

CAREER ASPIRATIONS OF PREGNANT AND PARENTING ADOLESCENTS

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The purpose of this study was to examine career aspirations of pregnant and/or parenting adolescents. Social Cognitive Career Theory provided the theoretical framework. Females enrolled in a teenage parenting center completed a questionnaire to determine career aspirations. Findings indicated age and source of career information had a significant effect on career aspirations of participants. Pregnant adolescents aspired to more prestigious careers than parenting adolescents and adolescents who were both pregnant and parenting. A large portion of participants aspired to become registered nurses. Findings from this study can assist educators, counselors, and families in developing long-term programs to provide pregnant and parenting adolescents academic and career development skills for success in attaining their future career aspirations.

While slightly decreasing in rates in recent years, adolescent pregnancy continues to be prevalent in the United States, with nearly one million teenage females becoming pregnant each year (Meade & Ickovics, 2005; Sarri & Phillips, 2004). The country's adolescent pregnancy rate remains the highest among western industrialized nations, with 4 of every 10 pregnancies occurring in women younger than age 20 (Dangal, 2006; SmithBattle, 2003; Spear, 2004). Characteristics such as family structure, age at first intercourse, low self-esteem and educational expectations, poor academic performance, low socioeconomic status, and lack of career aspirations or goals have been associated with adolescent pregnancy (Kaufman, 1996; McCullough & Scherman, 1991; Stewart, 2003; Xie, Cairns, & Cairns, 2001). Adolescent pregnancy poses various social consequences for teen mothers and has been associated with lower educational attainment, which often leads to poverty and/or high school dropout (Hayes, 1987; Meade & Ickovics, 2005; National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2002). Pregnancy is one of the reasons commonly cited by female secondary students for dropping out of high school (Brindis & Philliber, 2003).

Pregnant secondary students are more likely to possess lower career aspirations, attain less prestigious occupations, experience less satisfaction with career progress than their non-pregnant peers, and feel their future job choices are limited (Coles, 2005; Nord, Moore, Morrison, Brown, & Myers, 1992). Because adolescent mothers often lack work experience, educational skills, and job training, they are less competitive in the workforce. As a result, a large number of adolescent mothers are disproportionately poor, depending on public assistance to support them economically (Maynard, 1996; Rothenberg & Weissman, 2002).

Goals and Career Aspirations

Adolescence is a time when teenagers develop certain aspirations regarding their education and future careers. Aspirations represent a person's orientation toward particular goals and can be influenced by variables such as gender, socioeconomic status, family support,

parental expectations, and cultural values (Khallad, 2000; Rojewski, 1996a). During adolescence, aspirations are especially important because they allow teenagers to evaluate the degree to which various choices help or hinder their chances of attaining desired goals. A career aspiration is defined as the occupation a person desires to pursue if there were no reality constraints (Arbona & Novy, 1991). Career aspirations represent an individual's orientation toward a particular career goal and may cause an individual to closely examine decisions regarding schooling or the future. Career aspirations may also reflect past experiences and perceived barriers (Gottfredson & Becker, 1981; Rojewski, 1996b).

Theoretical Framework

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is a framework based on Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. The theory attempts to complement and build conceptual linkages with existing career development theories (Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 1996). SCCT examines the development of career and academic interests, career choice, and performance outcomes (Albert & Luzzo, 1999; Gore Jr. & Leuwerke, 2000). SCCT describes numerous personal variables and their interaction with other aspects of the individual and the environment to form the career development path (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). According to SCCT, three main variables are believed to regulate an individual's career behavior. These three variables, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals, are commonly described as the "building blocks" of career development (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002; Lent et al., 1996; Smaby, Crews, & Downing, 1999). Self-efficacy refers to people's judgment about their capabilities to take action to achieve designated types of performances. Outcome expectations are personal beliefs about the probable consequences or outcomes of performing particular behaviors (Lent & Brown, 1996). The final variable focuses on goals and how setting goals guides an individual's behavior (Albert & Luzzo, 1999). Taken together, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals are said to influence educational and vocational choices (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine career aspirations of pregnant and/or parenting adolescent females. Adolescence is a time of self-definition as an individual moves from childhood into young adulthood (Merrick, 1995). For this study, an adolescent female was defined as a girl between 13 and 19 years of age. Independent variables for demographics included age, race, parenthood status, parents' occupation, parents' education level, and source of career information. Parenthood status consisted of three categories: pregnant, parenting, or both pregnant and parenting. Pregnant was defined as a female adolescent who was expecting a child. Parenting was defined as a female adolescent who became a biological parent before age 20 (Xie et al., 2001). The term pregnant and parenting described females who had one or more children and were pregnant at the time of this study. Career aspirations, the dependent variable, represented an individual's orientation toward a particular career goal (Rojewski, 1996b).

