



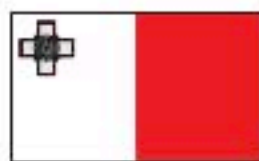
Unlocking the Female Potential

LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH STUDY

The Life Prospects of Teenage Parents

RESEARCH FINDINGS REPORT

Partner Organisations



Operational Programme II – Cohesion Policy 2007–2013
Empowering People for More Jobs and a Better Quality of Life
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Investing in Your Future

**National Commission for
the Promotion of Equality**

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The Life Prospects of Teenage Parents

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FOREWORD

Dear reader,

NCPE's commitment to eliminating gender inequality in Malta comes forth again with this research exercise. As you will read in the following pages, through the European Social Fund – ESF 3.47 Unlocking the Female Potential, NCPE has embarked on a mission to further understand certain realities that limit the involvement of women in the labour market. Throughout this research, we have sought to identify the needs of specific female target groups that make up the national context. Among other objectives we delved deeper into the life prospects of teenage parents.

It has been an exciting journey through two very full years of research to discover and bring to you these findings. In the 2nd chapter, we have also included policy recommendations that we hope will address the most urgent needs when it comes to teenage parents in Malta and Gozo. Important conclusions that can be covered in future studies as well as in future legislations can also be found here. In the analysis we have also assessed the impact of relevant policy actions and projects. We trust that this research will be fruitful and will be useful for policy development in order to raise awareness on the current situation of teenage parents in Malta and Gozo. Special thanks go to M. Fsadni & Associates involved in this research as well as to all NCPE staff.

Dr Romina Bartolo LL.D, MJuris (EU Law)
Executive Director, NCPE
December 2012

RESEARCH CONSULTANTS' ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Report was researched and written by Marika Fsadni of M. FSADNI & Associates, together with key expert associate consultant Angele Deguara. The Research Consultants were responsible for the design, co-ordination and execution of the research field operations and also for the reporting of the findings of the entire project. Also, special thanks go to Anna Debono, senior research analyst, who led the fieldwork operations, which were all conducted in-house.

The Research Consultants are very grateful to NCPE for entrusting them with this interesting and very challenging research project. Sincere thanks go to NCPE's Executive Director, Dr Romina Bartolo, Therese Spiteri and Natalie Haber for their significant contribution during the whole course of this research project.

M. FSADNI & Associates would also like to sincerely thank the 25 stakeholders who participated in this study. These stakeholders comprised counsellors, social workers, teenage parent shelters, health specialists, government officials and various professionals, who contributed significantly to producing a more holistic research approach to this longitudinal study.

The Research Consultants are also extremely grateful for the vital input in this study by over 90 male and female teenage parents hailing from Malta and Gozo, who accepted to be interviewed at least four times during the course of this study. The sharing of these teenage parents' experiences, challenges, difficulties, joys, perceptions, opinions and perceived life prospects contributed significantly to this study.

The Research Consultants are indebted to all these individuals and entities for participating and contributing essential input towards this study. Indeed, this is the first ever study of this size and detail on exploring the life prospects of teenage parents in Malta and will undoubtedly serve as an initial platform to encourage other similar studies to be conducted in the near future.

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2. INTRODUCTION

The **National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE)** embarked on a project entitled *'Unlocking the Female Potential'* which aims to increase the overall female employment rate by providing indirect incentives to work. The current research provides policy makers with vital information on the current situation of teenage parents in Malta and Gozo. The project was subdivided into five parts, and this research study is focused on analyzing the life prospects of teenage parents.

2.1 Research Overall Objective

The overall objective of the research is to conduct a longitudinal study looking at the life prospects of teenage parents.

2.2 Specific Research Objectives

The specific research objectives for the Project are to uncover the following:

- the challenges which Maltese and Gozitan teenage parents face;
- the possibility of further educational prospects for teenage parents;
- the possibility of job prospects for teenage parents;
- profiles of persons who are teenage parents;
- whether teenage parents have knowledge of services and support structures which are available and whether they make use of such structures;
- the roles which each of the parents take on;
- any patterns which may be found within the cohort related to the socio-economic status and background of teenage parents;
- ambitions, future prospects and perceptions of teenage mothers, also investigate what their aspirations were prior to becoming parents;
- the effects that becoming a teenage parent had on the life prospects of both teenage mothers and teenage fathers, and is there a difference between the genders;
- what needs teenage parents have and how support structures can be enhanced to better suit their needs;
- how the teenagers have taken on the role of parenthood and how they see their prospects.

3. SALIENT CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Respondent Profile

- A total of 103 teenage parent respondents were interviewed for the first phase of this longitudinal study. Out of these, 96 took part in the second wave of interviews, 93 in the third wave and a total of 90 accepted to be interviewed for the fourth time.
- The initial 103 respondents included 91 females and 12 males. Of these, 79 females and 11 males agreed to be interviewed for the four phases of this longitudinal study.
- 31% of the teenage parents indicated that they became parents at 18 years, followed by 23% who became mothers/fathers at age 19.
- The level of education of 66% of the teenage parents at the time when they became parents was of a secondary level while that of 31% was of a college/ technical school level. The level of education of teenage parents increased from the time they became parents.
- The 103 respondents hailed from different localities in Malta and Gozo. When they became teenage parents, 35% used to live in the Southern Harbour region, 25% hailed from the Northern Harbour region, 15% from the Northern region, 12% from the South Eastern region, 10% from Gozo and 4% from the Western region.
- 33% of the teenage parents interviewed indicated that at the time they became parents they were unemployed. Another 30% stated that they were students and 27% indicated that they were in full time employment. The employment status of the same respondents when they were interviewed for the first time, changed considerably. In fact, being a student decreased to 12% while inactivity increased from 2% to 19%. Part time employment also increased from 8% to 14%.
- 85% of the respondents stated that when they became parents, their parent/ guardian was the main income earner in their household. 9% indicated that it was their spouse/ partner and 2% mentioned that they were the main income earners.
- The employment status, at the time the respondents became parents, of the main income earner for 70% (72 respondents) of the respondents was full time employment, while for 15% (15 respondents) it was unemployment.
- With regards to the socio-economic classification of the respondents at the time they became parents, 49.5% fell in the DE classification, 43% fell in the C1/C2 classification and a low 8% fell in the AB classification. At the time when the first interviews were conducted, there was an increase of the DE classification with 50.5%, 43% fell in the C1/C2 classification and 7% fell in the AB classification.

Policy Considerations

- In line with national statistics, the majority were over 18 years when they became teenage parents, although the few who become parents at a much more tender age cannot be underestimated especially nowadays when sexual activity among teenagers appears to be on the increase.
- Socio-economic status is clearly correlated to teenage parenthood with almost 50% of teenage parents hailing from a working class background.
- As suggested in the literature, this may point to the likelihood that low income may be a cause as well as a consequence of teenage parenthood.

Challenges Faced by Teenage Parents

- The main challenge for teenage parents is the financial burden of having a child. The increase in responsibility, the change in lifestyle, restricted freedom and the pressure to keep a good relationship with the partner are also challenges which teenage parents have to face when they become parents. It is worthy of mention that the challenges faced because of parenthood are not different between teenage mothers and teenage fathers. While in general, the teenage parents remain facing the same problems for a number of years, others face new problems.
- 31% of the respondents communicated that they do not regret becoming teenage parents while the remaining 69% do. The main regrets mentioned by these respondents were education related, the restricted freedom, the change in their lifestyle, and having to terminate employment.
- 53% of the mothers indicated that fathers were supportive/ very supportive, 8% stated they were neither supportive nor not supportive and 40% pointed out that they were either not supportive or not at all supportive.
- 54% of the mothers indicated that the fathers were forthcoming with financial support, 65% pointed out that the fathers recognized the child immediately and 16.5% stated that the father of their child never recognized the child.

Policy Considerations

- While teenage mothers need to learn from their experience and to face their responsibilities, it is clear that more support structures//incentives are needed for young mothers to be able to work and to be financially independent while still managing to spend time with their child.
- While over half of the fathers are supportive of their children, a significant number are unfortunately not supportive. This points to the low importance given to the father's role in our social policy and in our culture in general. It is important for policy makers to encourage both mothers and fathers to take an active role in the upbringing of their children rather than projecting the traditional caring model which puts all the responsibility on the mother.

Educational and Job Prospects of Teenage Parents

- The majority of the teenage parents communicated during the first interview that they have educational aspirations for the future. A total of 5 respondents of those who fall within the AB socio-economic classification have such aspirations, however, the percentage is much lower foreducational aspirations are much lower among those falling within the C1C2 and DE classifications.
- 39% stated that they perceive their educational prospects as being either positive/ very positive, another 37% perceive them to be neither positive nor negative and 16.5% perceive them to be either negative/ very negative.
- Of the 40 respondents who perceive their educational prospects as being positive, 12 indicated that they plan on furthering their studies once their child commences school and is old enough to be independent. Other respondents indicated that they would be able to achieve their educational goals if they find a good child care service to take care of their child.

- On the other hand, of the 17 respondents who perceive their educational prospects to be negative, 10 indicated that they are not interested in furthering their studies either because they feel that they do not need to or because they feel that they do not have enough time to juggle between their parenting duties and studying.
- 19 of the 33 respondents, who are or were still studying when they became pregnant, indicated that their school did not try to accommodate and encourage them to continue studying. Of the same 33 respondents, 28 respondents claimed that the school did not try to direct them to any service or another form of education.
- 42% of the respondents pointed out that they perceive their job prospects to be positive/ very positive, 29% perceive them to be neither positive nor negative and 26% perceive them to be negative/ very negative.
- The teenage parents' views on job prospects for teenage parents, both in Malta and in Gozo were generally negative. These respondents argued that it is difficult for teenage mothers to balance time between taking care of the child and going to work. Furthermore, these parents argued that if teenage parents do not have accessibility to childcare, employers would not employ them and few are those employers who offer reduced hours and flexi time to employees.
- During the first interview, almost 75% of teenage parents pointed out that their salary package/ social welfare financial support does not allow them and their child to live a life, which they personally believe is a life of acceptable comfort.
- 40% indicated that they have attended a job interview at any point after they became parents. Of these, 21 respondents were asked about their family status by their prospective employer during a job interview. Nevertheless, 29 respondents do not believe that the fact that they are teenage parents has had an effect on whether employers employ them or not. 21 of the respondents stated that they are finding job opportunities.

Policy Considerations

- Although not all teenage parents had aspired to continue studying even before they became parents, one of the main regrets is the difficulty of continuing their education. This points to the importance of investment in support structures which would enable more teenage mothers to continue studying such as the availability of childcare facilities in post-secondary educational institutions. While affordable and easily accessible childcare services may encourage young parents to continue studying, it may also be beneficial to the lecturing and administrative staff of these institutions as well, thus making it also more economically viable.
- While childcare may not have emerged as very popular with teenage mothers, this is not necessarily because the parents do not want to use the facilities but it could also be because childcare would not be available nearby, or because it is not affordable, or because the hours are not appropriate.
- Work-life balance issues need to be given more serious consideration. Considering that achieving a work-life balance is difficult for all parents (especially mothers) with small children, it is far more difficult for single teenage mothers to do so.
- The opening of a number of Smart Kids childcare centres managed by the Foundation for Educational Services is commendable and the services should be extended further to accommodate more parents especially those with particular needs such as teenage parents.
- While a considerable percentage of young mothers consider their job prospects to be positive, overall, the avenues available to most teenage parents are not very encouraging, also considering their limited educational qualifications, experience and skills. Therefore, one should also consider the types of jobs that such a vulnerable group may have at their disposal due to such limitations.

- It is worrying to note that over half of those who were still studying when they became pregnant were not given any encouragement or support to continue studying. While some of these students may have been attending post-secondary schools, where the situation is different, it is regrettable that those who were attending secondary schools were deprived of such support. Furthermore, while certain students may be directed to Unit Gho a, it is pertinent to note that this unit, which offers a very important service, does not provide academic education to its clients even if they are of school age. Thus such students are being deprived of their basic education, making their future prospects even bleaker (See e.g. Dibben, 2006).

Roles taken up by Teenage Parents

- At the time of the first interview, 32% indicated that they do not even talk to the father/ mother of their child, 31% stated that they are still going out with the father/mother of their child and 25% indicated that they are no longer in a relationship with the partner.
- 89% indicated that they were close/ very close with their child when he/ she was born. This bond between the parent and the child gets stronger with time.
- With regards to the pleasant feelings of becoming teenage parents, numerous respondents simply stated that they feel content that they have a child. Other respondents indicated that the love their child gives them is the most satisfying aspect while some described the moment their child was born as the best feeling they had ever experienced.
- 55% of the teenage parents, mainly fathers, pointed out that the father/ mother of their child is involved/ completely involved in the decisions related to the child. 37% indicated that the partner is not involved/ not at all involved.
- Almost all respondents indicated that it is the mother's role to wash, feed, play with the child, taking the child for walks/ to visit relatives and to wake up at night. As to the fathers' roles, 55% indicated that the father plays with the child, 51.5% stated that the father takes the child for walks/ to visit relatives and 44% stated that the father is responsible for feeding the child.
- 37% of the respondents pointed out that the father does not play any role in the day-to-day caring of the child.

Policy Considerations

- Once again such findings point to the dire need for social policy to give due importance to the equal sharing of responsibilities between parents and to encourage more fathers to undertake caring responsibilities. This needs to be combined with more awareness raising campaigns through various media including educational institutions. Such educational initiatives could be integrated more effectively within the formal curriculum such as within PSD lessons. However, other initiatives could be jointly organised by the Department of Education with the participation of other entities such as Unit Gho a or NCPE. These could be more creative in form and may include plays, film, and other forms of expression, attractive to students.

Effects of Parenthood on Life Prospects of Teenage Parents

- Just over half of the respondents indicated that having a child did have an impact on their educational aspirations. Becoming a parent had the major impact on the educational aspirations of female respondents, with 54% of them stating this, rather than on male respondents, where 75% of them stated that becoming a parent did not have any impact on their aspirations.
- When asked whether becoming a parent had an impact on their job aspirations, 64% replied in the positive. Respondents indicated that after becoming parents they were not able to balance their time between studying and taking care of the child while others stated that having a child meant that they had to find employment immediately to be able to cope financially.
- 91% stated that once they became parents their perspective of life changed. These indicated that they have become more mature, responsible and now that they are parents their priorities have changed. The teenage parents indicated that they have learnt that life is difficult and one has to face circumstances whether one likes it or not.
- Becoming a teenage parent had more impact on the mothers, rather than on the fathers, on the way they feel when they compare themselves to others of their age. In fact, a high 84% of the teenage mothers indicated that they feel different/ very different from other females of their age. This response was given by a lower 67% of the teenage fathers.
- Parenthood had a major impact on the lifestyle of both teenage fathers and mothers. Respondents stated that once they became parents they stopped going out with their friends, they had less time for their hobbies and they stopped grooming themselves due to lack of time, lack of going out and lack of money.
- 60% indicated that once they became parents their hobbies did not change, this being stated primarily by the male respondents. Moreover, teenage mothers find less time than teenage fathers to dedicate to their hobbies.
- The first persons teenage parents usually inform once they know that they are about to become parents are their partner and their mother.
- Shock, surprise and anger were the first reactions of the family members once they got to know that the respondents were about to become parents.
- Before becoming parents, 39% indicated that they enjoyed a close/ very close relationship with their parents, 43% indicated that they were neither close nor not close with their parents and 17.5% communicated that they were not close/ not at all close with their parents. After becoming parents, 68% indicated that their relationship with their parents changed.

