

ABSTRACT

Psychiatric Morbidity in 13-17 year old mothers,
12 to 18 months Postnally - Correlation
with family structure and support.

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This study examines the extent to which childbearing and childrearing increase the vulnerability to psychiatric morbidity, in primiparous, 13 to 17 year old Trinidadian girls, twelve to eighteen months post-delivery. Correlations between the teenage mothers' perception of family support, family structure and psychiatric morbidity are also explored.

All primiparous 13 to 17 year old females ($n = 111$) who resided in counties Victoria and St. Patrick and whose babies were one to one and a half years of age, were subjected to a two-part questionnaire. The GHQ-28 measured the probability of psychiatric morbidity and a 22-item questionnaire was used to identify characteristics of family structure and family and partner's support. Chisquare statistical analyses were done to measure the extent of association between these two parameters. Forty-

one percent of these teenage mothers had a probable psychiatric problem with somatic and anxiety symptoms being most prevalent.

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The study further identified age as the only socio-demographic variable that had significant association with psychiatric morbidity. In addition, a very significant association with psychiatric morbidity was indicated in the following situations: a teenage mother living alone with her child with neither family nor partner support in a single parent family unit, subjects perceiving emotional rejection from parents, and where the teenager's parents alone supported baby. Conversely too much support, in particular excessive caretime given to baby, is also significantly associated with psychiatric morbidity.

The implementation of specialized clinics and services was recommended as a means of addressing the needs of teenage mothers rearing their babies, based on the findings of this study.