

# Informal support for adolescent parents

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Delegates have access to a wide variety of comprehensive guidance material. If Delegates require further information on access or planning matters they are to call the TAPS line for advice.

The Research Team are unable to ensure that the information listed below provides an accurate & up-to-date snapshot of these matters.

**Research question:** What are the average hours of informal support provided to parents aged 15-17 with and without a disability for the care for their children?

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## 2. Summary

I have not been able to find an answer to the stated research question.

There is mixed evidence regarding the amount of informal support received by adolescent parents. One body of evidence suggests young mothers received comparable levels of support relative to mothers of other age groups. It suggests that the large majority of parents of any age group receive little to no support for child care from their family or friends. However, this study defines 'young' as 15-25 and so it is not clear whether the data represents the real situation for mothers under the age of 18. Studies from overseas complicate the results as well (refer to [4.1 Informal support for adolescent parents](#)).

Not accounting for age, parents with a disability are less likely to have access to informal supports compared to parents without a disability (refer to [4.2.2 Parents with a disability](#)).

Considering the limitations describe in [3. Limitations](#), the findings reported in this research paper should be treated carefully.

## 3. Limitations

There are limitations to the currently published research. From what I have come across, readily available data:

- is largely focused on mums rather than parents in general
- in the Australian context is limited
- is organised into varying age groups making it difficult to prise apart the data for the specific age group 15-17 years
- does not reflect support hours, rather it is largely self-reported satisfaction with levels of support, e.g. "I get enough support for daily activities Y/N".

In addition, there does not appear to be a research body focussing on support for adolescent parents with disabilities. There is a literature on support for adolescent parents and a literature on support for parents with a disability (especially intellectual disability) but unfortunately there is very little overlap in research focus.

## 4. Adolescent parents

The rate of adolescent or teenage pregnancy in Australia is declining. It is already below other English speaking developed countries such as USA, England, Wales, Canada and New Zealand (Hoffman and Vidal, 2017, p.3-4; Hoffman et al, 2020, p.9; Easterbooks, Katz, Menon, 2019, p.201).

The most current research in the Australian context shows that teenage pregnancy / parenting is more common in rural areas, among teenagers of low socio-economic backgrounds and

among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Hoffman and Vidal, 2017, p.6). Individual factors also play a role such as aggression and delinquent behaviour, idealised notions of parenthood and low grades in school (p.9). According to one early study, intellectual disability is also a risk factor for adolescent pregnancy (Levy et al, 1992, p.195). Much of the disadvantage experienced by teenage parents may be related to entrenched disadvantage prior to pregnancy, though evidence is mixed with some studies finding negative impacts on employment, education and health (Hoffman and Vidal, 2017, p.9-10; Hoffman, Lam, Baxter, 2021, p.1, p.4).

#### 4.1 Informal Support for adolescent parents

Research into teenage parenting is minimal in Australia and focuses mainly on mothers (Hoffman and Vidal, 2017, p.1; Easterbrooks, Katz, Menon, 2019, p.199). An early 2003 study of 124 mothers under the age of 18 found that they overestimate their support networks and in fact receive far less support than they are expecting prior to the birth of their child (Quinlivan, Luehr, Evans, 2003). A qualitative study of 9 mothers aged 16-19 years found evidence for the benefit of social networking sites in providing social, emotional and informational support (Nolan, Hendrick, Towell, 2015). More recently, working papers coming out of the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course ([Life Course Centre](#)) has begun to shed light on the demographic and social implications of teenage parenting in Australia (Hoffman and Vidal, 2017, p.1; Hoffman et al, 2020, p.4).

Hoffman et al looked into informal support received by young mothers, here defined as biological parents aged 15-24 years. They found that compared to other age groups, young mothers were least likely to still be in a relationship with the child's father, least likely to have contact with friends, and least likely to use a play group (2020, p.14). Young mothers were less likely to have good relationships with their family compared to mothers 25-34 years. However they were more likely to have regular contact with their parents, receive support from their parents or in-laws compared to mothers over 30 years old. They were the most likely of any age group to report having their support needs met and receiving support from other family members (2020, pp.14-15; refer to [Figure 1 Support source for young mothers](#)).