Policy Considerations

- While it is to be expected that becoming a parent has an impact on one's lifestyle, attitude towards life, educational and work prospects etc., most teenagers are less prepared than older parents to face these huge challenges. This points to the importance of sex education in our schools and in society in general, not only in terms of contraceptive use and responsible sexual activity but also regarding the possible consequences of unsafe or irresponsible sexual behaviour. Such considerations are clearly reflected in the Sexual Health Policy launched by the Ministry of Health in 2010. Therefore it is important that these considerations are eventually implemented in an effective manner. Such initiatives can take different forms and may use different media, depending on the context and the target audience. A combined and collaborate effort involving different stakeholding agencies may be more effective and holistic. Furthermore, the initiatives taking place within the educational system may be

corroborated by activities such as seminars, talks, interactive activities targeted at adolescent groups at local level such as e.g. youth groups.

- It is equally important to educate the parents of teenagers about the importance of talking to their children about sexual behaviour and the responsibilities that go with it. While the reactions of parents to the pregnancy of their teenage daughter are understandable, they may also point to the assumption that parents believe their children not to be engaging in sexual activity or that they are taking the necessary precautions if they are engaging in sexual intercourse. It is important for parents to recognise the importance of discussing such issues with their teenage children.

Awareness of Support Structures Available

- The 38 respondents who were in gainful employment at the time of the first interview were asked whether there was a convenient and affordable childcare facility close to their place of work. A total of 22 respondents replied in the negative. Of the same 38 teenage parents, 14 stated that they make use of family friendly measures at work, with the vast majority of them availing themselves to flexi hours.
- 65% indicated that when they were about to become parents they did not enquire on any services/ support structures which were on offer for teenage parents by the private and public sector in Malta. The reasons given by these respondents for not enquiring on any services or support structures were mainly not needing any services and not knowing that services existed.
- 77% of the respondents pointed out that they made use of services/ support structures available to teenage parents. Of these, 45 respondents mentioned that they used the services of Unit Għożża, 41 respondents mentioned the parent craft courses and 25 respondents indicated the parent craft professional handouts and booklets.
- 41 respondents indicated that apart from the service/ support structures they availed themselves of, they are aware of other services. 14 respondents indicated that they are aware of the shelters of Appogg, 13 respondents are aware of Unit Għożża, 11 respondents are aware of the parentcraft courses and the services of social workers and 10 respondents are aware of the school counseling services.
- 15 of the 24 respondents who did not make use of any services/ support structures specified that they did not need any services/ support structures and 5 respondents pointed out that they did not know that services/ support structures existed.
- When asked their opinion on the benefits given to teenage parents by the government, most of the respondents complained that the monthly benefit received is not enough to live off when taking into consideration that the cost of living is continuously on the rise. The respondents also complained that it is not fair that once the mother had a full time job, the benefits are cut off and that if the father's name is written on the child's birth certificate the benefits are not given in full.
- 13% of the parents interviewed indicated that they make use of child care services.
- 59 respondents of the 90 respondents who indicated that they do not make use of any childcare centres, pointed out that they would be willing to use a childcare centre while 31 respondents stated that they are not willing to use childcare centres.

Policy Considerations

- Since teenage parents would lose their social benefits once they earn more than the minimum wage, this may act as a disincentive. Perhaps it is worth considering increasing the threshold above which the teenage parent would lose her benefits to encourage more teenage parents to earn more. One should note that the poverty rate among lone parents is significantly high as is welfare dependency. Furthermore, losing social benefits once the father's name is written on the birth certificate of the child is a disincentive for mothers to declare who the father of the child is especially since not all fathers are actually supportive of the mother and child.
- As indicated above, further investment in childcare centres is essential. More parents would use such services if they are affordable, conveniently close to their home, school or place of work and open at least during office hours.
- While for some teenage parents, support services may not be essential as they find the support of their family, especially of their mother, it is evident that more awareness raising is needed regarding the availability of such services. Furthermore, different service providers need to coordinate their support services better, to work hand in hand and to support each other since it is after all the teenage parents and their families who will benefit most from such cooperation and good will.

The Needs of Teenage Parents

- When exploring whether the respondents' parents ever talked to them about relationships and sex before becoming teenage parents, the majority gave a negative response. With regards to contraception, 66% stated that their parents either did not speak to them about such issues.
- 93% pointed out that they received formal sex education at school and when asked whether they are knowledgeable of how one may get pregnant and how contraception works, 67% replied in the affirmative.
- After becoming pregnant, 66% indicated that they started to use measures not to get pregnant. Even though they became parents at a young age, the remaining 34% of the respondents, are still risking getting pregnant again because they stated that they are not using any contraceptive measures.
- 36% of the respondents pointed out that at the time they became parents it was difficult to obtain contraceptives, nevertheless, another 36% indicated that it was easy.
- With regards to health, 41 of the female respondents stated that they had never been to a gynaecologist before getting pregnant but they have been going ever since.
- 32 of the female respondents indicated that they had health problems or complications related to the pregnancy or to giving birth.
- With regards to support structures/ specific services which the government may offer to assist teenage parents, 72% mentioned subsidised childcare centres, 70% mentioned more financial benefits and 50.5% mentioned more assistance/ flexibility from schools.
- Teenage parents believe that the most useful services/ support structures for teenage parents would be: free childcare facilities, the provision of free nappies and/ or milk, more financial benefits from the government and more shelters like Dar Ġużeppa Debono in Gozo.

Policy Considerations

- The data clearly points to the importance of effectively implementing our sexual health policy in order to ensure that there is sufficient awareness among youth about the implications of early sexual activity.

- While most teenage parents claimed to have received formal sex education, one has to evaluate better the level of sex education which is being given in our schools. From the research interviews it is clear that certain teenagers are not sufficiently aware of the efficacy or dangers of certain methods, believing that certain methods are safer than they actually are.
- It is also important to target the educational content to the appropriate age groups and to consider the different development processes of girls and boys. For example, sexual education regarding the use of contraceptives would be much less effective if given to Form I and II boys but perhaps it would prove to be a good basis for Form II girls.
- The fact that certain teenagers claimed to have found it difficult to access contraceptives also points to factors other than actual unavailability especially among the younger parents since in recent years, the availability of contraceptives has increased. Especially with regards to condoms, such claims may suggest shyness, embarrassment or even refusal to sell by pharmacists to younger teenagers.
- Furthermore, it is worrying to note that one third of teenage parents claim that they did not start taking contraceptive measures even after their experience of teenage parenthood. Similarly the relatively low percentage of female respondents who are seeing their gynaecologist after giving birth is a cause for concern. All this points to the need of revisiting our sexual and health education channels, methods, content and timing.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the research objectives of this Project, set out in Section 2.2 above, the research methodology adopted for these Activities comprised the following:

4.1 Literature Review

A thorough review of recent international and local literature and official international and national surveys conducted by recognised statistics bodies on the life prospects of teenage parents.

4.2 Qualitative Phase

A robust qualitative research exercise involving a two-tier research study. The object of this thorough qualitative research phase was to obtain an 'in-depth' understanding of the perceptions and opinions of relevant stakeholders and teenage parents. The qualitative stage also served as a platform which provided the context for the longitudinal study and insights on the salient issues and research areas that needed to be included in the subsequent stage. It is worthy of mention that this qualitative research phase addressed the research objectives of the Project. The two tiers comprised:

- **Tier One:** one-to-one personal interviews with 25 key stakeholders, including counsellors, social workers, health specialists, government officials and various professionals. The different backgrounds and positions of the respondents allowed for a variety of perspectives on the life prospects of teenage parents and enriched the study with a multitude of issues and suggestions.

- **Tier Two:** one-to-one personal interviews with 10 teenage parents. These one-to-one personal interviews were conducted with:
 - 3 Gozitan and 7 Maltese teenage parents.
 - 2 fathers and 8 mothers.

Two further interviews were conducted with the parents of teenage parents.

Great care was taken during these interviews due to the sensitive and intimate nature of some questions and all respondents were reassured of their anonymity. It was made clear to the respondents that they don't need to answer any questions which they consider too private. Nevertheless, all the respondents were very forthcoming and answered all questions.

The perceptions, attitudes and views of interview respondents were examined on the following research areas:

- respondent profile (age, hometown, family background);
- overall feelings and perceptions;
- educational prospects;
- job prospects;
- lifestyle and hobbies/pastimes;
- immediate family's reaction to respondent becoming a teenage parent;
- views and attitudes on sex;
- relationship with other parent;
- respondent's role of parenthood; and
- knowledge and use of services/support structures.

The same questionnaire was used during the interviews with stakeholders and teenage parents, and the questions were adapted, added or removed as relevant to achieve the research objectives.

This qualitative research exercise was designed, coordinated, executed and reported upon by key expert, Marika Fsadni and her market research analyst team. The research instruments for this qualitative phase were produced by the Research Consultant and approved by NCPE, before proceeding with the Longitudinal Study.

4.3 Longitudinal Study

Based on the research findings which emanated from the qualitative phase, a research instrument was designed for the Longitudinal Study which followed.

The sample frame for this phase consisted of at least 100 interviews (103 were conducted in actual fact) with respondents who became parents during their teenage years. Being a longitudinal study, these respondents had to be interviewed four times in order to record any changes in their opinions and their future prospects.

A total of 103 teenage parent respondents were interviewed for the first phase of this longitudinal study. These interviews were conducted between May and September 2011.

The same respondents were then interviewed again for the second wave between October and December 2011. Unfortunately, in the second wave of interviews a total of 7 respondents refused to participate any further in the research, with a total 96 respondents being interviewed.

During the months of February, March and April, the third wave of interviews were carried out. Out of the 96 respondents who had participated in the second wave, three of them refused to contribute further to the project, this meaning that a total of 93 teenage parents were interviewed for a third time.

Finally, between the months of May and July, the teenage parents were interviewed for the fourth and last time. This time round another 3 respondents refused to be interviewed again, with a final total of 90 teenage parents being interviewed four times.

5. A REVIEW OF RECENT LITERATURE

Introduction: Setting the Scene

Social research suggests that teenage parenthood often presents a number of social barriers both to the parents and their children which make it difficult for them to fulfill their life expectations. Although research has tended to focus more on teenage motherhood rather than on fatherhood or parenthood in general, overall the evidence tends to point to a number of negative outcomes associated with early childbearing. Thus teenage parenthood has been linked to factors such as lower educational prospects and poorer educational levels, increased likelihood of welfare dependency, poor work prospects, unemployment or lower earnings, poverty, poorer health, lone parenthood and partnership dissolution (Otterblad Olausson et al, 2001; UNICEF, 2001a; Berrington et al 2005, The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2009). Certain studies such as those of Berrington et al (2005) have also pointed to a number of disadvantages which the children of teenage parents may experience. Although a major consequence of teenage parenthood appears to be a negative impact on the socioeconomic situation of young parents, it has also been suggested that the socio-economic deficit encountered by teenage parents may be both a cause as well as a consequence of their predicament, and assumptions of a direct outcome have been questioned (Otterblad Olausson et al, 2001, Arai, 2009). In other words, socio-economic disadvantage may not necessarily stem from the fact that a teenager becomes a parent. Teenage parenthood very often further exacerbates the disadvantage but the socio-economic disadvantage may exist even if the teenager does not get pregnant and may even lead to teen pregnancy. However, the disadvantage will not go away just because a teenager does not become a parent. Therefore that economic disadvantage is a direct outcome of teen parenthood has been questioned by some commentators.

The aims of this study are manifold as it seeks to explore issues such as the challenges faced by teenage parents within the local context: their educational and occupational prospects, their dreams and aspirations; whether teenage parenthood left an impact on these aspirations and whether this impact was different on men and women. The study also aims to discover whether teenage parents make use of any support services and whether such services can be improved to better meet their needs. The study seeks to build a profile of teenage parents with particular emphasis on their socioeconomic situation prior to and following the advent of teenage parenthood. The roles taken by each of the parents, their perception of this role and the relationship between them and with the child/ren will also be explored.

Defining Teenage Parenthood

There does not seem to be a standard definition of what comprises teenage parenthood. In the literature concerning parenthood at a relatively young age, one finds research on “young”, “teenage”, “adolescent” or “early” parenthood pertaining to different age cohorts. Despite the generally held understanding that the “teen” ages refer to the ages between thirteen and nineteen, when it comes to definitions of teen parenthood, the boundary lines are not necessarily cut along these age parameters. The Reprostat 2 Report which reviews factors linked with teenage pregnancy in the European Union (Imamura et al, 2007) defines “teenage” as between 13 and 19 but notes that among the many studies reviewed for their project there was a wide variety of definitions used, making comparisons difficult. The much quoted UNICEF (2001a) report on teenage births in rich nations takes the teenage birth rate as the number of births per 1000, 15 to 19 year-olds. Similarly, the Guttmacher Institute (2010) calculates the teenage birth rate in relation to those aged 15 to 19. This is probably because births among very young teenagers (13-15) are relatively few. It is older teenagers (17-19) who experience the majority of teenage births while births to those aged 15-17 represent quite a small proportion of all teenage births (Daguerre and Nativel, 2006). Data from Malta (Department of Health Information and Research (DHIR, 2011), confirms this trend as births to mothers younger than 15 make up less than 1% of all deliveries. In light of the above, this study considers teenage parenthood to refer to mothers and fathers who became parents between the ages of 13 and 19.

Much of the literature on teenage pregnancy and parenthood tends to focus on teenage mothers while fathers were relegated to the background and, until recently, did not take a central role in academic research. There also appears to be disagreement as to what constitutes a teen father. Is a teen father a person who fathers a child when he is a teenager or a person who has a child with a teenage mother? (Shields and Pierce, 2006). Although research is not consistent regarding the age difference, young fathers generally tend to be older than young mothers (Tyrer; Chase, Warwick and Aggleton, 2005; Speak, 2006; Arai, 2009). In Malta there is a significant discrepancy in the number of teenage mothers when compared to the number of teenage fathers (≥ 19). Figures for five-year intervals from 1960 to 2008 reveal that while the number of teenage mothers ranged from 164 to 330, the number of teenage fathers ranged from 25 to 54 with the figure in most years being close to 30 (NSO, 2010)

Social Changes

Over the past few decades developed countries in particular have witnessed various social and economic transformations in relation to teenage or early pregnancy/parenthood and how these are portrayed and addressed by policy makers, academics and the media as well as how they are perceived and experienced by the young parents and their families. Since the middle of the 20th century many countries in the West have experienced significant changes in family patterns, demographic trends, health education and services, cultural norms and expectations, moral values and sexual behaviour. The greater participation in post-compulsory education and the rising costs of setting up one’s home led to a longer transitional period into adulthood and a longer period of dependence on parents, making teenage pregnancy less desirable (Arai, 2009). These transformations were accompanied by a psychosexual revolution which discarded old sex taboos, liberated sexual behaviour, encouraged contraception, liberalised abortion law, saw an increase in cohabitation and births outside marriage and sexual imagery and messages permeated youth culture (UNICEF, 2001a). These shifts have led to, among other things, a higher age at first birth, longer periods of contraceptive use, the dissociation of sex and marriage and a decline in fertility rates (including those among teenagers) (Daguerre and Nativel, 2006).

