents Study is a five-year research project that seeks to better understand the experiences of young parents (aged 15-24) with a variety of health, education, and social service interventions and policies. It involves interviews and fieldwork at a number of young parent programs in Prince George and Greater Vancouver, British Columbia. The study aims to gather information that can be used to improve services and supports for young parents both locally and provincially.

This study is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and led by Dr. Jeannie Shoveller of UBC’s School of Population and Public Health.

For more information about the Young Parent Study, please visit our website:


Thank You.