Method

Population and Sample

The target population for this study was all pregnant and/or parenting adolescent females in a southeastern state. The accessible population consisted of pregnant and/or parenting teens attending a teenage parenting center that solely served the needs of pregnant and parenting adolescents. Therefore, this was a sample of convenience. Based on Olejnik's (1984) four factors for sample size selection, a sample size of 51 participants was required for a large effect size, a

statistical power of .70, and an alpha level of .05. A total of 79 participants completed and returned questionnaires.

Instrument

This study employed the use of a cross-sectional survey because the data was collected at one point in time (Creswell, 2003). Survey design was chosen to generalize the results from the sample to the larger population. The questionnaire for this study included demographics for age, race, parenthood status, parents' occupation, parents' education level, and source of career information. Responses to the open-ended career aspiration question were assigned a four-digit code according to prestige scores from Nakao and Treas's (1992) Socioeconomic Index (SEI). To control for validity and reliability of respondents' scores, a pilot test was conducted with a sample of 11 adolescent females from a teen parenting program at a hospital in a southeastern state. The pilot test also determined how to code and record student responses using the SEI. A two-rater coding system was used to ensure unanimous agreement on the classification of each respondent's career aspiration.

Procedure

Permission was granted from authorities in the participating school district and from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Individuals who participated in this study completed an anonymous two-page questionnaire consisting of questions focused on demographic information, as well as an open-ended question regarding career aspirations. Questionnaires were administered by teachers to adolescent females enrolled at a teenage parenting center. All adolescent females completed the same questionnaire, and participants could discontinue participation in the study at any time.

Data Analysis

Data compilation, verification, and analyses were completed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Release 11.5.1 for Windows. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to compare the independent variables with the dependent variable. Means and standard deviations were calculated to compare respondents' demographic data with career aspirations. All research questions were analyzed using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). If a one-way ANOVA found a significant difference, post-hoc tests were run to determine where the differences occurred, and effect size was calculated.

Findings

Demographic Profile

The total number of respondents for this study was 79. All respondents were female and ranged from 13 to 19 years of age. The mean age of respondents was 16.41 years and the standard deviation was 1.36. The majority of respondents were African American. There were more parenting adolescents than pregnant adolescents and only two respondents reported being both pregnant and parenting. Demographic information describing the 79 respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Information of Respondents

Independent variable	N	Percentage
Age		
13	3	3.8
14	3	3.8
15	13	16.5
16	19	24.1
17	26	32.9
18	12	15.2
19	3	3.8
Race		
American Indian/Alaskan Native	4	5.1
African American	63	79.7
Hispanic	3	3.8
Multi-Racial	3	3.8
Caucasian	6	7.6
Parenthood Status^a		
Pregnant	33	42.3
Parenting	43	55.1
Pregnant and Parenting	2	2.6
Parents' Education Level		
Mother		
Did not finish high school	14	17.7
High school graduate	29	36.7
2-year college graduate	6	7.6
4-year college graduate	10	12.7
Completed some college	7	8.9
Not sure	13	16.5
Father		
Did not finish high school	9	11.4
High school graduate	28	35.4
2-year college graduate	4	5.1
4-year college graduate	4	5.1
Completed some college	8	10.1
Not sure	26	32.9
Source of Career Information^b		
Mother	19	25.7
Father	2	2.7
Teacher(s)	12	16.2
Guidance counselor	3	4.1
School career center	6	8.1
Other adults	6	8.1
Friends	1	1.4
Books, magazines, newspaper, television	15	20.3
Other	10	13.5

^aThere was one missing observation. ^bThere were five missing observations.