Statistical Trends

In most developed countries, teenage births overall appear to have taken a downward trend especially since the 1970s (Daguerre and Nativel, 2006; Arai, 2009) while the average age at first birth has taken an upward trend in all Member States of the European Union (EU) (Euro-Peristat, 2008; European Communities, 2009). The Perinatal Health Report (Euro-Peristat, 2008) suggests low rates of teenage births across Europe claiming that in most countries they account for less than 3% of all deliveries although the percentage of teenage mothers (younger than 20) varied from 1.3 in Denmark to 9.3 in Latvia. A more recent Eurostat report (European Union, 2010) claims that within the EU the highest proportion of births to mothers aged up to 17 years were registered in Bulgaria and Romania although there was a decline in underage pregnancies in both countries between 2002 and 2007. According to the same Eurostat report, while most Member States registered a decline in teenage births, in a few countries including Finland, Italy, Luxembourg and Malta, small increases were noted. The Perinatal Health Report puts teenage birth rates in Malta at the higher end of the spectrum at 5.8% (DHIR, 2008). This may also be reflected in the increasing number of teenage mothers attending Unit Għozza, a support service which offers an educational programme to young unmarried pregnant women (Vella, 2008).

Between 1995 and 2005, European women on average had their first child between the ages of 25 and 30. In most countries more than one half of first births occurred to women over 25 years old while in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom, mothers who had their first born over age 30, outnumbered their younger counterparts. (European Communities, 2009). However in Bulgaria and Romania mothers aged 15-19 accounted for 22% and 24% respectively of those who became mothers for the first time before they were 30. Malta also appears to be following the trend to postpone the birth of the first child to the late twenties. The National Obstetric Information System (NOIS) Annual Report for 2010 states that the highest percentage of deliveries continues to occur within the 25-29 age cohort (DHIR, 2011). The NOIS report for 2008 notes a steady increase in the delivery rate of those aged 30-34 years which increased from 23% in 1999 to 31% in 2008. At the same time the delivery rate of those aged 20-24 years declined from 21% in 1999 to 15% in 2008 (DHIR, 2009). However since 2003, the same report documents a steady rise in the rate and number of teenage births (less than 20 years old). As shown in the table below, the majority of teenage births in 2008 and 2009 occurred to mothers aged 15-19 while births to very young teenage mothers make up less than 1% of deliveries. It is interesting to note that for 25 of the 276 mothers aged under 20, this was their second delivery while 2 other teenage mothers delivered their third child in 2008 (DHIR, 2009). The 2010 NOIS Report (DHIR, 2011) confirms the previous trends although there was a decrease in the overall number of births from 4180 in 2009 to 4036 in 2010. The number of births to those aged 15-19 also decreased from 271 in 2009 to 249 in 2010 while the number of births to those aged less than 15 remained the same.

Table 5.1: Frequency & Percentage of Deliveries* According to Maternal Age for 2008 and 2009

Age Group	2008		2009	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
< 15	9	<1	6	<1
15 – 19	267	6	271	7
20 – 24	615	15	603	15
25 – 29	1430	34	1366	33
30 – 34	1294	31	1312	32
35 – 39	442	11	474	12
40 – 44	87	2	75	2
45+	6	<1	5	<1
Unspecified	4	<1	0	0

Adapted from NOIS Annual Report for 2008 (DHIR, 2009), pg. 15 and NOIS Annual Report for 2009, (DHIR, 2010), pg. 10
 * Deliveries may involve singleton as well as multiple births.

The under 20 fertility rate remained more or less constant since 2000, similar to that noted in 1975 although there is a noted rise from 1995. The teen fertility rate was higher in 1960 when the total fertility rate was higher than it is today. The following table gives an indication of teen live births and teen fertility rates between 1960 and 2008 compared to total live births and fertility rates.

Table 5.2: Teen live Births & Teen Fertility Rates between 1960-2008 vs. Total Live Births & Fertility Rates

Year	UNDER 20		TOTAL	
	Live Births	Fertility Rates	Live Births	Fertility Rates
1960	330	2.2	8565	3.6
1965	246	1.3	5628	2.5
1970	227	1.3	5314	2.0
1975	265	1.7	5724	2.2
1980	155	1.2	5602	2.0
1985	160	1.4	5430	2.0
1990	144	1.1	5368	2.1
1995	142	1.0	4613	1.8
2000	239	1.7	4255	1.7
2005	222	1.6	3598	1.3
2008	248	1.8	3721	1.4

Adapted from Children 2010 report (NSO, 2010) Pgs 20 and 21

Note 1: Up to 1972 live births include the children of British servicemen based in Malta. From 1973 onwards live births refer to persons of Maltese nationality only.

Note 2: If one looks at the total under 20 live births (not only Maltese) in the same report, the figures for 2000, 2005 and 2008 would read 246, 230 and 269 respectively.

Note 3: The discrepancy between the numbers captured by NSO and by DHIR quoted earlier is due to the fact that NSO figures are based on Public Registry figures while the DHIR figures are captured directly from the hospitals. Therefore any apparent excess in the number of births recorded at DHIR may be due to births to foreigners who then opt to register the babies abroad and these would therefore not feature in the Maltese Public Registry.

One major shift which occurred over the past decades was the relationship between teenage parenthood and marriage. According to Arai (2009), in the UK three quarters of teenage births occurred within marriage in 1971 (although conception generally took place outside it). By 2004 this figure had gone down to 10% since teenage mothers are more likely to remain single or cohabit than to get married. They may also opt for abortion. While in Malta, abortion is illegal, this does not hinder some prospective mothers from seeking abortion outside Malta. In 2009, there were 78 legal abortions carried out in the UK by Maltese residents, more than double the 38 abortions registered in 2008,(NSO, 2011a), although we do not know the ages of these women. The Demographic Review for 2010 (NSO, 2011b) suggests that Malta may be following a similar pattern with most teenage births taking place outside marriage. In 2010 out of a total of 255 births to mothers under 20 years of age, 212 were outside marriage. Furthermore, in Malta cohabitation does not appear to be the norm among teenagers. According to the 2005 Census of Population and Housing (NSO, 2007) there were 29 persons aged 10-19¹ living with an unmarried partner.

¹ Age categories are divided into 10-year cohorts from 0-9 to 90+ in terms of relationship to reference persons in private

The Perception of Teenage Parenthood as a Social Problem

In the decades following the middle of the 20th century teenage pregnancy and parenthood came to be construed as a problem although concern and anxiety about the issue did not gain ground at the same time in different countries (Daguerre and Nativel, 2006; Arai, 2009; Duncan, Edwards and Alexander, 2010). This suggests that the problematisation of teenage parenthood is both culturally and historically embedded and is closely linked to the reigning cultural morality and normative order of different societies. Thus teenage pregnancy and parenthood have come to be associated with social disadvantage, negative experiences, single parenthood and welfare dependency, moral and cultural decay, crime and drug use. They are often seen as aspects of adolescence which are better prevented “since they constitute a threat to the very fabric of society if allowed to flourish unchecked” (Holgate and Evans, 2006, p. 7) apart from the setbacks to the teenagers themselves. Teenage parenthood tends to defy the normative view of young people’s gradual progression into adulthood. It tends to shatter the view of teenagers as studying, having fun and being sexually inactive until they become adults. Lesko, 2001).

Teenage mothers and fathers are thus relegated to “underclass” status (Duncan et al, 2010) and seen as irresponsible, immature, promiscuous (especially in the case of mothers) and feckless and uncommitted (especially in the case of fathers) (Arai, 2009; Duncan et al, 2010). Then there is concern about the economic burden entrusted on the state and society by teenage mothers who are even deemed to be enticed into having children by the social benefits derived from single parenthood (Duncan et al, 2010) eventually registering the father as “unknown” (Shields and Pierce, 2006; Galea, 2009). However, citing the Millenium Cohort Study, Bradshaw (2006) claims that only 15 per cent of teenage mothers planned their pregnancy and 28 per cent of the teenage mothers were unhappy or very unhappy about the pregnancy nine months after the birth of their child. Yet, as the UNICEF report (UNICEF, 2001a, p. 3) neatly puts it, teenage birth rates “are seen as a problem because they are strongly associated with a range of disadvantages for the mother, for her child, for society in general, and for taxpayers in particular”. They are a cost to society and this often leads to a demonisation of all young mothers (Holgate and Evans, 2006). Consequently, this may lead social structures such as families, educational systems and welfare agencies to deal inadequately with the issue and to continue relegating teenage parents to the margins of society (Lesko, 2001), thus depriving them of opportunities which may make it easier for them to fulfill their personal and social aspirations.

These concerns are reflected in the terminology used by policy makers, journalists, academics and other stakeholders when referring to teenage parents. According to Daguerre and Nativel (2006) young parents have been referred to as “children having children” and young parenthood as “early parenthood”, phrases which reflect society’s moral judgements as to what constitutes the ‘right’ age and circumstances for becoming a parent. Different terms used to refer to young parents (especially mothers) not only reflect social processes and structures which label teenage behaviour but also point to the lack of clarity surrounding the issue (Holgate and Evans, 2006) as different commentators cited by the authors have used terms such as “adolescent mother”, “schoolgirl mother”, “teenage mother” and “child mother” which are more age- and development specific as well as “young mother” which is more open to interpretation.

Factors Which Increase the Likelihood of Teenage Parenthood

Certain studies on teenage parenthood have focused on the factors which may influence the likelihood of teenagers becoming parents. While certain studies have taken into consideration

households. See Table 33 p. 155.

the possible effects of such factors on both mothers and fathers, other studies tended to focus on either teenage mothers or fathers, and more particularly, mothers. Therefore the discussion may at times reflect this trend. However, the research seems to suggest that there are certain factors which may be influential in the case of both teenage boys and girls and their likelihood of becoming young parents.

A number of studies have indicated that certain life situations, experiences or circumstances are predictors of early parenthood. Reviewing twenty studies from the UK, the Nordic countries and Hungary, Imamura et al (2007) report that low socio-economic background, disrupted family structure and limited education appear to be closely linked with early pregnancy. They also found a less strong association between certain unhealthy lifestyle factors such as risky sexual behaviour, smoking, drug and alcohol use. Social deprivation has also been associated with an increased risk of early parenthood by Bradshaw (2006). From an interview study based in Estonia, Haldre et al (2009) claim that early sexual intercourse, little knowledge of sexual reproductive system and contraceptives, alcohol abuse, physical punishments by family members and dislike of school have also been related to early unwanted pregnancies. In a comparative study analysing the relationship between socioeconomic disadvantage and adolescent women's sexual and reproductive behaviour, Singh, Darroch and Frost (2001) examined data from Canada, France, Great Britain, Sweden and the United States. The study found that adolescent childbearing is higher among women with low levels of income and education. Teen motherhood was also found to be strongly related to race, ethnicity and immigrant status although these differences varied across countries. Although early sexual activity was found to have little association with income, young women with low levels of education were more likely to start having sexual intercourse during adolescence than those who were better educated.

A set of predictors was also identified by Berrington et al (2005) at the University of Southampton who analysed a range of British statistical data sources. Among the life course antecedents of teenage motherhood, they identified having a conduct disorder, poor reading ability, receipt of means-tested benefits and living in social housing at the age of 10. Having no father figure at birth and having parents who left school at 16 and mother's aspirations were also found to relate positively to early motherhood as did the father's low socio-economic position. Having a mother who had given birth herself as a teenager was found to have a significant impact on the likelihood of becoming a teenage mother. Berrington et al's research revealed that the life course antecedents of early parenthood among young fathers (under 23) were quite similar to those of young mothers (under 19) although the same factors had less impact on the risk of early fatherhood. Among the features which suggested a positive relationship with becoming a young father, the authors identified poor reading ability and living in social housing at age 10; having been in care before the age of 17 as well as having parents who had left school when they were 16. Having a father from a lower socio-economic background and having a mother who had been a teenage mother herself were found to have a more significant impact as predisposing factors of early fatherhood. Being in care was also identified as a strong predictor of early fatherhood by Tyrer et al (2005) and Arai (2009).

Research cited by both Arai (2009) and Speak (2006) shows that young fathers tend to hail from a low socio-economic background, have low educational qualifications and poor employment prospects both when they become fathers as well as later on in life compared to men who become fathers at a later stage. They are more likely to have had negative early familial experiences such as domestic violence or parents' separation or divorce. Teen fathers also tend to have engaged in truancy and to be early school leavers compared to men who do not become fathers at such a young age (Tyrer et al, 2005) although there is not enough evidence which indicates that there is a direct causal effect between early school leaving and early fatherhood.

Shields and Pierce (2006) cite earlier research in the US which identified similar factors associated with risks of teen fatherhood such as race, hailing from large, financially unstable families, having sexual intercourse before the age of 16, drug use, low reading scores, parents' expectations for their son's future, having been involved in delinquent behaviour or being a gang member. Teens' parents' low educational levels and early first births were found to be strong predictors of early fatherhood.

The Impact of Parenthood on the Life Prospects of Teenage Parents

The outcomes of teenage parenthood are well documented although the outcomes of teenage motherhood have been given more attention than those of teenage fatherhood. The word "outcome" is used on purpose to differentiate from "consequences" in the sense that the experiences of teenage parenthood are not necessarily the direct consequence of parenthood itself but may partially be the result of factors preceding the pregnancy and birth of the child to the teenage parents. To take socio-economic circumstances as an example, when one considers the risks leading to teenage parenthood, one cannot assume that the socio-economic disadvantage of many teenage parents is directly due to the fact that they became parents when they were teenagers since it could just as well be the result of their poor socio-economic childhood background (Otterblad Olausson et al, 2001; Unicef, 2001b), although parenthood may further increase their disadvantage.

A Eurostat report on poverty and social exclusion (European Union, 2010), claims that teenage pregnancy often leads to the disruption of the mother's education and may reduce her access to the workforce. It may also limit her future social interaction or participation. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (2009) outlines the impact of adolescent parenthood on mothers, fathers, children as well as on the state. The report claims that adolescent mothers are significantly less likely to graduate from high-school than those who become mothers at a later stage. They are also more likely to end up living in poverty, to be welfare recipients and to experience long periods of welfare dependence. With regards to young fathers, the same report states that adolescent fathers tend to finish fewer years of schooling, to have a lower annual income by age 27 and to participate less in the workforce compared to men who postpone fatherhood to adulthood. The report also outlines the disadvantages which the children of adolescents are likely to encounter. It is claimed that the daughters of adolescent mothers are more likely to become adolescent mothers themselves while the sons of adolescent mothers have a greater risk of ending up in prison. The report also refers to the economic impact of teenage parenthood on the state claiming that in 2004, public funding in the US amounted to \$9.1 billion.

