

# **The Benefits of a Parenting Programme for Adolescent Mothers and Fathers**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research was to gain insight into the experience of adolescent mothers and fathers after attending a parenting programme together. One of this study's aim was to increase knowledge, awareness and understanding surrounding the benefits of a parenting programme for adolescent parents. Another objective was to introduce a parenting programme for teenage fathers since locally no ongoing programmes for teenage fathers are available. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four couples of adolescent parents and one teenage mother after they attended a six-week parenting programme. The participants were selected purposefully by the officer in charge at Servizz Għożża, which is the only organisation in Malta which offers its services to adolescent mothers and their families. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was adopted as the methodological approach, and four superordinate themes emerged from the analysis. Throughout the parenting programme, adolescent parents felt supported and understood by the other participants. The programme also helped these teenage parents to improve their parenting by encouraging their children to engage in positive behaviours and parenting them together. The programme was also an opportunity for these parents to reflect on parenting and their challenges. This study introduced new insights about the possible focus on couple relationship within parenting programmes for adolescent parents and also the involvement of these adolescents' families to encourage more familial support.

Keywords: adolescent parents, parenting programme, support

## **Declaration of Authenticity**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work in this dissertation titled “The Benefits of a Parenting Programme for Adolescent Mothers and Fathers” in partial fulfilment of the Master in Systemic Family Psychotherapy, was carried out by myself. Appropriate citation has been included when referring to studies by other authors.

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Rationale**

Adolescent parents in Malta have been identified as being in a dire need for more opportunities to engage in equal sharing of responsibilities between parents (National Commission for the promotion of equality, 2012). However, most of the focus both in research locally and abroad is mostly on teenage mothers rather than on adolescent parents. It is crucial for social policies to recognise that for every young mother, there is always a father.

When teenagers become parents, there are two families involved, whose life cycles are somewhat muddled up, as a couple of adolescents who are still attending school or have just started working and are on the verge of independence and leaving home, suddenly become parents and most of the time, they become entirely dependent on their parents again. Most often, the new baby becomes part of one's family unit, or his/her custody is shared between the two families. The effects of teenage pregnancy on both parents and their families surely have significant practical and policy implications.

In Malta, the only organisation which offers its services to adolescent parents is Servizz Għożża, which forms part of the National School Support Services provided by the Ministry for Education and Employment. However, these services are mainly limited to adolescent mothers, and until today, no programmes are being offered to teenage fathers or adolescent parents together. In Malta, in the year 2018, 62 girls between the ages of 13 and 18 years got pregnant. The number of pregnant girls per year has decreased drastically and steadily, from 191 pregnant girls in 2008 (Servizz Għożża Statistics, 2008-2018). The majority of these teenagers keep on living with their family of origin, for several years after their baby is born.

A number of these pregnant girls attend Servizz Għożża throughout their pregnancy, where they are offered sessions that help them cope with their pregnancy, learn parenting skills and develop skills that help them develop communication skills that they can use in their relationships, both with the baby's father or partner and with their parents and in-laws. After they give birth, these girls keep on receiving assistance from Servizz Għożża by attending a mother and baby support group once a week through which the guidance teachers and counsellor continually support them. Also, guidance and counselling sessions are offered to pregnant teenagers and young mothers, their partners & their families, whenever they need. However, as I have already mentioned, no structured programmes are offered to the fathers to be or adolescent fathers. The decrease in the number of pregnant girls attending Servizz Għożża might be an opportunity for the services provided to be expanded and to include the fathers to be and young fathers in the programme.

Throughout my work as a guidance teacher at Servizz Għożża, I have met several pregnant teenagers and young mothers, and I have become aware that at times, they struggle with problems in their relationship with the father of their child, and on how they can share parenting responsibilities even when they are no longer a couple. I have reflected a lot on my role in supporting these adolescents, and this has driven me to inquire more on developing parenting programmes for both adolescent parents. I believe in the importance of involving both the child's parents from the very beginning as this might offer a more solid foundation for the upbringing of their offspring. I feel that more must be done locally to engage adolescent fathers in their children's lives and to educate them to involve themselves more and become more responsible just like what is already being done with expectant teenage mothers and young mothers. I hope that this study will help to raise awareness and understanding surrounding the role of the adolescent parents together in their children's lives

which will hopefully influence the implementation of support services aimed for both teenage mothers and fathers.