Pregnant adolescents (n=31) chose career aspirations with prestige scores ranging from 26.39 (cosmetologist/hairdresser) to 97.16 (physician). A majority of these pregnant adolescents (29.0%) indicated they wished to become registered nurses, followed by physicians or protective service personnel (both 12.1%). Parenting adolescents (n=42) chose career aspirations with prestige scores ranging from 26.39 (cosmetologist/hairdresser) to 97.16 (physician). The majority of parenting adolescents (30.2%) also aspired to become registered nurses. The occupations of physician (18.6%) and cosmetologist/hairdresser (9.3%) were the second and third highest career aspirations desired by parenting adolescents. Two adolescents were pregnant and parenting, meaning they had one or more children and were currently pregnant. One adolescent female who was pregnant and parenting desired to become a police officer, while the other pregnant and parenting adolescent female aspired to be a registered nurse.

For the independent variable parenthood status, no statistically significant difference was found regarding the career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents when a one-way ANOVA was conducted. Because there were only two females categorized as both pregnant and parenting, these respondents were removed from analysis. Perhaps if more participants were in this group, significant differences may have been found.

The independent variable, age, was examined to determine the effect on career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents. Age had a significant effect on career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents at the .05 alpha level, $F(3, 72)=3.20, p=.028$. Bonferroni tests revealed the difference existed in adolescents between ages 13 to 15 compared to adolescents who were 16 years of age ($p=.022$). Younger adolescents between ages 13 to 15 had a slightly higher mean average for career aspirations than adolescent females in the other age groups (16, 17, and 18 to 19 years). A large effect size of .118 indicated that 11.8% of the variation in the dependent variable, career aspiration, can be attributed to the independent variable, age. See table 2.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations of Prestige Scores for Career Aspirations Based on Age

Age group	N ^a	M	SD
13-15	18	81.33	17.90
16	18	60.67	24.60
17	26	68.01	19.46
18-19	14	67.00	20.20

^aThere were three missing observations.

Race, another independent variable, did not have a statistically significant difference on career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents. Perhaps if the sample was more diverse, results would have yielded significant differences. However, for this study, the large number of African American participants made it difficult to determine if race had any effect on the career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents. A seventh independent variable examined the effect of parents' occupation on career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents. Parents' occupation did not show a statistically significant difference on the career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents. Parents' education level, the eighth independent variable, did not have a statistically significant effect on career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents.

The final independent variable for this study explored the effect of the source of career information on career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents. Due to the variety of

answers resulting in small group sizes, responses were collapsed into the following new categories to obtain larger numbers for analyses: *family*, which included mother and father, *school*, which consisted of teachers, guidance counselors, and school career centers, *other*, including other adults and friends, and *media*, consisting of books, magazines, newspapers, and television. Source of career information did have a statistically significant effect on career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents at the .05 alpha level, $F(3, 67)=4.56, p=.006$. The difference was between the *family* group compared to the group labeled *other* ($p=.047$), and with the *family* group compared to the *media* group ($p=.008$). Within the *family* group, mothers were cited most often as the best source of career information ($n=19$ or 25.7%), followed closely by books, television, and magazines ($n=15$ or 20.3%) from the *media* group, and then teachers, from the *school* group ($n=12$ or 16.2%). See table 3.

Table 3
Source of Career Information for Pregnant or Parenting Adolescents

Source of career information	Pregnant or parenting adolescents' career aspirations		
	N ^a	M	SD
Family	20	82.04	19.17
School	21	72.05	21.18
Other	15	63.03	20.50
Media	15	58.67	20.35

^aThere were eight missing observations.