A number of negative outcomes were also reported by Otterblad Olausson et al (2001) who analysed national data on Swedish women born between 1941 and 1970 to evaluate the long-term socioeconomic consequences of teenage parenthood. Their analysis revealed that among those who became mothers as teenagers there was a higher risk of being in unskilled blue-collar work, to be unemployed and to have a low level of education. They also had higher risks of not living with a partner and of high parity (four or more children). Having to support larger families as lone parents continues to dampen their socioeconomic circumstances. Teenage parents were also more likely to be receiving a disability pension or other welfare benefits. These risks were even higher for younger teenagers (11-15 years). These had the highest risks of unfavourable outcomes in direct contrast to those who became mothers between the ages of 25 and 29 who had the lowest odds. The risks were higher for teenage mothers regardless of their family's socioeconomic background and of their own level of education. However the authors also point out that it is important to distinguish between correlation and causation since the socioeconomic problems

encountered by teenage parents during adulthood might reflect circumstances which were already present before the advent of parenthood.

A study by Berrington et al (2005) at the University of Southampton using data from two large longitudinal cohort surveys to explore aspects of teenage parenthood and its impact, reported that those who had become mothers before reaching 20 compared to those who became mothers at a later stage (over 24) experienced a number of disadvantages later on in life. At age 30, teenage mothers were nearly six times more likely to live in social housing, four times more likely to live in a jobless household, more than three times as likely to be welfare recipients, twice as likely to be unsatisfied with their neighbourhood, twice as likely to experience partnership dissolution and four times more likely to be in a family where neither themselves nor any partner were in paid employment.

The study also found that teenage mothers were more than twice as likely to be in poor physical and psychological health in adulthood and that teenage mothers were more likely to describe their health as “fair” or “poor” rather than “excellent” or “good”. The study found that teenage mothers were more than twice as likely, compared to their older counterparts, to register a high malaise score. However this association was not found to be a simple direct effect of teenage parenthood but partly emerged from complex factors related to childhood antecedents such as poor material circumstances, conduct disorder, poor educational ability, experience of institutional care and low parental aspirations for their education. With regards to self-reported overall health, Berrington et al (2005) claim that at age 30, teenage mothers reported generally lower levels of health than non-teenage mothers. Although this too was partly due to common childhood antecedent factors, when these were controlled, young motherhood still remained strongly associated with overall inferior health. This association also remained when other factors such as socio-economic factors in adulthood and the greater risk of teenage mothers being emotionally distant from their own mother were taken into consideration. Therefore overall it appears that the generally poorer health of teenage mothers is linked to both adult and childhood disadvantage.

Berrington et al’s (2005) research also shows that men who become fathers when they are still teenagers or in their early twenties have a stronger predisposition to end up living in social housing, to be unemployed, to be recipients of means-tested benefits, to have a lower level of education and to have a lower income at age 30 when compared to those who became fathers when they were older. Although some of these factors may be the result of factors which may have led to early fatherhood such as poverty, low educational ability and low aspirations of parents, when these were controlled, teen fathers were still twice as likely to be unemployed in adulthood.

The study by Berrington et al (2005) also discusses the impact of teenage parenthood on the children. Overall, there are more behavioural problems in children born to teenage mothers than among those born to older mothers. However the study found that the adverse outcomes in children are highly dependent on the mother’s mental state which is in turn related to teenage motherhood. The authors argue that the poorer levels of mental health among teenage mothers may be explained by their likelihood of not having a co-residential partner and of living in poor housing. These in turn are affected by the social disadvantages which emerge from the mother’s original family background.

According to Bradshaw (2006) there is ample evidence which points to the poor outcomes of teenage mothers and their children both in the short and long term. Teenage pregnancies have a higher risk of resulting in low birth weight babies, infant and child mortality, hospital admissions of children, postnatal depression and low rates of breastfeeding. Teenage mothers are also three

times more likely to be poor than mothers in their 30s. Teenage mothers are also more likely to discontinue their education and to be out of work. Bradshaw also claims that the children of teenage mothers are more likely to experience these disadvantages and twice as likely to become teenage parents themselves. According to Daguerre (2006) certain health problems are directly linked to teen mothers and their children. For example the children of young mothers are more likely to be born prematurely, to have low birth weights, to experience cot deaths and to have domestic accidents.

Writing about the situation in Malta, Savona-Ventura (2009) points to a number of medico-social problems which affect both the mothers and their children especially in the case of out-of-wedlock pregnancies. He claims that overall these maternities tend to have poor antenatal care with about one-tenth of women seeking formal antenatal care only in the third trimester of pregnancy, often predisposing them towards premature deliveries. These problems are often exacerbated by heroin use which is increasing among younger women. Although Savona-Ventura does not refer specifically to teenage mothers, it is still pertinent to them considering that around half of them are single mothers and also because in the first months of their pregnancy, they may try to hide their predicament to the detriment of antenatal care.

In Malta, teenage parents appear to encounter similar problems although recently the stigma attached to teenage parenthood is not as strong as it was in the past and teenage parents tend to find the support of their family (Cutajar, 2006). Savona-Ventura (2009) also claims that although out-of-wedlock teenage parenthood brings about a major change in the life of the mother and her family, many teenage mothers find the necessary support.

Cutajar's (2006) research indicates a number of disadvantages that single mothers tend to encounter, even more than single fathers. Overall lone parents tend to have lower educational qualifications compared to other women and teenage mothers are no exception. This is likely to have a multiplier effect on other members of the family who also risk having a low educational achievement. Cutajar cites earlier research which indicates that many single mothers, especially teenage mothers, tend to interrupt their education, especially if they attend area secondary schools and consequently end up with little or no qualifications. However, citing Bezzina and Dibben (2002), Cutajar claims that not all teenage girls aspired or ever aspired to continue with their studies. Some considered parenthood as a transition to womanhood although this does not suggest that all teenagers plan on getting pregnant. There are those who would have preferred to continue studying but have to give up their plans unless they find the necessary services and support.

However as the studies quoted by Cutajar (2006) show, whether teenage mothers continue their studies also depends on the mothers' inclination towards education and on the obstacles they are likely to encounter. The research she quotes suggests that in Malta it is not mandatory for pregnant girls to continue attending mainstream schools as long as they start attending Gho a, a unit providing educational programmes and support services to school-aged mothers. Bezzina and Dibben (2002 in Cutajar, 2006) claim that certain heads of secondary schools tend to be reluctant to let pregnant girls continue attending their school, fearing that they might set a bad example to their school mates although this seems to be less the case with post-secondary education establishments. Some heads of secondary schools do not even inform the teenage mother of the option to continue attending the same school.

In her small-scale study on school girl mothers, Dibben (2006) considers the attitudes of heads of school, guidance teachers and coordinators and how these affect the decisions that pregnant students take regarding their education. She claims that certain practices tend to lead to the segregation of these students from mainstream education. She argues that this segregation may

lead to an undermining of the education potential of these pregnant schoolgirls. As teenage mothers tend to have less opportunity for adequate education and training, their economic prospects and those of their family will be negatively affected. Among the obstacles cited by Dibben for pregnant girls to leave mainstream schooling were that heads do not like the idea of visibly pregnant students; encouragement by guidance teachers, shame, bullying, complaints from other parents, excuses to stay home and not being informed about the option of remaining within the mainstream. Dibben (2006) claims that those who continue within the mainstream tend to have the support of their family.

Whether teenage mothers will return to school after the birth of their child depends on the orientation of the mother to school and on their parents' support. For example, if their parents both work, it would be more difficult for the young mother to continue her studies. Indeed childcare is one of the key obstacles to educational achievement according to Dibben (2006). Bezzina and Dibben (2002 in Cutajar, 2006) also point to the financial difficulty of mothers who may feel constrained to leave school and start working instead of returning to school. Others may find it difficult to leave their child behind especially if they are made to feel guilty by others who may accuse them of neglecting their maternal responsibilities. For Gozitans, leaving the child behind to study or work in Malta may be even more difficult (Cutajar, 2006).

Cutajar (2006) also claims that since many teenage mothers do not have a husband to support them, they may be pushed to the labour market in order to maintain their children. In certain cases, the birth of a child led the mother of the teenager or the teenager's boyfriend to seek employment. Citing the studies of Bezzina and Dibben (2002) and Castillo (2000) Cutajar argues that young mothers tend to seek employment since the welfare benefits they receive are not enough. Thus, teenage parents resort to part-time employment in order to better balance their home and work demands. However, although this affords greater flexibility, it does not provide adequate income as it is often not well paid. Furthermore, due to their poor educational background, teenage mothers are more likely to be employed in insecure jobs under inferior working conditions, making economic independence more difficult. Yet not all teenage mothers aspire to find employment. Some prefer to get married instead. Cutajar (2006) also points to the greater disadvantage of Gozitans who have even less work opportunities than their Maltese counterparts.

Most of these earlier findings were confirmed in a more recent small-scale study (Aquilina, 2012) carried out with eight teenage Maltese and Gozitan mothers. The study sought to study the outcome of teenage parenthood after a number of years, when the child was between 5 and 10 years of age. Regarding educational outcomes, the study reported that while those who had planned to continue their studies managed if they had the necessary support, it was very stressful trying to combine school, studying and motherhood. Those who did not continue studying attributed their decision either to the fact that they had never planned to further their education or else because they did not find the necessary support from their family or from the educational institution. Especially at secondary level, fear of "contamination" tends to contribute to the young mother's termination of studies although even university faculties were cited as not being equally supportive. For Gozitans, the problems were even worse. Aquilina reports that employment was the toughest obstacle for these young mothers. All the participants in the study lived for a time or were still living with their family after they became parents and all gave great importance to the support they found from their family in terms of financial help as well as for the purpose of studying or working.

Although early motherhood appears to be determined by social and material disadvantage, it is also clear that teenage motherhood further reinforces such disadvantage (Daguerre and Nativel, 2006). Furthermore, as noted by UNICEF (2001a) while those who come from a disadvantaged background will make their situation worse by becoming pregnant at a young age, their problems

will probably still not go away if they do not get pregnant. In fact there are those who believe that the negative outcomes of teenage parenthood have been exaggerated (see for example Arai, 2009; Duncan et al, 2010). According to Arai (2009) although research tends to link negative outcomes with teenage parenthood, Arai (2009) claims that there is no consensus as to whether childbearing in the teenage years actually causes poor outcomes or not. Reviewing a number of studies from different countries, Arai points to the diversity in findings and notes that the outcomes of early parenthood may differ in extent across different countries. Singh, Darroch and Frost (2001) believe that cross country differences may be attributed to differences in public perception about costs of childbearing, societal attitudes and openness about sexuality as well as access to information and services.

The Father's Involvement

Of all the births outside wedlock in 2008 (1048), 352 were registered with unknown paternity (NSO, 2010). This amounts to 33.6% of births outside marriage. However one notes that the percentage of undeclared fathers has generally been on the decline since 1996 where 60% of births outside marriage were registered with unknown paternity. Galea (2009) reports significantly high percentages of baptisms in different parishes in Malta which are registered as "father unknown" even though he claims that it is not uncommon for these supposedly unknown fathers to be present at the baptism. According to Galea, very often the name of the father is not provided not because it is not known who the father is but because the mother would want to have sole custody of the child especially if the couple never intended to have long-term commitment or to get married. Mothers may also claim not to know who the father is so that they would be able to claim social assistance according to Galea (2009). However one should also keep in mind that in certain cases, the mother may want to protect herself or her child from the father for a number of reasons such as fear of abuse or domination. There are also cases where the father would, for example, be married and would not want his name to appear on the birth certificate. Furthermore, although unknown paternity may nowadays be solved through DNA testing, in cases of promiscuity, this is not always feasible.

Regardless of whether the father is formally registered as unknown or whether he has a name, the role taken by the young father in the upbringing of his child/ren may take various forms and depends both on the relationship the father has with the mother of his child/ren as well as with the age at which he became a father although the couples' relationship appears to be a stronger factor (Arai, 2009; Speak, 2006). Although, young unmarried fathers are commonly perceived as being absent or uncaring fathers, research reviewed by Speak (2006) shows that this is not necessarily a realistic assumption. There are fathers who take an active role in bringing up their children and contributing financially; others see their children regularly depending on court agreements or the decisions of the mother; others only see their children occasionally or very rarely, eventually becoming estranged from their children altogether (Speak, 2006). Research conducted by Berrington et al (2005) indicates that 50% of those who had become fathers in their teens, 40% who had become fathers in their early twenties compared to only 15% of older fathers did not live with their first child when they were 30. While only 6% of older fathers reported not to have ever lived with their first child, the figures were more than 20% for those who had become fathers as teenagers and 15% of those whose child was born when they were in their early 20s.

Among those who lived with their children when they were still in their teens or early twenties, one in seven separated from the children within five years compared to one in every ten older fathers (what age). Berrington et al's study also suggested that behavioural and psychological factors have a strong impact on whether fathers co-reside with their children. The authors (who)

also claim that while teen fathers tend to be either in a casual or in a steady relationship when they become parents, older fathers are more likely to become parents while they are in a co-residential union. Furthermore it was concluded that teenage fathers are more likely not to live with their offspring from birth rather than to separate from them later (Berrington et al (2005)).

There are a number of issues which influence the degree and type, if any, of involvement of the father in the life of his child/ren. As might be expected, non-residential fathers, especially those who do not maintain any relationship with the mother are more likely to be absent than married or cohabiting young fathers, although it does not mean that the former never take an active role in the upbringing of their child/ren. This was also confirmed by a study carried out in Malta (Aquilina, 2012) which found that in most cases where the relationship between the mother and father was discontinued, the father did not contribute financially or otherwise to the upbringing of the child and hardly maintained any contact with both mother and child. On the contrary, Speak (2006) cites earlier research which suggests that young parents often tend to continue their relationship even if they do not marry or live together and that many non-residential fathers maintain regular contact with their children and their mother. In a US study of 109 young fathers coming from a poor background (Gavin et al, 2002 in Arai, 2009) it was found that the involvement of the father was most strongly linked to the type of romantic relationship between the parents although other factors such as the father's employment status, the educational level of the maternal grandmother and her relationship with the father of the child were also significant. Social support especially from the teen's mother was also found to have a positive impact on the father's involvement by Wheat (2003 in Shields and Pierce, 2006).

Shields and Pierce (2006) cite earlier research which found that it is self-image and ideas about role expectations which had most impact on paternal involvement. A similar point was made by Nylund (2006) who claims that while a number of studies indicate significant paternal involvement, he subscribes to Paschal's (2004 in Nylund, 2006) argument that conventional views about masculinity may lead to paternal under involvement. From his clinical experience, Nylund notes that many teen fathers held traditional hegemonic ideas of masculinity and parental roles where mothers assumed primary responsibility for childcare. Such views were internalised through their life experiences, traditional male role models and media influence.