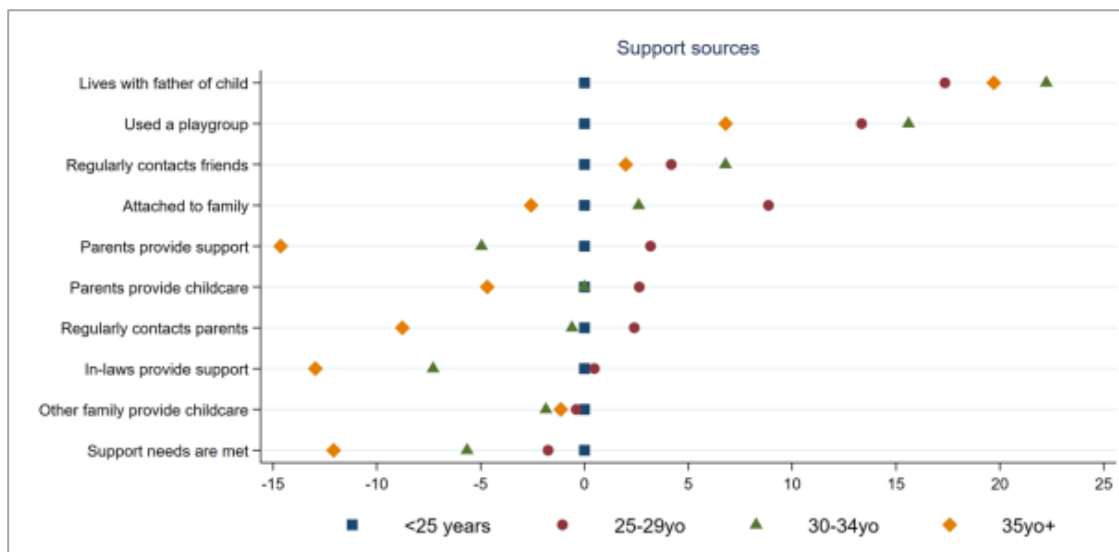
To put these results in context, informal childcare by family member is difficult to access for any parent, especially if the child's grandparents are younger and employed (p.22; Mollborn, Blalock 2012, p.2). Across all age groups under 55% of mothers report having their support needs met, under 45% report their partner actively parents, under 59% report receiving support from their parents and under 22% report receiving assistance with childcare from their parents and under 4% report receiving support from other family members (Hoffman et al, 2020, p.28; refer to [Figure 2 – Distribution of support sources for mothers by age](#)).

Among mothers under 25 years old, 54.4% report having their support needs met, 43.7% report their partner actively parents, 55.4% report receiving support from their parents, 18.6% report receiving assistance with childcare from their parents and 3.9% report receiving support from other family members (Hoffman et al, 2020, p.28; refer to [Figure 2 – Distribution of](#)

[support sources for mothers by age](#)). Importantly, these results do not distinguish between adolescents and young adults.

There are inconsistent results coming from overseas. Mollborn and Blalock note that teenage parents are more likely than other parents to receive help from grandparents or other family, while acknowledging that this is becoming less likely with increased workforce participation of grandmothers. However, while teenage parents are more likely to receive childcare from parents or other family members, they are also more likely than other groups to receive no support for childcare. Teen parents are also more likely to receive no support than to receive childcare from grandparents or other family (Mollborn, Blalock, 2012, pp.2-3, p.9). A 2017 Study of 455,033 mothers found teenage mothers had the lowest levels of social support, significantly lower household income, were less likely to be working, more likely to experience depression, more likely to have a chronic health condition and perceive their health to be worse compared to mothers of other age groups (Kim et al, 2017, pp.1421-1422). A 2012 study found that of US teens who had given birth between 2008 and 2010, 72% lived with their parents (*cited in* Wilson et al, 2017, p.513). This is a striking figure though by itself does not necessarily imply that the mother’s family is providing childcare support. It is unclear whether the reason for the contrasting results is related to different social and environmental contexts or to different study designs.

