

## **Study Finds Colleges Don't Support Parenting**

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Staff Writer

(April 24, 2008) With half of all abortions in the U.S. being performed on college-aged women, a new report suggests part of the reason may be the lack of pregnancy and parenting resources available on most college campuses.

The report, *Perception is Reality*, was compiled by Feminists for Life (FFL) after conducting a survey among 165 members of student pro-life groups in 117 colleges and universities across the country. The students were asked to put themselves in the shoes of a pregnant or parenting student and see how readily they could find the resources a woman would need to either have or support her baby while continuing her education.

What the students found is that most college campuses either lack appropriate resources or students aren't aware of the resources available. Survey respondents said housing was unavailable for these students and that they were most confused about, or unaware of, campus childcare options, school financial aid, and healthcare policies.

“This survey confirms everything I have been told during the last decade of moderating Pregnancy Resource Forums on campuses across the country,” said FFL president Serrin Foster.

“Even when students who are not feeling the pressure of an unplanned pregnancy try to look for resources, either they can't find them or the resources are inadequate or expensive. And perception is reality. A perceived lack of resources can drive pregnant women to abortion or result in parents dropping out of college to face a lifetime of poverty. Pregnant women and parents need and deserve better resources and easily accessible information.”

Specifically, survey respondents found that students were unable to find basic information on the range of options available to secure financial aid for housing, tuition and childcare costs.

“The fact that many respondents did not even know how to find information on healthcare and financial aid suggests a serious gap in the way college administrations educate students about their most basic resources,” the report states.

Students are also woefully uneducated about paternity establishment and the rights and responsibilities of fathers, the report found. “Both of these elements are crucial for establishing the financial security of a pregnant or parenting student.”

Schools that do provide pregnancy resource information in the form of pamphlets and posters tend to do so in only a few places on campus.

While some schools are trying to offer flexible class scheduling and other on-campus resources to pregnant or parenting students, overall, basic resources are usually unpublicized. “Students remain unaware of the services available to them in the event they face an unplanned pregnancy,” the

report states. “For these students, the perception that they have no resources or support is their reality.”

The idea for the study was born more than a decade ago when a board member of the FFL told the story of her unplanned pregnancy while in college. “Without housing on campus for me and my baby, without on-site daycare, without maternity coverage in my health insurance, it sure doesn’t feel like I have much of a free choice.”

During her travels to campuses across the country, Foster began to notice that she had never seen a visibly pregnant student-or faculty member.

In 1997, FFL held their first Pregnancy Resource Forum to assess this situation on campus. The first forum was held at Georgetown University and students said that either the resources were lacking or information about them just couldn’t be found. This story was repeated at colleges and universities across the country indicating a widespread problem.

This prompted the launching of the first-ever Pregnancy Resources Survey in the fall of 2007 with the aim of determining what students perceived about their schools’ resources and support for pregnant and parenting students.

“Students' difficulty finding answers to survey questions suggests a need for colleges to designate or establish a central office or staff person to guide pregnant and parenting students to the resources they need," said FFL National Program Director Cayce Utley, M.A. Public Policy, who prepared the report.

FFL advocates the establishment of on-campus offices to serve parenting students, prospective student parents who are pregnant or imminently anticipating an adoption, and students who are placing or have placed a child for adoption through the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Pregnant and Parenting Student Services Act, which was introduced by Senators Elizabeth Dole (R-NC) and Ben Nelson (D-NE) in March, 2007.

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