There are other factors which may make paternal involvement more problematic even if the intention of the father is to take an active role in the life of his child/ren. Most of the young men who took part in Tyrer et al's (2005) small-scale research had felt left out from pertinent decisions from the onset of pregnancy. For example they felt excluded from decisions regarding whether the mother will keep the baby or whether to abort, to give the child for adoption or else they shared her views. Most of the participants had made some effort to assume their fatherhood responsibility. However it was not always easy to maintain their paternal role due to factors which were at time beyond their control. If the mother had a new boyfriend or if she moved far away with the children, if they used drugs or were taken into custody, this complicated matters further. Regardless of whether they live with the mother of their children or not, research cited by the same authors point to a number of other difficulties which teen fathers are likely to face such as poor accommodation, unemployment and dependence on benefits. Young fathers also tend to report little encouragement and support to help them adjust to their father role.

Similar problems were reported by Speak (2006). Certain practical factors such as lack of income or adequate accommodation may limit the contribution which the father can make. Speak also refers to the role of other parties such as the mother of the children, grandmothers, friends of the father as well as social policy issues which may further complicate the situation. For example mothers or grandparents may place barriers or prevent the fathers from seeing their children if, from experience, they consider them as unreliable, uncommitted, irresponsible and are cautious

about letting the father get much involved. Conversely, some mothers are more than willing to let their children spend time with their father, both because this is positive for the child's wellbeing and also because it is the father's duty to share the responsibility.

Berrington et al (2005) claim that regardless of the age when men become fathers, most of those who are not co-resident (about two thirds), see their child at least once every month and a just as many state that they support their child in some way or another. However, the more time passes from when the father lived with the child and his or her mother, both tend to decrease in frequency. Frequency of contact also tends to decrease if the mother is in a new relationship or if the father is in a new relationship and has fathered other children. The study reports that at age 30, the majority of teenage non-residential fathers were living with a new partner. While the majority of young (under 23) fathers were not living with any children at age 30, 18% were living with other biological children. About one fourth of children born to young fathers compared to 11% of children whose father was older were living in reconstituted families. Regardless of father's age, child maintenance is affected by the frequency of contact, whether there are other biological or step children and the level of education of the father. Contrary to frequency of contact with the child, maintenance payments are not affected by the mother's present relationship status.

Despite the apparently bleak outcomes of early fatherhood, it has also been documented (Tyrer et al, 2005; Reeves, 2006, 2007 in Arai, 2009) that for some young men, becoming a father can have a sobering effect, making them come to terms with their responsibilities and changing their ways although the way men come to terms with fatherhood and how they react to it varies. From their qualitative study on young fathers who had grown up in an institution, Tyrer et al (2005) found that most young fathers had made some attempt at taking responsibility as a father; most expressed strong and positive feelings towards their child and their role despite their initial shock at learning of the pregnancy. Others said that fatherhood had a calming effect on them; others felt the need to take action in order to assume their new responsibilities such as moving away from disruptive friends, finding employment or helping with childcare. There were also those who preferred not to have been burdened with the responsibility but were trying to deal with it. Borg Xuereb's study (2006 in Aquilina, 2012) on Maltese teenage fathers reports that all the fathers hailed from a working class background and lived in depressed areas. The fathers in the study appreciated any support they received from family and friends. For them fatherhood largely meant financial responsibilities. They recognised the need to work harder in order to be fathers. Fatherhood also conjured feelings of lost youth since they had to grow up, mature and take on new responsibilities. Many felt trapped when they became fathers.

Welfare Responses to Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood

Regardless of the cultural milieu, the state's political ideology and the type of welfare regime, governments in Western societies have responded in one way or another to teenage parenthood. According to Daguerre and Nativel (2006), four central arguments can be traced in policy discourses to justify state intervention:

1. that teenagers are too young (physically, emotionally and psychologically) to bring up children;
2. that adolescents are not mature enough to make informed choices about their sexuality;
3. that there is a link between early parenthood and social disadvantage later on in life (although it is still unclear whether poverty is the cause or consequence of teenage parenthood);
4. the association between teenage parenthood and welfare dependency and inherited welfare dependency as parents on welfare legitimises welfare abuse for offspring's and their families.

Research in different countries suggests that the type and extent of social protection do have an impact on teenage reproduction (Daguerre and Nativel, 2006). For example, policies which encourage participation and facilitate access to tertiary education are effective incentives for young women to defer childbearing. In contrast, lack of public and private sector investment in depressed areas has the opposite effect as lack of education and job opportunities make early motherhood a more attractive option. The same authors report that “low-risk” countries are characterised by welfare policies which seek to minimise the stigma attached to teenage parenthood (can this be more related to the Maltese context). In countries such as France, Germany and Switzerland, which are characterised by conservative-corporatist welfare regimes, teenage parenthood is perceived empathically and not as a burden on the taxpayer as they are construed in the US. In these countries, community-based schemes involving local authorities, voluntary and church organisations as well as social, educational and health professionals, have proved successful in providing the necessary support to both mother and child. (Daguerre and Nativel, 2006). According to Nativel (2006), in France, welfare provision for teenage mothers takes a very protective stance. Teenage mothers and their children benefit from a wide range of social protection policies. Apart from cash benefits provided by the state, there are over a hundred maternal centres all over France which provide accommodation to single mothers without a home, some of them catering specifically for teenage mothers. The protective environment offered by the centre helps the mother to bond with her child and offer a range of other services such as counselling, parenting skills and where possible attempts are made to re-establish contact with the teenager’s family. Teen mothers are also helped to find work, training courses and independent housing. Fathers are invited to build ties with the child.

Research on services offered to teen fathers is not abundant. Tyrer et al (2005) carried out a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with 16 young men aged 15 to 23 who had been or were still in care and seventy-eight service providers across England. The study sought to determine the type of support available to young fathers and to establish what enables or prevents the support they need. On the basis of the findings of other studies cited by the authors (Quinton et al, 2002; Dennison and Lyon, 2003) and from what emerged from their own research, the picture they paint is not very positive. The studies by Quinton et al and Dennison and Lyon revealed that young men preparing for fatherhood did not find much support from health services. They were marginalised, ignored or made to feel uncomfortable despite their desire for information, advice and inclusion. Certain professionals did not regard working with young fathers as central to their work and although fathers in young offenders’ institutions received some parenting training, they found a lot of barriers once released. From their own research, Tyrer et al (2005) established three important and related factors related to the experiences of young fathers coming from a background of institutionalisation: (i) social exclusion (ii) lack of trust and how this compromised their ability to access services; (iii) how services perceived as bureaucratic and not tailored to their needs deterred young fathers from seeking help. From their research with professionals, the authors found that young men are often discouraged by social workers from becoming involved with their children. They also found that little assessment is made of fathers’ needs and that when fathers wanted to be involved, they were often made to feel unimportant both during and after the pregnancy. These feelings were confirmed by the young fathers. Many felt that they were often seen in terms of the negative, feckless, uncaring stereotype. They were seen as “no hopers”. They felt that mothers had all the rights and did not trust the courts to deal with problems of lack of access to their children. They also felt that doctors are not sensitive to their predicament and do not care about their problems. Certain rules in the services bureaucracy were inflexible and enhanced the obstacles. For example, in a flat provided by the state to one of the young fathers in the study, his girlfriend was not allowed to share the flat as she was not previously in care.

Local literature about local services to teenage parents is scant. The Government's National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion for 2008-2010², and for 2012³ outline a series of policy initiatives but most of these programmes do not target teenage parents or pregnant teenagers specifically although they may also be accessible to them. There are a number of services offered by the state as well as voluntary or non-governmental organisations from which prospective or actual teen parents can benefit such as social work services, personal and social development education in schools, educational psychologists, school guidance and counselling services.

The main service targeted specifically at teenage mothers is that of Unit Għozza, an educational and social support programme offered to schoolgirl mothers encouraging them to pursue their career path and helping them to adopt a positive attitude towards motherhood. According to its website (<http://schoolnet.gov.mt/guidance/Unit%20Ghozza.htm>) Unit Għozza provides a number of services to the mothers as well as to their boyfriends and parents. The girls receive psychological and moral support both before and after the birth. They are also prepared for the birth and given practical skills on baby care and parenting. Other programmes available focus on educational and personal development. The unit also facilitates contacts with other relevant support services or organisations from which both mother and child can benefit. It also advises, liaises or supports school administrators regarding pregnant students. According to a report published in Malta Today midweek (Vella, 2008), the number of girls attending the unit increased from 12 in 1989/90 to 174 in 2007. In Gozo, Dar Guzeppa Debono is a home for single mothers (not only teenagers) and their families. This home offers a range of services including fostering, counselling and spiritual guidance and offers shelter to those mothers who are sent away from home. Another project called "Benniena" is presently offered at St Luke's Hospital where it was transferred from under the wing of Appogg. This social work service aims to help individuals or couples who experience problems associated with pregnancy.

The issue of moral regulation plays a central role in welfare culture although the extent of control depends on the dominant normative framework surrounding youth sexuality. This is reflected in different policies on sex education, access to contraception and abortion legislation found in different countries (Daguerre and Nativel, 2006). Variations in policy direction are embedded in different value systems. If the aim is to reduce teenage parenthood due to its association with social disadvantage, policy tends to focus on solutions such as early and comprehensive sex education, liberal abortion legislation and easy access to contraception. In contrast, if policy is motivated by a religious morality which sees sex and childbearing outside marriage as a sin and abortion as an unacceptable solution, then policy responses would be based on abstinence campaigns, restrictive (or inexistent) abortion laws, welfare reform and ambiguity about sex education and contraception (UNICEF, 2001a). According to the same report, although the Nordic countries, appear to have found the answer to maintaining low levels of teenage parenthood, their model may not be ideal due to its heavy reliance on abortion. In contrast, the Netherlands have managed to maintain both lower levels of teenage births as well as comparatively lower abortion rates.

In November 2010 the long awaited first sexual health policy was launched in Malta (Ministry for Health, the Elderly and Community Care, 2010). The policy makes reference to unwanted pregnancies as one of the consequences of ill sexual health. Although a policy focusing on sexual health does not address issues concerning teen parenthood, the sexual health policy is an

2 Document may be accessed from: <http://www.google.com.mt/search?q=Malta+National+Reports+on+Strategies+for+Social+Protection+and+Social+Inclusion&sugexp=chrome,mod=0&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

3 Document may be accessed from: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/keyDocuments.jsp?pager>.

essential tool concerned with implementing early intervention strategies aimed at reducing the incidence of pregnancy among teenagers. Research in the US suggests that comprehensive sexual health programmes are more effective than abstinence-only programmes (Carter McLaughlin and Luker, 2006). Malta's sexual health policy cites similar research and recognises the importance of taking a comprehensive approach to sexual education rather than one which focuses only on abstinence.

6. RESEARCH FINDINGS – QUALITATIVE PHASE

The findings reveal that Maltese and Gozitan teenage parents are very heterogeneous and they could not easily be analysed using one common 'profile' – they differ in their age, socio-economic class, family background, aspirations, support, attitudes and relationships. Nevertheless, it appears that the vast majority tend to be from the lower socio-economic classes and from families with various relationship problems or a history of teenage pregnancy. The Cottonera area and the south stand out as localities with a higher concentration of teenage pregnancy, although young parents in Malta come from all geographical regions and social classes. Low educational and career aspirations appear to be linked to the likelihood of becoming pregnant before the age of 20, with some girls seeing motherhood as a means of self-realization. The alternative profile that emerged was that of the 'good girl/boy' who comes from a middle-class family with great ambitions, who is overprotected by the parents and goes to a good school. In the case of this type of teenagers, the pregnancy could be the result of a first-time experience or a one-time occurrence. Although such profiles are overgeneralisations and should be interpreted with caution, they should be explored further in the longitudinal study so that they can be confirmed, disproved or enriched.

The major challenges for teenage parents were facing the social stigma which still persists (although decreasing), furthering their education and finding a job which provides them with enough income. In fact, financial problems are experienced by almost all teenage parents and their families and this aggravates the situation with regards to childcare and support. Many of the young parents have no option to continue with their education because both of their parents are working and there are not enough childcare facilities which offer services free of charge or at rates that are affordable to teenage parents. In fact, the lack of childcare services at schools and workplaces is one of the major reasons why teenage parents need to postpone or interrupt their studies, which leads to lower educational attainment and worse employment prospects. It transpires that Maltese and Gozitan schools are not equipped to cater for the needs of teenage parents, and the prevailing culture dictates that teenage mothers should be separated from the other students and directed to special education. At the same time, the institutions that provide for the needs of young parents do not offer the full range of subjects, and many teenagers are left with no viable option to achieve their educational objectives. As a result, many give up and tone down their aspirations or struggle to find a way of balancing education with working for an income, childcare and spending quality time with their family.

The job prospects of teenage parents are strongly related to education, and the majority of teenagers who do not manage to complete their education to a high standard end up in low-paid jobs with no career opportunities, such as salespersons, waiters or factory workers, or else with no job at all. In particular, teenage mothers tend to comply with local culture and traditions and stay at home as housewives, while teenage fathers are forced to start work earlier at the expense of their education in order to provide for their families. Although these conclusions are a generalization and only based on a small sample of opinions, the experience and expertise of the respondents give a valid reason to study these perceptions further in the longitudinal study.

With regards to aspirations, the teenagers from the lower classes appear to have little ambition to achieve in education or a career, but they see parenthood as a sign of maturity and a fulfilling 'project' in itself. Given the low chances of finding a good job without sufficient education, some teenagers try to achieve independence through social welfare benefits or starting a family on their own. Those who are most affected are the ones whose future plans for education and career prospects were interrupted by the pregnancy, and who have to give up their aspirations because of the child or rely on their parents to help them out. Overall, one clear finding was that teenage fathers' educational and job prospects are generally much less affected by those of mothers, because they don't have to carry the baby themselves and often manage to escape responsibility for its upbringing even after it is born.

In fact, the roles of the teenage fathers appear to be much more varied than those of mothers. In the majority of cases, the parents of the teenagers take care of the baby in the mother's home, and the mother either takes on her role while trying to juggle with school and work or else continues with her life as if the baby was her sibling. The father's roles vary between those who are doing their utmost to support the mother within the limits of her family's acceptance and those who are completely absent. Court cases for compensation, proof of parenthood and access to the child appear to be common, especially with regards to whether the father's surname should be given to the baby or not.

The teenage parents were aware of only a few of the support structures available to them, and many are apparently not interested in the services either because they believe they don't need help, or because they are ashamed to expose their situation. Unit Go a and the parent craft courses offered by the hospital were the most popular services. It further transpires that Gozitan teenage parents are not aware of the structures available in Malta (including Unit Go a), while the Maltese were not aware of Dar u eppa Debono or else were not considering it as an option. Other support structures and services such as the childcare facilities at the University, Pro ett Benniena, Gift of Life and childcare centres were clearly mentioned by the stakeholders but much less known among the teenage parents themselves. However, given the small sample this finding needs to be confirmed during the longitudinal study.