## **1.2 Research Question**

Research about teenage pregnancy and adolescent parents in Malta has been mainly focused on the teen mothers and barely touched the involvement of the child's father in the children's upbringing (Bezzina & Dibben, 2002; Cutajar, 2006; Meli, 2006; Dibben, 2016, Grech et.al, 2017), even though, Bezzina & Dibben (2002), found that in all their participants' cases, the fathers took on their responsibilities and were willing to involve themselves in their new families. On the other hand, in Meli's study (2006), all the participants had barely any contact with the father of their child after the baby was born. In this study, it seems that the fathers were quite present during the pregnancy, but unfortunately, the relationship with the mother went downhill after the child was born. This is also my experience as a guidance teacher at Servizz Għożża, where I often observe that several relationships deteriorate once the adolescents become parents. This is one of the reasons why I believe in the importance of involving adolescent fathers to be from the very beginning and helping both parents to learn skills that aid them to support each other throughout their pregnancy and after their child is born.

Foreign research also tends to focus more on teenage motherhood rather than on teenage parenthood even when it comes to the development and implementation of parenting programmes for adolescent parents (Coren et al. 2003; Barnet, 2012; Chrisler et al. 2012; Hudgins et al. 2014). Young fathers are often neglected, both as potential resources to their children as well as clients with their own unmet needs. Society in general associates teenage

parenthood with teenage motherhood, most probably because, most teenage parents are female as most adolescent mothers' children are fathered by adult men (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). However, even if most of the fathers are not regarded as adolescents, and may not reside with their children, their involvement should still be considered as necessary as in any other child's life, whose parents are both adults.

Because of all this, in this study, I intend to explore the experience of both adolescent mothers and fathers after attending a parenting programme together. My primary objective in conducting this study is to explore the personal experiences of teenage parents who take part in the parenting programme and identify its effect on them and their relationship. Thus, the ultimate goal of this research is to understand what might help these adolescents to improve their parenting skills and their interactions with their children while they work together to support each other as parents.

Hence, the main research question in this study is:

What are the benefits of a parenting programme for adolescent mothers and fathers?

### **1.3 Conceptual Framework**

In relation to this research, I give a lot of importance to the family systems theory, which helps me understand the value of the role of both parents in a child's life. The family systems theory is a theory made known to by Dr Murray Bowen. He proposes that individuals cannot be understood on their own, but as a part of their family (Carr, 2012). Families are systems of interrelated individuals, none of whom can be understood in isolation from the system. The behaviour of every individual within the family is related to and dependent upon the

behaviour of all the others. All behaviour is communication and therefore influences and is influenced by others (Watzlawick et al. 1967). The implementation of a parenting programme for both adolescent mothers and fathers would signify a shift towards enhancing relationships on a family level as one unit, rather than merely focusing on parental skills of a single individual. According to Carlson & McLanahan (2006), offering parenting programmes to both parents has a more significant positive impact on the children.

From a systemic perspective, fathers need to be recognised as much as mothers and mothers as much as fathers. Both parents need to be given attention and support when it comes to child-rearing because research shows that both parents' involvement in parenting interventions is beneficial. Several studies show that involving both parents reduces children's negative behaviours while increasing positive reactions, maintains changes in parenting over time, develops parents' ability to parent with their partner and decreases co-parenting conflict (Lee and Hunsley, 2006; Lundahl et al. 2008; Mockford and Barlow, 2004; Schulz et al. 2006).

Another framework I am working from in relation to the research question is the Social Constructionism theory which may be defined as a perspective which considers that much of what we believe in is because of social and interpersonal influences (Gergen, 1985). Our environment and society affect the way we construct everything around us, and this process varies over time and across contexts. According to social construction theory, individuals receive messages from society about the roles they should adopt (Lupton and Barclay, 1997). Social construction theory argues that the discourses represented in society help construct how its members will think about and respond to a particular experience. Parenthood is one construct which is culturally defined within social, economic, and historical contexts (Apple

and Golden, 1997). The meaning that people give to motherhood and fatherhood is affected by the conversations they have within their social context.

Parenthood is often associated with more changes in mothers' lives than in fathers' lives, given the culturally widespread assumption that mothers are the primary caregivers (Pinquart & Teubert, 2010). Fatherhood also emerges as a social construct through negotiating and rearranging fathers' own experiences (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). Fatherhood is a socially constructed idea that results from gender, economic, and political constructs that define families (Thorne, 1992). The meanings associated with fatherhood differ across time, contexts, and households. The stereotypical gender construct can leave men outside the mother-child relationship and less emotionally connected with their children (Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005). However, recent changes in social expectations have redefined fatherhood from breadwinner and disciplinarian to being involved in the day-to-day care of children of all ages (McBride et al. 2005).