Effect size was calculated for the significant findings. Eta squared was calculated to be .169, indicating a large effect size of practical significance. Therefore, 16.9% of the variation in the dependent variable, career aspiration, can be attributed to the independent variable, source of career information.

Conclusions

Of the six independent variables examined in this study, age and source of career information were the only two to show a statistically significant difference on the career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents. Regarding age, adolescents between ages 13 to 15 had a slightly higher mean average for career aspirations than adolescent females who were 16 to 19 years of age. For source of career information, group 1 (family) had more of an effect on career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents than group three (other) and group four (media). The majority of pregnant adolescents aspired to become registered nurses. Likewise, the majority of parenting adolescents aspired to become registered nurses. Other occupations pregnant or parenting adolescents aspired to included physicians; protective service careers in the Air Force, Army, or Navy; lawyers; and hairdressers or cosmetologists. Parenthood status, race, parents' occupation, and parents' education level did not affect career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents. Nearly three-quarters of respondents indicated that adolescent parenthood would not prevent them from obtaining their desired career.

Discussion and Implications

One noteworthy observation from this study was that despite parenthood status, the majority of adolescent females aspired to become registered nurses. This finding is consistent

with Drummond and Hansford's (1992) study, as they reported that pregnant adolescents most often aspired to nursing careers. Adolescent females' desire to become nurses could be attributed to their exposure to the nursing community throughout the duration of their pregnancy and birth process. Five of the eight high schools which are the home schools of the participants offer Healthcare Science classes these adolescent females may have been enrolled in prior to entering the teenage parenting center. Their potential involvement in Healthcare Science classes may correlate with their developing interests in the nursing field and could influence their aspirations of wanting to become nurses. In addition, several adolescent females aspired to careers in the protective service sector of the workforce. This could be due to the fact that a large military base is located in the same city as the teenage parenting center. Thus, these adolescents are likely exposed to military careers through local newspaper and television advertisements, friends, or relatives. In fact, many adolescent females indicated one or both of their parents were employed in the military, which could also influence these females to aspire to military careers.

Previous research has typically found African Americans to have lower career aspirations than their European American counterparts (Hellenga, Aber, & Rhodes, 2002). Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) supported this notion, stating African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans exhibited considerably lower occupational outcomes than Caucasians. Brown and Barbosa (2001) found that career aspirations of females from low-income families were confined to the experiences of their relatives and friends. In this study, race did not have a statistically significant difference on career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescent females.

When evaluating source of career information on career aspirations of pregnant or parenting adolescents, this study found that these adolescent females received most career information from the family, particularly the mother. In examining this finding, it may be linked to a single head of household mother or adolescents being more aware of their mothers' occupation. Participants in this study reported being more impacted by media than school resources with respect to source of career information. School resources such as teachers, counselors, and school career centers were ranked lower than media, perhaps suggesting adolescents are not receiving substantial career information in the school setting. Considering this study was conducted in a school designed to serve the needs of pregnant and parenting adolescents, this information outlines the necessity for a significant concentration on quality career development programs. This supports Cole's (2005) findings that define a need for early career education emphasizing opportunities and resources available to achieve education.

There has been minimal research on career aspirations of pregnant and parenting adolescents; however, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is effective in examining the interaction of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals on the career development process. According to Young, Martin, Young, and Ting (2001), programs that connect behaviors with outcomes and programs that promote the importance of higher education afford adolescents the skills to develop realistic strategies for meeting life goals. Guidance programs that include career education and exploration opportunities have been found to provide exposure to postsecondary education and training options (McWhirter, Rasheed, Crothers, 2000). An implication of this study's findings is the necessity for stringent measures to create intense education programs linking pregnant or parenting adolescent females' outcome expectations with their goals regarding future career aspirations, as outlined in the Social Cognitive Career Theory.

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