The current support structures could be improved by ensuring more structured, consistent and targeted sex education campaigns to help prevention and by making the existing structures more accessible for those who become teenage parents. Educational programmes should be consistent in terms of content, delivery and values as well as complementary, so that what is taught in schools is consistent with parents' educational efforts within the family and with extracurricular activities. The government campaigns for safe sex should be executed by using new media and approaches which are much more attractive to teenagers, such as music, arts, drama and discussions. The lessons should start earlier, before the children are sexually active and then continue on an ongoing basis so that the teenagers have lessons later on when they can relate more to what is discussed. There must be clear education on contraception methods including which methods are effective and which are not. This is required to address the reality that social change, media influence and new lifestyles make the abstinence approach unrealistic and a different method is needed to decrease the number of early unplanned pregnancies.

Childcare is urgently required by most teenage parents, so that they have a chance to continue their education, enhance their job prospects and ultimately become independent of social welfare. The respondents suggested that there is the need for more childcare facilities in schools and workplaces, and the working hours of the existing facilities need to be extended. Moreover, it was suggested that parents who have no support from their family and no means to afford childcare should have the facility to use the service for free throughout the week, rather than only on several days.

With regards to counselling services, professionals must be well trained to ensure that they understand the entire situation of the young parent and do not see the pregnancy in isolation from other issues. The practice of giving advice to mothers to declare the father as 'unknown' should be discontinued, as it compromises the rights of both the father and the child, and ultimately affects the whole families of the couple in a negative way. In addition, social benefits should be retained but their structure should be changed to a case-by-case, means tested system which takes into account the situation of each individual – available support, financial means, aspirations and plans to study or work which would make the person independent from government support. In this way, an indirect incentive to become pregnant would be removed and the available resources would be directed to those who really need them.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the findings, salient issues and research areas in this report are qualitative and should serve as an indication, rather than a definitive representation of reality. They must be tested further on a larger scale during the longitudinal study before they can be confirmed or disproved.

7. RESEARCH FINDINGS – LONGITUDINAL STUDY

This Section highlights the salient findings which emerged from the Longitudinal Study carried out with teenage parents between May 2011 and July 2012. The analysis will focus on comparing the findings of the results which emerged in the first wave of interviews with the final results emanating from the fourth wave of interviews.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

Age, Gender, Marital Status, Level of Education and Geographical Region

A total of 103 teenage parent respondents were interviewed for the first phase of this longitudinal study. Out of these, 96 took part in the second wave of interviews, 93 in the third wave and a total of 90 accepted to be interviewed for the fourth and final time. All four sets of interviews were conducted over a span of a year and two months,

The initial 103 respondents included 91 females and 12 males. Of these, 79 females and 11 males agreed to be interviewed for the four phases of this longitudinal study.

The age of the teenage parents at the first interview varied from 15 years to 35 years. The highest percentage of the teenage parents (31% - 32 respondents) indicated that they became parents at 18 years, followed by 23% (24 respondents) who became mothers/fathers at age 19. Moreover, 19% (20 respondents) specified that they became parents at age 17, 15% (15 respondents) at age 16, 8% (8 respondents) at aged 15 and 4% (4 respondents) at age 14.

With regards to the marital status of the teenage parents at the time of the first interview, 77% (79 respondents) were single, 15.5% (16 respondents) were married while 5% (5 respondents) were cohabiting. It results that during the time between the first and fourth interview, a small percentage of teenage parents who were single became either married or cohabiting. It is interesting to point out that a staggering 95% (98 respondents) of the teenage parents indicated that at the time when they became parents they were single.

The level of education of 66% (68 respondents) of the teenage parents at the time when they became parents was of a secondary level while that of 31% (32 respondents) was of a college/ technical school level. At the time of the first interview, 64% (66 respondents) still held a secondary level of education, 20% (21 respondents) held a college/ technical level and 14% (14 respondents) were attending/ completed a course at the University of Malta. The level of education of some of these teenage parents increased slightly between the first and fourth interview. In fact, respondents who completed college/ technical school increased to 23%, and attendance at the University of Malta also increased to 16%.

At the time when they became parents, almost all teenage parents were living with their immediate family, meaning with their mother, father and siblings. Although during the time of the first interview, the highest majority of the respondents were still living with their parents, 15.5% (16 respondents) had left home to start living with their partner and child. This percentage continued to increase to 19% (17 respondents) up to the fourth interviews.

During the time they became parents, 35% (36 respondents) used to live in the Southern Harbour region, 25% (26 respondents) hailed from the Northern Harbour region, 15% (15 respondents) from the Northern region, 12% (12 respondents) from the South Eastern region, 10% (10 respondents) from Gozo and 4% (4 respondents) from the Western region. The geo region of the respondents changed slightly from when they became parents to the time of the first interview, with some shift to the South Eastern region. Furthermore, there were also no major changes in the geo region between the first and fourth interview.

Employment Status and Socio-Economic Classification

It is very interesting to note that a relatively high 33% (34 respondents) of the 103 teenage parents interviewed indicated that at the time they became parents they were unemployed. Another 30% (31 respondents) stated that they were students and 27% (28 respondents) indicated that they were in full time employment.

The employment status of the same respondents when they were interviewed for the first time, changed considerably from the time they became parents. In fact, being a student decreased to 12% (12 respondents) while inactivity increased from 2% (2 respondents) to 19% (20 respondents). Part time employment also increased from 8% (8 respondents) to 14% (14 respondents).

Between the first and fourth interviews, it can be noted that full time employment increased by 7%, part time employment increased by 4% and being a student also increased by 2%. On the contrary, unemployment decreased by 12% and inactivity decreased by 1%.

The occupations held by the respondents at the time they became parents were mainly semi-skilled/ unskilled job positions. Their occupations held at the time of the first and fourth interviews were in line with those held when becoming parents. The occupations were mainly: waiters/ bar attendants, cleaners, cashiers and sales assistants.

When during the first interview the 38 respondents, who at the time were in full time or part time employment, were asked to indicate for how long they had been engaged in their job position, a total of 11 respondents stated that they had been employed in the position for between two and five years, 7 respondents indicated that they had been employed for less than three months and 6 respondents stated that they had been employed for between one and two years. 28 respondents

of the same 38 respondents indicated that they have been employed, not necessarily in the same job position, for less than five years.

Of the 36 respondents, who at the time they became parents were inactive or unemployed, 21 respondents used to receive financial support from the government. This number increased drastically to 44 respondents of the 53 respondents who were inactive or unemployed during the time of the first interview. Between the first and fourth interview, this number decreased to 22 respondents of those who were inactive or unemployed.

A high 85% (88 respondents) of the 103 respondents stated that when they became parents, their parent/ guardian was the main income earner in their household. Another 9% (9 respondents) indicated that it was their spouse/ partner and a mere 2% (2 respondents) mentioned that they were the main income earners. This had changed at the time the first interview was held where 60% (62 respondents) indicated their parent/ guardian, 21% (21 respondents) mentioned their spouse/ partner and 14% (14 respondents) mentioned themselves. A further change occurred between the first and fourth interview where half (45 respondents) of the 90 respondents mentioned their parent/ guardian and 21% (19 respondents) mentioned their partner/ spouse and themselves respectively.

The employment status, at the time the respondents became parents, of the main income earner for 70% (72 respondents) of the respondents was full time employment, while for 15% (15 respondents) it was unemployment. At the time of the first interview, the employment status of the main income earner of 64% (66 respondents) was full time employment, a decrease of 6%, and of 17.5% (18 respondents) it was unemployment, an increase of 2.5%. Between the first and fourth interview, full time employment increased again, to 73% (66 respondents), while unemployment decreased again, to 11% (10 respondents).

With regards to the socio-economic classification of the respondents at the time they became parents, 49.5% (51 respondents) fell in the DE classification, 43% (44 respondents) fell in the C1/C2 classification and a low 8% (8 respondents) fell in the AB classification. At the time when the first interviews were conducted, there was an increase of the DE classification with 50.5% (52 respondents), 43% (44 respondents) fell in the C1/C2 classification and 7% (7 respondents) fell in the AB classification. Between the first and fourth interviews, the DE classification decreased to 43% (39 respondents), the C1/C2 classification also decreased to 43% (39 respondents) and the AB classification increased to 13% (12 respondents).

Challenges Faced by Teenage Parents

Almost all 103 respondents mentioned at least one challenge they had to face when they became parents. The challenges faced by these teenage parents varied from one person to another and their socio-economic classification at the time also played a part in the challenges faced. The main challenge, which was mentioned by the highest number of respondents, was the financial burden of having a child. Some respondents indicated that they had to end their employment to be able to take care of their child while others did not have any income of their own because they were still students. This challenge was mentioned by respondents whose socio-economic classification falls in the C1/C2 or DE classifications and by none of the teenage parents who fall in the AB classification.

The increase in responsibility, the change in lifestyle and restricted freedom were also highlighted as main challenges which teenage parents had to face when they became parents. These parents stated that it was hard for them to adapt to the new responsibilities which come with having

a baby. They indicated that it was hard for them to accept the fact that they could not go out anymore with their friends, that they had to wake up several times during the night to feed the baby and that they had to have more patience. Several teenage parents indicated that they felt that they had to grow up quicker and did not live their teenage years as other teenagers.

Moreover, other teenage parents indicated that keeping a good relationship with the father of the baby was a struggle at the time they became parents. These teenage parents indicated that they were afraid of having to take care of the child on their own without any support from their partner. It is interesting to point out that several teenage parents whose socio-economic classification falls within the AB classification indicated that the main challenge they had to face was to deal with the gossip.

When, during the fourth interview, the respondents were asked whether they are facing the same challenges they faced when they became parents, a relatively high 58% (52 respondents) replied in the positive. Nevertheless, almost all of the other respondents indicated that while they are not facing the same challenges, they are facing other problems. Numerous of these respondents indicated that since they became parents they moved out of the house they used to live at the time and are now living on their own. This resulted in a new challenge where they are constantly in a race against time in order to keep up with the housework, taking care of the child and maintaining a part time or full time job. Other respondents indicated that they are facing a problem with disciplining their child while others are struggling in maintaining a healthy relationship with their partner.

More than 31% (32 respondents) of the 103 respondents communicated that they do not have any regrets for becoming teenage parents. Nonetheless, the remaining 69% (71 respondents) could mention at least one regret they have. The main regret mentioned by these respondents was education related. The respondents indicated that they believe that they could have done much better in their education, but had to put it to a halt once they became parents.

The restricted freedom and the change in their lifestyle were also mentioned by numerous respondents as regrets they have. These respondents mentioned that they wished that they could have enjoyed more their teenage years and that they could have gone out with their friends. Other respondents indicated that they regretted that they either had to terminate their employment or had never been in employment. Moreover, some respondents expressed their regret for having a child with the father/mother of the child. These respondents indicated that the father of the child left them once they got pregnant and did not provide any financial assistance towards the child.

During the fourth interview, almost 48% (43 respondents) indicated that they still had the same regrets as they had in the first interview while another 42% (38 respondents) stated that they did not have any regrets.

When asked to mention the pleasant feelings they experienced when becoming teenage parents, numerous respondents simply stated that they feel content that they have a child. Other respondents indicated that the love their child gives them is the most satisfying aspect while some described the moment their child was born as the best feeling they had ever experienced. Furthermore, the responsibility of having a dependent and the satisfaction of having managed to go through the experience alone were also mentioned as pleasant feelings they have in terms of becoming a teenage parent. These pleasant feelings experienced by the respondents remained constant throughout the four interviews.

All respondents were then asked a set of questions regarding their relationship with the mother/father of their child. This issue emerged as being a major challenge faced by teenage parents. All 91 female teenage parents interviewed in the first interview stated that they had informed the father of the child once they became pregnant. Table 7.1 below illustrates how much the fathers were supportive of the teenage mothers once they were informed they were becoming parents. It results that almost 53% (48 respondents) of the mother indicated that fathers were supportive/very supportive, 8% (7 respondents) stated they were neither supportive nor not supportive and 40% (36 respondents) pointed out that they were either not supportive or not at all supportive.

Table 7.1 – Psychological support received from Father of Child – Female Respondents - Aggregate

Counts Break % Respondents	
Total	91
He was not supportive at all	28 30.8%
He was not very supportive	8 8.8%
He was neither supportive nor not supportive (neutral)	7 7.7%
He was supportive	17 18.7%
He was very supportive	31 34.1%

When asked whether the fathers were forthcoming with financial support, 54% (49 respondents) of the mothers replied in the positive while another 38.5% (35 respondents) gave a negative response. Almost 65% (59 respondents) of the mothers pointed out that the fathers recognized the child immediately while 11% (10 respondents) stated that they recognized the child but not immediately. Unfortunately, 16.5% (15 respondents) stated that the father of their child never recognized the child.

Of the 15 teenage mothers whose partner did not recognize the child, 11 mothers were given advice on whether to register the father on the child's birth certificate. These 11 mothers, received advice mainly from a lawyer, from a social worker and from someone at school.

With regards to the 12 teenage fathers, all of them stated that their partner informed them immediately once she got pregnant. All of these teenage fathers indicated that they either supported their partner or supported their partner a lot. Moreover, 11 of them mentioned that they provided their partner with financial assistance and all of them stated that they recognized the child immediately. Half of the teenage fathers indicated that they were aware that they could recognize the child and have their name on the child's birth certificate even if the mother did not wish to register them as the fathers. 8 of the teenage fathers indicated that the family of their partner accepted them and were very supportive. Another respondent stated that the partner's family was neither supportive nor not supportive while 3 respondents stated that the partner's family was either not supportive or not at all supportive.

Educational and Job Prospects of Teenage Parents

The majority (55% - 57 respondents) of the teenage parents communicated during the first interview that they have educational aspirations for the future. It is worth pointing out that the gender and socio-economic classification of the respondents plays a role on whether respondents have educational aspirations. In fact, as Table 7.2 below shows, while more than 50% of the respondents who fall within the AB socio-economic classification have such aspirations, however, educational aspirations are much lower among those falling within the C1C2 and DE classifications. With regards to the gender, it is also interesting to point out that teenage mothers have more educational aspirations than teenage fathers.

Table 7.2 – Educational Aspirations of Teenage Parents – by SEC and Gender

Counts Break % Respondents	Total	AB	C1 - C2	DE	Female	Male
Total	103	7	44	52	91	12
Yes	57 55.3%	5 71.4%	23 52.3%	29 55.8%	53 58.2%	4 33.3%
No	46 44.7%	2 28.6%	21 47.7%	23 44.2%	38 41.8%	8 66.7%

The teenage parents were then asked to indicate how they perceive their educational prospects to be. A relatively low 39% (40 respondents) stated that they perceive their prospects as being either positive or very positive, another 37% (38 respondents) perceive them to be neither positive nor negative and 16.5% (17 respondents) perceive them to be either negative or very negative.

