Female College Students’ Thoughts Regarding Childbearing, Family, and Parenting Practices

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Background & Purpose

Background: Given the influx of information via technology (e.g., internet, social media) over the last 25 years, it is likely that current millennial college students are aware of various childbirth options (e.g., hospital birth, home birth), and more knowledgeable about the benefits of breastfeeding and vaccinations than students were 25 years ago. Further, exposure to information via technology has also likely increased college students’ awareness of the variability in family structure (e.g., cohabitation, marriage). Within the field of Maternal & Child Health, it is essential for practitioners to be proactive in planning for future needs and addressing misconceptions. In doing so, it is likely that both maternal and child health outcomes will continue to improve in subsequent years.

Purpose: This study examined the variability in current UWEC female students’ reported aspirations and knowledge surrounding childbearing, family structure, and parenting practices, particularly those practices that may have been less common 25 years ago (e.g., cohabitation, water births).

Questions & Predictions

Questions:
1. What are female college students’ preferences for decisions that must be made during pregnancy? (type of delivery, having diagnostic screening)
2. What are female college students’ preferences regarding family structure? (marriage vs. cohabitation)
3. What are female college students’ preferences for parenting practices? (breastfeeding, vaccinations)

Predictions: I expect that a large proportion of the participants in this study will be accepting of non-conventional childbearing, family, and parenting practices that were not common 25 years ago.

Procedure & Demographics

Method: Participants completed an anonymous online survey (Qualtrics) that included 30 items assessing their thoughts regarding childbearing, family structure, parenting practices, and demographics.

Inclusion Criteria:
- UW-Eau Claire female student, age 18+, unmarried, has no children, not currently pregnant

Overview:
- The initial sample included 282 female college students, of which 229 (81.2%) indicated a desire to have children. These 229 participants then answered questions regarding childbirth, parenting practices, and demographics.
- The majority of participants were White which is representative of the UWEC Campus population.

Discipline:
- Humanities: 3.1%  
- Social Science: 28.8%  
- Education/CSD: 16.6%  
- Nursing/Healthcare: 22.7%  

Age:
- Human Sciences: (18-19): 60.7%  
- Social Science: (20-21): 31%  
- Education/CSD: (22-23): 7.4%  
- Nursing/Healthcare: (24-35): 4.9%

Limitations & Future Direction

Participants were required to provide demographic information at the end of the survey. In hindsight, this was a limitation because the 50+ participants who stated they were unsure or indicated a desire to have no children were not subsequently prompted to provide demographic information.

Future research should assess perceptions of male college students. Maternal and Child Health is increasingly concerned with making sure fathers are not forgotten because they play an important role too. This includes supporting paternity leave, single fathers, stay-at-home fathers, and father-child play.

References