

Married Students with Kids at BYU Hawaii

This research studied married students with kids who attend Brigham Young University of Hawaii. Informants included the wives who were part-time students or stay at home moms whose husbands are full time students. Both types of wives have very similar backgrounds and for this purpose they are grouped together as one type of informant. All informants live at BYU Hawaii's student married housing called Temple View Apartments (TVA). They all belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Settings used to gather information from the informants include their apartments, playgrounds around the apartment complex, and the chapel where they attend church.

The methods used in this research included participant observation, and formal and informal interviews. Most of the information gathered came from participant observations and informal interviews. Informants were between ages 22-27 and all have been married for less than six years with not more than two kids. None had kids older than age five. The issues talked about with the informants included finance, social life, time management, and intimacy between husband and wife.

One of the biggest concerns among these small student families is their financial situations. As students with children, many of them have to be very creative and exploit all possible resources to help make ends meet in the home. All married students, because of their low income status, qualify for the federal Pell-grants which covers all tuition and cost of textbooks for fall and winter semesters. Surprisingly, finances are not a very big concern when these couples are considering having children while in school. In fact Lily, who is a citizen from another country, wants to have as many children as possible while in school. The reason for this is because these students yearly income is so little it is all paid for. Lily uses a health program called Quest that if qualified for, pays for all of ones medical bills and check ups while pregnant continuing up until the time the child is born.

All of the informants interviewed had used Quest health insurance to pay for their use of the hospitals and examinations. As for living expenses, a variety of situations occur. Many of the informants reported that before they had children it was very easy for both of them to hold jobs and provide for their living expenses. After children, however, somebody needed to constantly be with the child leaving little time for work. Many of the informants have to resort to student loans to get them through school. Some will still work at their jobs or are forced to seek out jobs that pay better and work into their schedule while taking out loans to cover what expenses are left over. Some rely on parental support to get by. It was very common to see an increase in parental support financially when the child was born paying for many of the necessities that a child needs i.e. diapers, cribs, clothing, and these sorts of things. All the informants interviewed agree that making ends meet was difficult and at times seemed overwhelming, it was possible and most important it was definitely worth it.

With the mothers being home all the time many found it hard to work. Time and immobility were the main problems for those interviewed. One informant Erica provided her services as a baby sitter for other married students who were in the same situation as her who live in the same apartment complex as her. The job was very easy and worked out very well for her because she could baby sit at her house and look after her own 18 month year old each day. She did not make very much money because the child's family also had a very low income and is only able to pay her four dollars an hour. Erica really isn't baby sitting for the money, although what little bit helps, she does it to be nice and help out that particular family that could not afford a real baby sitter than for the money. Maria, who has a two year old son and a one year old daughter, took a job tutoring very close by in the community. It worked out well because she was able to work close by and make a decent wage for this community. However, it was hard because she had to find and pay for a babysitter for her children while she worked. It was a double edged sword of sorts, making money working all the while having to pay for someone to watch her kids.

In many situations, just after the child was born, the wife dropped out of school for a few semesters to stay home with the child while the husband continued to go to school. However, one couple interviewed negotiated their class schedule so that while

her husband was in school, she could stay at home and while she was in school her husband was able to stay at home. These marriages are highly gendered. The man is the eventual sole bread winner for the family while the wife is a typical stay-at-home mother while the children are young. Whether the wife finishes school or not depends on the couple or the situation. It seems clear that amongst almost all couples that the husbands' schooling and career are top priority because it is assumed that he will be the provider for the family. They know their roles and feel much fulfilled.

The couple's social lives changed when they had children. Informants reported that before children, they went out often to see movies or out to dinner. After kids, however, going out to a movie or dinner is a very rare occurrence. It is much more difficult to just get up and go out. Where going out to diner isn't too difficult, going to see a movie is near impossible. A common problem that seemed to arise in almost every discussion was finding a babysitter. The problem seemed to stem from the fact that the majority of the married students all had very young children or even newborns of only a few months. These informants told us that it was hard to find a baby sitter because with a newborn, they need much more attention and care than say a two year old. So they can't just use anyone. Being new parents as well it was obvious that they were very new at parenting and very reluctant to leave their child in the care of anyone other than family. Only one of the informants interviewed had family that lived here on the island and close to the university. They used their family quite a bit to watch their two year old son Asher. His mother Rose is now pregnant with another child and she mentioned she may be calling on her families services even more after their next child is born.

Church is another huge part of the informant's social lives. The LDS church has a program meant just for women who are wives and mothers; it is called the relief society. The relief society teaches lessons of advice and encouragement. Once a month the relief society will get together and have a special women's conference that focuses on many different things. Usually these conferences will include some sort of activity that teaches women how to be better mothers or wives for their families. For example, one of the informants interviewed Sarah, talked about the many different recipes that she learned and prepares quite often for her husband and children. She also talked about different cleaning tips she learned from the other woman in the Relief Society that have helped her

immensely in her home. Other activities include making different kinds of crafts; learn different workouts, dances, etc... The women will also get some of the men to volunteer and watch their children while they attend the conference. For those interviewed, church and interacting with the women in the Relief Society is the major source of socializing those interviewed do.

How the informants spend their day revolves entirely around their children. Most informants say that their days can become extremely repetitive. Most moms spend their time at home chasing around their children. In the morning they watch lots of TV and try to keep their children somewhat entertained. In the apartment complex there are many playgrounds built for the many children running around at all hours of the day. Many of the mothers will go to these playgrounds at least once during the day to escape the house and get outside and get some fresh air. There are other mothers at the playground so it is a good time to socialize and meet new mothers with children of a similar age. There are many chores that fall into this daily routine that are very time consuming. Laundry is one for example; laundry can take quite a lot of time since there is only one laundry room for the entire apartment complex with many washers and dryers. Going back and forth and switching the washers to the driers is a very tedious chore. One of the informants named Jessica said she looks forward to evenings because her husband can then look after her children so she can go to a yoga or aerobics class. This is absolutely essential in her day she says because it gives her a chance to relieve some stress and talk to some adults for a change instead of children. Most informants also make sure they spend time as a family. The church sets the standard for families in the informants life because the church councils on having a family home evening every Monday night. Family home evening can be as simple as taking a walk or it can be watching a movie together no matter what it is it helps the parents bond with each other and their children.

Intimacy was another part of the informants life that changed quite a bit after having children. The informant's sex life is as consistent as before but the spontaneity is gone. One of the informants Anne, talked about the minute her daughters fall asleep her husband would initiate sex. This was a fairly common occurrence amongst all the informants. One other negative aspect reported about the change in intimacy after having children was that many of the women gained weight during pregnancy and felt less sexy.

Even so the men never seemed to complain and never reported feeling less attracted to their wives after having children. Even with the weight gain the informants reported having a great sex life still and having a greater love for each other after having kids. It really does seem to pull them closer together as a couple. An informant Lisa said that now that she shares such a wonderful gift like children with her husband she can't help but have a greater love and respect of her husband more than ever.

Many aspects of marriage change quite a bit after having children. Things such as finances, social life, time management, and intimacy were a big change for these informants. Many hardships were encountered by the informants but all agreed that the decision to have children at such a young age while still in school is one of the best decisions that they have ever made.