Numerous respondents, who perceive their education prospects to be positive, indicated that they plan on furthering their studies once their child commences school and is old enough to be independent. The aspirations of teenage parents vary a lot with some of them aiming at starting a course at MCAST, with the hairdressing and beautician's courses being the most popular, while others would like to do their O'level examinations and subsequently further their studies to University. Some respondents indicated that they would be able to achieve their educational goals if they find a good child care service to take care of their child while they are attending lectures. On the other hand, numerous respondents of those who perceive their educational prospects to be negative, indicated that they are not interested in furthering their studies either because they feel that they do not need to or because they feel that they do not have enough time to juggle between their parenting duties and studying. Other respondents stated that they do not have educational aspirations because they want a job not qualifications and that they are satisfied with their current situation/ job position.

The teenage parents' opinions on 'education/ school' for teenage parents in Malta were very different. While some teenage parents indicated that there is no discrimination between teenagers and teenage parents and that there are equal opportunities for everyone, others complained that secondary schools are not at all 'teenage-parents friendly' and that there are no childcare services dedicated to teenage parents so that they are able to further their studies. It is also worthy of mention that some respondents believe that the educational prospects of

teenage parents depend highly on the geo region, family background and on how much the family is supportive and encourages the teenage parent. Moreover, a significant amount of respondents expressed their satisfaction with the service given by the government's educational support service for teenage mothers, Għożża. These respondents stated that they appreciate all the support they received from this unit with some even stating that the support received 'saved their lives'. At the fourth interview, almost all respondents indicated that they still hold the same views on the 'education/ school' for teenage parents in Malta as they held in the first interview.

Unfortunately, almost 19 of the 33 respondents, who are or were still studying when they became pregnant, indicated that their school did not try to accommodate and encourage them to continue studying. The main reason for this being that being at post-secondary school, mainly at Junior College, there is not much one-to-one communication between lecturers and students. Moreover, the respondents indicated that they did not seek any assistance from the school/ college on how the institution could help them to continue their studies. The majority of the other 14 respondents indicated that they were offered counselling and guidance services at school while others were referred to Unit Għożża. Of the same 33 respondents, 28 respondents claimed that the school did not try to direct them to any service or another form of education.

A considerably high 42% (43 respondents) of the aggregate 103 respondents pointed out that they perceive their job prospects to be either positive or very positive, 29% (30 respondents) perceive them to be neither positive nor negative and 26% (27 respondents) perceive them to be either negative or very negative. It is very interesting to point out that respondents who fall within the DE socio-economic classification and teenage mothers are more pessimistic about their job prospects than those falling in the AB and C1C2 classifications and teenage fathers respectively. Table 7.3 below illustrates these findings in more detail. Between the first and fourth interviews, the vast majority of teenage parents maintained the same perceptions of job prospects.

Table 7.3 – Perceptions of Job Prospects by Teenage Parents – by SEC and Gender

Counts Break % Respondents	Total	AB	C1 - C2	DE	Female	Male
Total	103	7	44	52	91	12
Very negative	6 5.8%	-	1 2.3%	5 9.6%	6 6.6%	-
Negative	21 20.4%	2 28.6%	5 11.4%	14 26.9%	20 22.0%	1 8.3%
Neither positive nor negative	30 29.1%	2 28.6%	13 29.5%	15 28.8%	24 26.4%	6 50.0%
Positive	31 30.1%	2 28.6%	16 36.4%	13 25.0%	27 29.7%	4 33.3%
Very positive	12 11.7%	1 14.3%	8 18.2%	3 5.8%	11 12.1%	1 8.3%
Don't know	3 2.9%	-	1 2.3%	2 3.8%	3 3.3%	-

Throughout the four sets of interviews, there were only minor changes in the employment status of the respondents. It results that during the four sets of interviews, around 41% (37 respondents) were not actively looking for employment, 37% (34 respondents) held the same job position as previous and 13% (12 respondents) were actively looking for a job.

The teenage parents' views on job prospects for teenage parents in Malta were generally negative. These respondents argued that it is difficult for teenage mothers to balance time between taking care of the child and going to work. Furthermore, these parents argued that if teenage parents do not have accessibility to childcare, employers would not employ them and few are those employers who offer reduced hours and flexi time to employees. The respondents maintained their perceptions throughout the four sets of interviews.

During the first interview, almost 75% (68 respondents) of teenage parents pointed out that their salary package/ social welfare financial support does not allow them and their child to live a life of acceptable comfort. Up to the fourth interview, more than 82% (74 respondents) of the respondents indicated that their income had not changed while 12% (11 respondents) indicated that their income increased. For the 16 respondents who at the fourth interview indicated that their income increased or decreased since the first interview, 69% (11 respondents) stated that their income allows them to live comfortably.

Of the 20 respondents who were inactive at the time of the first interview, while 9 respondents indicated that they see themselves working in the five years following the interview, another 8 respondents) stated that they do not know if they will be in employment.

A total of 41 respondents (40%) indicated that they have attended a job interview at any point after they became teenage parents. Of these, the majority (21 respondents) were asked about their family status by their prospective employer during a job interview. Nevertheless, 29 respondents of the same 41 respondents indicated that they do not believe that the fact that they are teenage parents has had an effect on whether employers employ them or not. 21 of the same 41 respondents stated that they are finding job opportunities. Table 7.4 below analyses this finding by the level of education of the respondents. It results that the higher the level of education of teenage parents the more likely it is that they are offered job opportunities by employers.

Table 7.4 – Job Opportunities offered to Teenage Parents – by Level of Education

Counts Analysis % Respondents	Total	Yes	No
Total	41	21 51.2%	20 48.8%
Illiterate	-	-	-
No formal education, but reads and writes	-	-	-
Some / Completed - Elementary	-	-	-
Some / Completed - Primary	-	-	-
Some / Completed - Secondary	22	8 36.4%	14 63.6%
Some / Completed - College / Technical	9	6 66.7%	3 33.3%
Some / Completed - University in Malta	9	6 66.7%	3 33.3%
Some / Completed - University abroad	1	1 100.0%	-

The 21 respondents who indicated whether they are finding job opportunities were then asked whether these job opportunities are meeting their expectations. Unfortunately, 10 of the respondents indicated that these job opportunities fairly meet their expectations while another 5 respondents stated that the opportunities do not reach their expectations.

With regards to qualifications, 24 respondents of the same 41 respondents indicated that they feel that they have enough qualifications, this being stated mainly by those respondents who have a post-secondary level of education.

At the time of the first interview, a total of 10 respondents had been gainfully employed on full time basis for at least five years. Of these, 4 respondents indicated that being teenage parents hinders their chances of receiving a promotion, this being mainly stated by those respondents who hold a secondary level of education.

Roles taken up by Teenage Parents

More than 28% (29 respondents) of the 103 teenage parents interviewed in the first set of interviews, specified that when they became parents, their partner aged between 21 and 25 years, these being all female respondents. Another 15% (15 respondents) indicated that their partner aged 17 years, 18 years and 20 years respectively. It is worth pointing out that all the partners of teenage fathers were also teenagers.

At the time of the first interview, 32% (33 respondents) of the respondents indicated that they do not even talk to the father/ mother of their child, 31% (32 respondents) stated that they are still going out with the father/ mother of their child and 25% (26 respondents) indicated that they are no longer in a relationship with the partner. As Table 7.5 below shows, there is a higher possibility

that male teenage parents remain in a relationship with the mother of their child. With regards to teenage mothers, the highest percentage of them do not even talk to the father of their child.

Table 7.5 – Relationship of Teenage Parents with the Mother/ Father of their Child – by Gender

Counts Break % Respondents	Total	Female	Male
Total	103	91	12
We are still going out together	32 31.1%	25 27.5%	7 58.3%
We are living together	10 9.7%	9 9.9%	1 8.3%
We are married	15 14.6%	14 15.4%	1 8.3%
We are not together anymore	26 25.2%	24 26.4%	2 16.7%
We don't even talk to each other	33 32.0%	31 34.1%	2 16.7%
Other	5 4.9%	5 5.5%	- -

A high 83% (75 respondents) of the respondents indicated that their relationship with the father/ mother of their child did not change throughout the four sets of interviews. Of the 15 respondents whose relationship with their partner changed over the course of the interviews, 3 respondents stated that they have a new partner.

Of the 47 respondents, who at the first interview were either not in a relationship with the father/ mother of the child or not even talking to their ex-partner, 25 respondents pointed out that they are in a relationship with another partner, this being mainly indicated by teenage mothers.

A staggering 89% (92 respondents) of the teenage parents, mainly teenage mothers, indicated that they were either close or very close with their child when he/ she were born. Research findings show that the bond between the parent and the child gets stronger with time. In fact, at the first interview, more than 93% (96 respondents) indicated that their relationship with their child at the time was either close or very close. This relationship between parent and child remained constant throughout the four sets of interviews.

With regards to the relationship which existed between both parents at the time the child was born, the majority (56% - 58 respondents) indicated that they were either close or very close. This reply was given mainly by the teenage fathers. Another 26% (27 respondents) stated that they and their partner were either not close or not at all close, this being stated primarily by female respondents.

The respondents' relationship with the father/ mother of the child at the time of the first interview remained similar to that of when the child was born. In fact, once again 56% (58 respondents) indicated that they were close/ very close and 33% (38 respondents) indicated that the relationship was not close/ not at all close. It can be pointed out that there is the trend that the teenage fathers' relationship with the partner gets better with time, this contrasting to the teenage mothers' relationship.

The majority (55% - 57 respondents) of the teenage parents pointed out that the father/ mother of their child is either involved or completely involved in the decisions related to the child. This was mainly indicated by teenage fathers. Another 37% (38 respondents) indicated that the partner is either not involved or not at all involved, this being stated mainly by female respondents. Over the course of the four sets of interviews, the relationship between the respondents' partner/ father/mother of child and the child remained the same.

The 25 respondents who have a partner who is not the father/ mother of their child were asked to indicate whether they have ever experienced any problems in the new relationship because of the child. 15 respondents replied in the negative while the other 10 respondents gave a positive response. During the course of the four interviews only a few of these respondents indicated that they encountered any new problems in their relationship because of the child.

With regards to the specific roles of the teenage mothers, almost all respondents indicated that it is the mother's role to wash, feed, play with the child, taking the child for walks/ to visit relatives and to wake up at night. As to the fathers' roles, 55% (57 respondents) indicated that the father plays with the child, 51.5% (53 respondents) stated that the father takes the child for walks/ to visit relatives and 44% (45 respondents) stated that the father is responsible for feeding the child. It is also interesting to point out that a relatively high 37% (38 respondents) of the respondents pointed out that the father does not play any of the roles in the child's life. With time it results that the roles played by each of the teenage parents in the taking care of the child do not change.

Effects of Parenthood on Life Prospects of Teenage Parents

When all 103 respondents were asked to state what their educational plans were before becoming parents, numerous respondents indicated that they wished to undergo a course at University. These respondents stated that they would have liked to undergo a course to become lawyers, teachers and learning support assistants. Nevertheless, other respondents communicated that they did not have educational aspirations and had always wanted to complete up to Form 5 and then seek employment. The beauty and hairdressing courses within MCAST were also mentioned by various respondents as courses which they aspired to take up.

Just over half of the respondents indicated that having a child did have an impact on their educational aspirations. Becoming a parent had the major impact on the educational aspirations of female respondents, with 49 respondents of them stating this, rather than on male respondents, where 9 respondents of them stated that becoming a parent did not have any impact on their aspirations. The educational aspirations of the respondents did not change throughout the course of the four interviews.

The respondents were then asked to indicate what their job aspirations were before becoming parents. A significant number of respondents indicated that before becoming parents they did not have specific job aspirations but would have liked to find a full time job in order to be financially independent and be able to buy the things they like. Other respondents specified various job positions and careers which they would have liked to pursue. These included becoming a teacher, a learning support assistant, a child care assistant and a sales assistant. When asked whether becoming a parent had an impact on these aspirations, a high 64% (66 respondents) replied in the positive. Some of these respondents indicated that after becoming parents they were not able to balance their time between studying and taking care of the child while others stated that having a child meant that they had to find employment immediately to be able to cope financially.

More than 91% (94 respondents) of the respondents stated that once they became parents their perspective of life changed. These respondents indicated that they have become more mature, responsible and now that they are parents their priorities have changed. The teenage parents indicated that they have learnt that life is difficult and one has to face circumstances whether one likes it or not. These perceptions on life have remained the same for the vast majority of the respondents throughout the four sets of interviews.

As Table 7.6 below shows, becoming a teenage parent had more impact on the mothers, rather than on the fathers, on the way they feel when they compare themselves to others of their age. In fact, a high 84% (76 respondents) of the teenage mothers indicated that they feel either different or very different from other females of their age. With regards to the teenage fathers, this response was given by a lower 67% (8 respondents). The respondents attributed these feelings to the facts that they feel more mature than their friends now that they are parents, they have other priorities than their friends and they cannot go out as much as their friends do. These views remained constant throughout the four sets of interviews.

Table 7.6 – How Teenage Parents’ view themselves when compared to others their Age – by Gender

Counts Break % Respondents	Total	Female	Male
Total	103	91	12
I am very different from them	38 36.9%	36 39.6%	2 16.7%
I am different from them	46 44.7%	40 44.0%	6 50.0%
I am quite similar to them	16 15.5%	12 13.2%	4 33.3%
I am exactly the same as them	3 2.9%	3 3.3%	- -
Don't know	- -	- -	- -

A high and positive 71% (73 respondents) indicated that they either feel more determined/ motivated or much more determined/ motivated than before they were parents, 11% (11 respondents) stated that they are as determined/ motivated as they were before becoming parents and 17.5% (18 respondents) indicated that they are either less motivated/ determined or much less motivated/ determined than they were before. It results that parenthood affected in the same manner both teenage fathers and mothers. Table 7.7 below highlights this finding in more detail. The degree of motivation/ determination of the respondents remained the same throughout the four sets of interviews.

Table 7.7 – Impact of Parenthood on Determination/ Motivation – by Gender

Counts Break % Respondents	Total	Female	Male
Total	103	91	12
Much less motivated / determined	11 10.7%	10 11.0%	1 8.3%
Less motivated / determined	7 6.8%	7 7.7%	- -
No change since becoming a parent	11 10.7%	9 9.9%	2 16.7%
More motivated / determined	38 36.9%	34 37.4%	4 33.3%
Much more motivated / determined	35 34.0%	30 33.0%	5 41.7%
Don't know	1 1.0%	1 1.1%	- -

It results that parenthood had a major impact on the lifestyle of both teenage fathers and mothers. Only 1 female respondent indicated that her lifestyle remained the same after becoming a mother. The other respondents all highlighted at least one aspect of how their lifestyle changed. A high number of respondents indicated that parenthood affected their free time and going out with friends. These respondents stated that once they became parents they stopped going out with their friends, they had less time for their hobbies and they stopped grooming themselves due to lack of time, lack of going out and lack of money. Numerous respondents also mentioned that they started sleeping much less, so they started to feel constantly tired, this leading to demotivation. Changes in the lifestyle of the parents continued to take place during the course of the four interviews. Some of the respondents indicated that since the child was born and growing up, they feel that they are more stable financially, therefore are able to live more comfortably, some are in a new relationship while others are planning on getting married to the father/ mother of their child.