**Figure 1 – Support sources for young mothers**



**Figure 2 – Distribution of support sources for mothers by age**

	15-24 years <i>(Young)</i>	25-29 years <i>(Late-20s)</i>	30-34 years <i>(Early-30s)</i>	35+ years <i>(Mature)</i>	Group difference
Lives with child's biological father	73.4	90.8	95.7	93.1	*
Support needs are met	54.4	52.7	48.8	42.4	*
Partner is supportive	55.2	58.5	54.8	55.5	
Partner actively parents	43.7	44.8	44.8	43.1	
Attached to family	59.1	68.0	61.7	56.6	*
Attached to friends	39.0	42.5	42.4	40.2	
Regularly contacts parents	85.9	88.3	85.3	77.1	*
Regularly contacts friends	65.7	69.9	72.5	67.7	*
Parents provide support	55.4	58.6	50.5	40.8	*
In-laws provide support	37.5	38.0	30.2	24.5	*
Parents provide childcare	18.6	21.2	18.6	13.9	*
Other family provide childcare	3.9	3.5	2.1	2.8	*
Used a playgroup	31.0	44.3	46.6	37.8	*
n (observations)	790	1,333	1,887	1,077	

## 4.2 Adolescent parents with a disability

### 4.2.1 Young people with a disability

The [Young adults in the NDIS](#) report provides some important contextual information for thinking about informal support of young parents with a disability. As of June 2021 there were 35,821 active participants 15 to 18 years old (23,642 males and 11,821 females). 88% of live with their parents. Less than 1% live with their children. This figure does not account for the number of young parents whose children are in foster care or kinship care.

### 4.2.2 Parents with a disability

A team from University of Sydney has conducted research focussing on prevalence of parents with intellectual disabilities in Australia using the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (Man, Wade, Llewellyn, 2014a; Man, Wade, Llewellyn, 2014b; Man, Wade, Llewellyn, 2017). Using 2009 data, they estimate a total of 194,217 parents with a disability aged under 40 years old. They note that due to the sample size it was not possible to further specify estimates by age range (pp.176-177).

Parents with intellectual disabilities are more likely to have less frequent contact with friends and family compared to non-disabled parents and to parents with other disabilities (Man, Wade, Llewellyn 2014a, pp.13-16; refer to [Figure 3 – Parents contact with friends and family](#)) and more likely to be involved with child protective services (Man, Wade, Llewellyn, 2017, p.173). Parents with intellectual disabilities are 3 times more likely to care for a child with a disability compared to parents without a disability. Parents with other disabilities (not intellectual disability) are twice as likely to care for a child with a disability compared to parents without a disability (Man, Wade, Llewellyn, 2014b, p.10).

The findings of Man, Wade, and Llewellyn are based on survey data from prior to the roll-out of the NDIS. This is a significant factor in the current Australian support environment and may affect the levels of funded, informal or community supports received by people with a disability.

**Figure 3 – Parents contact with friends and family**

Characteristic	Estimated % (95% CI) within each parent group		
	Parents with intellectual disability	Parents with other disabilities	Non-disabled parents
<b>SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING</b>			
<b>Contact with family/friends</b>			
Less than weekly contact	14.9 (4.6–38.9)	2.0 (1.2–3.2)	2.5 (1.3–4.7)
At least weekly contact but less than daily	56.5 (32.5–77.8)	46.2 (38.7–53.9)	48.2 (43.9–52.4)
Had daily contact	28.6 (13.9–49.9)	51.8 (44.5–58.9)	49.4 (45.0–53.8)

## 5. References

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## 6. Version control

Version	Amended by	Brief Description of Change	Status	Date
1.0	AHR908	Research paper locating data on levels of support for adolescent parent with and without a disability.	Approved	21-12-2021