The hobbies of the teenage parents before they became parents were very varied but a high number of respondents indicated that they like going out with friends, socializing, using the computer, dancing, modeling and practising a particular sport. Few were those who stated that they did not have any hobbies before becoming parents. More than 60% (62 respondents) of the respondents indicated that once they became parents their hobbies did not change, this being stated primarily by the male respondents. Between the first and four interviews there were only slight changes in the hobbies of the teenage parents.

Teenage mothers find less time than teenage fathers to dedicate to their hobbies. In fact, while, at the first interview, the majority of the mothers (60.5% - 55 respondents) indicated that they either do not find time or do not find time as much as they would like for their hobbies, half (6 respondents) of the fathers indicated that they sometimes or often find time for their hobbies. At the fourth interview, it resulted there were no changes in how much time teenage parents find for their hobbies and it was reconfirmed that mothers found less time for hobbies than fathers.

Respondents were then asked a set of questions regarding how becoming a parent affects their relationship with their family members. As expected, a high 87% (90 respondents) of the teenage

parents did not plan on becoming parents. These respondents indicated that it happened by mistake and that they felt that they were still too young to become parents. On the other hand, 13% (13 respondents) indicated that they became parents intentionally. Some of these respondents indicated that they had always wished to become parents at a young age while others stated that since they were in a stable relationship with their partner they wanted to have a child. One respondent pointed out that she intentionally got pregnant to be able to leave her home because she had a bad relationship with her father.

The first persons teenage parents usually inform once they know that they are about to become parents are their partner and their mother. In fact, these were mentioned by the highest percentage of respondents as either the first or second person they informed. Nevertheless, the friends were also mentioned by the respondents as the persons they informed first once they got to know they were about to become parents. Research findings also show that teenage parents informed the persons immediately or after a few days they got to know that they were going to become parents.

Shock was the first reaction of the family members once they got to know that the respondents were about to become parents. In fact this was stated by 71% (73 respondents) of the respondents. This was followed by 45% (46 respondents) who stated that their family members were surprised at the news while 37% (38 respondents) pointed out that their families were angry at them. As Table 7.8 below shows, it is interesting to point out that while only 18% (16 respondents) of the teenage mothers indicated that their family members were happy, this response was given by a much higher 42% (5 respondents) of the male respondents.

Table 7.8 – Reaction of Family Members to the News that the Respondents were becoming a Parent – by Gender

Counts Break % Respondents	Total	Female	Male
Total	103	91	12
They were shocked	73 70.9%	67 73.6%	6 50.0%
They were angry at me	38 36.9%	34 37.4%	4 33.3%
They were surprised	46 44.7%	42 46.2%	4 33.3%
They were understanding	23 22.3%	20 22.0%	3 25.0%
They sent me away from home	3 2.9%	3 3.3%	- -
They were happy	21 20.4%	16 17.6%	5 41.7%
They were disappointed	27 26.2%	27 29.7%	- -
They were angry at my partner	16 15.5%	16 17.6%	- -
Other	28 27.2%	25 27.5%	3 25.0%

When the respondents were asked whether there were any other teenage pregnancies within their family, 37% (38 respondents) replied in the positive while the remaining 63% (65 respondents) gave a negative response. It emerges that the socio-economic classification of the respondents does not have an impact on whether there are any trends in teenage pregnancies.

All teenage fathers received both psychological and financial support from their family. With regards to the teenage mothers, this support was received by 80% (85 respondents) of the respondents. As to child care support from their family members, 46% (46 respondents) of the teenage mothers indicated that their family supported them a lot/ completely while 30% (27 respondents) indicated that their family supported them moderately. On the contrary, half (6 respondents) of the male respondents indicated that they did not receive any child care support from their family members.

Almost 84% (82 respondents) of the respondents indicated that no one ever tried to convince them to get married. A very positive 85% (88 respondents) of the respondents indicated that they did not receive any suggestions to give up the baby. Nevertheless, 14% (14 respondents) indicated that abortion was suggested to them, this including 14% (13 respondents) of the female respondents.

Before becoming parents, 39% (40 respondents) of the respondents indicated that they enjoyed a close/ very close relationship with their parents, 43% (44 respondents) indicated that they were neither close nor not close with their parents and 17.5% (18 respondents) communicated that they were not close/ not at all close with their parents, this being stated mainly by teenage fathers. After becoming parents, 68% (70 respondents) of the respondents indicated that their relationship with their parents changed. This was stated by both male and female respondents.

The majority (55% - 57 respondents) of the respondents, primarily female respondents, pointed out that before they became parents, they found it easy to confide in their parents. When asked whether they found it easy to speak to them after they became parents, 72% (74 respondents) replied in the positive. This was mainly indicated by female respondents. The relationship between the teenage parents and their parents remained the same throughout the four sets of interviews.

Finally, the teenage parents were asked to indicate whether they viewed their parents as being strict, religious, understanding and supportive. A high 77% (78 respondents) stated that their parents are supportive, 64% (65 respondents) stated that their parents are very understanding, 30% (30 respondents) indicated that they view their parents as religious and 29% (29 respondents) indicated that their parents are strict.

Awareness of Support Structures Available

The 38 respondents who were in gainful employment at the time of the first interview were asked whether there was a convenient and affordable childcare facility close to their place of work. A total of 22 respondents replied in the negative while 13 respondents gave a positive response. Of the same 38 teenage parents, 14 respondents stated that they make use of family friendly measures at work, with the vast majority of them availing themselves to flexi hours.

A high 65% (67 respondents) of the respondents indicated that when they were about to become parents they did not enquire on any services and support structures which were on offer for teenage parents by the private and public sector in Malta. The reasons given by these respondents for not enquiring on any services or support structures were mainly not needing any

services and not knowing that services existed. Between the first and fourth interviews, only a few respondents enquired on any services.

A very high 77% (79 respondents) of the respondents pointed out that they made use of services/ support structures available to teenage parents. When these respondents were asked to indicate which services/ support structures they availed themselves to, 45 respondents mentioned Unit Ġhożża, 41 respondents mentioned the parent craft courses, 32% 25 respondents indicated the parent craft professional handouts and booklets and 14% 11 respondents stated that they attended antenatal classes.

Of the same 79 respondents, 41 respondents indicated that apart from the service/ support structures they availed themselves of, they are aware of other services. 14 respondents are aware of the shelters of Appogg, 13 respondents are aware of Unit Ġhożża, 11 respondents are aware of the parentcraft courses and the services of social workers and 10 respondents are aware of the school counseling services.

15 respondents of the 24 respondents who did not make use of any services/ support structures specified that they did not need any services/ support structures and 5 respondents pointed out that they did not know that services/ support structures existed.

When all 103 teenage parents were asked their opinion on the benefits given to teenage parents by the government, most of the respondents complained that the monthly benefit received is not enough to live off when taking into consideration that the cost of living is continuously on the rise and the children's products are very expensive. The respondents also complained that it is not fair that once the mother had a full time job, the benefits are cut off and that if the father's name is written on the child's birth certificate the benefits are not given in full. Other respondents pointed out that the benefits are highly abused of in Malta while others indicated that the benefits given are good and sufficient to live off if one manages the money wisely and if one had his/ her parents' financial support. The respondents maintained the same opinion on government benefits to teenage parents throughout the four sets of interviews.

It results that childcare centres are not very popular among teenage parents. In fact, only 13% (13 respondents) of the parents interviewed at the first set of interviews indicated that they make use of such services. The remaining 87% (90 respondents) indicated that they do not make use of these services. The 13% registered in the first set of interviews increased slightly to 16% (14 respondents) at the fourth set of interviews.

Almost 66% (59 respondents) of the 90 respondents, who at the first interview indicated that they do not make use of any childcare centres, pointed out that they would be willing to use a childcare centre while 34% (31 respondents) stated that they are not willing to use childcare centres. Of these 59 respondents, 27 respondents communicated that they would be willing to make use of the services of a childcare centre only when they have no other choice. Nevertheless, another 12 respondents indicated that they would use the service twice a week while 8 respondents indicated that they would use the service three times a week and five times a week respectively.

Table 7.9 below illustrates the teenage parents' opinions on whether various services/ support structures are useful for the challenges and difficulties faced by teenage parents. It emerges that teenage parents believe that the most useful services/ support structures would be: free childcare facilities, the provision of free nappies and/ or milk, more financial benefits from the government and more shelters like Dar Ġużeppa Debono in Gozo. These services/ support structures were mentioned by more than 89% of the respondents as being useful or very useful.

Table 7.9 – The Usefulness of Services/ Support Structures for Teenage Parents – Aggregate

Counts Analysis % Respondents	Total	Not useful at all	Not useful	Neither useful nor not useful	Useful	Very useful	Don't know
More financial benefits from the government	103	1 1.0%	- -	10 9.7%	15 14.6%	77 74.8%	- -
Means tested / care-based social welfare	103	3 2.9%	5 4.9%	11 10.7%	25 24.3%	55 53.4%	4 3.9%
Provision of free nappies and / or milk	103	2 1.9%	1 1.0%	5 4.9%	20 19.4%	75 72.8%	- -
Free childcare facilities	103	2 1.9%	1 1.0%	3 2.9%	13 12.6%	84 81.6%	- -
Ghazza's counseling and parental skills courses	103	4 3.9%	5 4.9%	10 9.7%	22 21.4%	60 58.3%	2 1.9%
Counseling and parental skills services for the teenage fathers	103	7 6.8%	6 5.8%	4 3.9%	25 24.3%	60 58.3%	1 1.0%
More education on sex and contraception in schools / youth centres	103	6 5.8%	5 4.9%	20 19.4%	27 26.2%	44 42.7%	1 1.0%
Parent craft courses offered from the hospital	103	5 4.9%	3 2.9%	6 5.8%	43 41.7%	43 41.7%	3 2.9%
Schools to send an invigilator to pregnant girls' homes so they can sit for the exams at home	103	2 1.9%	3 2.9%	7 6.8%	39 37.9%	51 49.5%	1 1.0%
More shelters like Dar Guzeppa Debono in Gozo	103	3 2.9%	3 2.9%	3 2.9%	29 28.2%	63 61.2%	2 1.9%
More services similar to the 'Gift of Life' service to help women deal with the difficulties of pregnancy	103	3 2.9%	2 1.9%	6 5.8%	40 38.8%	49 47.6%	3 2.9%
Progett Bennisena - engaging the TPs and even whole extended families	103	4 3.9%	4 3.9%	13 12.6%	45 43.7%	34 33.0%	3 2.9%
A Family Planning Clinic	103	3 2.9%	4 3.9%	11 10.7%	48 46.6%	35 34.0%	2 1.9%

The Needs of Teenage Parents

The last section of this report on the longitudinal research study with teenage parents will focus on the needs these teenage parents have. When exploring whether the respondents' parents ever talked to them about relationships and sex before becoming teenage parents, the majority (53% - 55 respondents) indicated either not much or not at all, 32% (33 respondents) indicated that sometimes their parents talked to them about relationships and sex and a low 15% (15 respondents) stated that their parents often or very often spoke to them on such issues.

With regards to contraception, 66% (68 respondents) stated that their parents either did not speak to them about contraception or did not speak to them at all about contraception. Another 25% (26 respondents) stated that sometimes their parents spoke to them about such issues and 9% (9 respondents) communicated that their parents spoke with them often or very often about precautions not to get pregnant/ get a partner pregnant. Research findings show that there are no differences in how much parents of male and female youths speak to them about issues related to relationships, sex and contraception.

Nevertheless, it emerges that although the majority of the respondents did not ever have conversations with their parents about sex, relationships and contraception, 93% (96 respondents) pointed out that they received formal sex education at school. 67% (69 respondents) indicated that they had knowledge of how one may get pregnant and how contraception works. Another 25% (26 respondents) stated that they were neither informed nor uninformed and a low 8% (8 respondents) communicated that they were either not informed or not at all informed.

After becoming pregnant, 66% (68 respondents) indicated that they started to use measures not to get pregnant. Of these, 35 respondents indicated that they started using the contraceptive pill and 33 respondents stated that they started using condoms.

36% (37 respondents) of the respondents pointed out that at the time they became parents it was either difficult or very difficult to obtain contraceptives. Another 36% (37 respondents) indicated that it was either easy or very easy to obtain contraceptives while 20% (21 respondents) specified that it was neither difficult nor easy. 36 respondents of the 53 respondents, who became parents more than three years before the first interview, indicated that nowadays it is either easy or very easy for teenagers to obtain contraceptives.

With regards to health, 45% (41 respondents) of the female respondents stated that they had never been to a gynaecologist before getting pregnant but they have been going ever since. Another 27.5% (25 respondents) stated that they used to go to a gynaecologist before they got pregnant and continues to go after giving birth. Moreover 11% (10 respondents) stated that they had never been to the gynaecologist before they got pregnant and stopped going after giving birth.

Of the 91 female respondents, a relatively high 35% (32 respondents) of the respondents indicated that they had health problems or complications related to the pregnancy or to giving birth. These health problems included problems with high/low blood pressure, fits during pregnancy, high level of sugar in blood and problems with fragile and weak teeth. Numerous respondents indicated that they had to deliver the baby through caesarean section.

Finally, the respondents were asked to suggest any support structures or specific services which the government may offer to assist teenage parents. A high 72% (74 respondents) mentioned subsidised childcare centres, 70% (72 respondents) mentioned more financial benefits and 50.5% (52 respondents) mentioned more assistance/ flexibility from schools. When analysing the data by the socio-economic classification of the respondents, it can be noted that childcare centres are more called for by respondents falling in the C1C2 and DE classifications while those falling in the AB classification called for more parent craft courses. Table 7.10 below shows these findings in more detail.

Table 7.10 – Suggestions for Government services/ support structures for Teenage Parents – by SEC

Counts Break % Respondents	Total	AB	C1 - C2	DE
Total	103	7	44	52
Subsidized childcare centres	74 71.8%	4 57.1%	32 72.7%	38 73.1%
More parent craft courses	20 19.4%	2 28.6%	11 25.0%	7 13.5%
More / better sex education	45 43.7%	- -	21 47.7%	24 46.2%
More assistance / flexibility from the schools	52 50.5%	1 14.3%	28 63.6%	23 44.2%
More financial benefits	72 69.9%	4 57.1%	29 65.9%	39 75.0%
Other	37 35.9%	3 42.9%	13 29.5%	21 40.4%

8. CONCLUSION

In the light of the foregoing review of recent literature and the longitudinal study carried out, a number of salient conclusions on the situation of teenage parents in Malta and Gozo emerge. These are presented in Chapter 3 of this Report, together with some policy considerations on the subject matter.

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