When it comes to adolescent parents, most often, fathers are less likely to be co-resident and therefore, less likely to be involved in the child's day-to-day life (Fagot et al. 1998). This lack of involvement from adolescent fathers might be maintained by cultural stereotypes which support teenage mothers, while most often leaving fathers entirely out of the picture. Furstenberg and Harris (1993) conducted a study about adolescent mothers' children, many of whom had also been born to a teenage father. They found that secure attachments to co-resident fathers led to improved behavioural and educational outcomes in adolescence. However, children with no relationship to their fathers were found to be more emotionally and behaviourally adjusted than those who had poor relationships with their fathers or those whose fathers were highly involved in early childhood but decreased their contact over time.

From a family systems and a social constructionism perspective, it is imperative to engage both parents with their children in programmes aimed to support parenting, rather than associating parenthood with mothers and assuming that mothers are the only parents who are interested in developing skills to interact with their children. Primary prevention principles suggest that early engagement of both teenage parents in taking care of their children provides early intervention opportunities which encourage parents to keep on parenting together and prevent them from becoming estranged (Pruett et al. 2017).

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter aims to review relevant literature surrounding the area of parenting programmes for adolescent parents with an emphasis on the involvement of fathers in these programmes and the lives of their children. I will begin by discussing the local research focusing on adolescent parents. I will then turn my attention to foreign studies on the young fathers' involvement and the support needed by teenage parents. Finally, I will tackle the research found about parenting programmes for adolescent parents.

### **2.2 Local Research**

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, local research tends to focus more on adolescent mothers rather than on both parents. The study of teen parenthood has become almost linked with the study of teen mothers, and thus, little attention has been dedicated to the study of teen fathers or adolescent parents. However, as Mamo (2007) found out in her research, it seems that young fathers wish to be involved more and taken more into consideration. None of the twelve young fathers interviewed by Mamo (2007) had any doubts about whether to keep the baby or abort it or give it up for adoption. On the other hand, these teenage fathers wished to have received a much more inclusive service from *Servizz Għozza*, which would also be aimed for their needs and not just targeted for adolescent mothers. These teenagers expressed their wish for a more structured support service where they can vent out their problems and listen to other adolescents who are going through similar situations.

Servizz Għożża offers its services primarily to pregnant teenagers and young mothers and the support provided to young fathers is very limited. Out of the 62 pregnant girls referred to Servizz Għożża during the year 2018, only 21 girls between the ages of fourteen and eighteen years attended the programme (Servizz Għożża Statistics 2008 – 2018). Expectant couples of any age in Malta can participate in prenatal courses at Parentcraft services at Mater Dei hospital. However, these courses are only aimed to provide information about pregnancy, childbirth and childrearing, while Servizz Għożża also offers beneficial sessions about relationships, contraception and sexual health to the young mothers. It would be a favourable opportunity for young fathers to be able to attend such sessions along with their partners.

In their study about young unmarried mothers, Bezzina & Dibben (2002) found that unlike what is generally perceived by society, all the partners of the mothers who were interviewed, remained involved in their children's lives, even those who did not stay in a relationship with the mother after the birth of their child. All the fathers were described as being very responsible and took on the role of caregivers for their newly formed families. Borg Xuereb (2006, in Aquilina, 2012) found that Maltese teenage fathers appreciate any support they receive from family and friends. For them, fatherhood mostly means financial responsibility, and they recognise that to be fathers, they need to work harder. Borg Xuereb (2006, in Aquilina, 2012) also found that fatherhood raises feelings of lost youth since these young fathers felt that they had to suddenly grow up, mature and take on new responsibilities since most teenage pregnancies are unplanned and unexpected.

Contrary to the findings above, Aquilina (2012), found that in most cases where the young parents were not in a relationship anymore, the father did not contribute financially or to the

upbringing of the child and hardly maintained any contact with the child. In her study about young mothers, Meli (2006) also found that all the partners of the mothers interviewed had left before the baby was born and were not involved in any way in their children's lives. It would be interesting to carry out a research in which these fathers are asked what would have helped them to remain involved in their children's lives.

Bezzina & Dibben (2002) found that young mothers perceive society as being very judgemental towards them for getting pregnant at such a tender age. They feel that, unlike young males, they are judged for getting pregnant at an early age, whereas the males might be congratulated for becoming fathers. However, when interviewing young fathers, Mamo (2007), found that at times, these adolescents also feel judged by society for becoming fathers at a young age as they are perceived as being irresponsible.

After carrying out a research project about the life prospects of teenage parents in 2012, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality suggested how important it is for policymakers to support both adolescent parents in taking a hands-on role in bringing up their children rather than putting all the responsibility of parenthood on the mother. The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality also suggested that Servizz Għożża could help in organising programmes to raise awareness on the value of equal sharing of responsibilities between parents and to encourage more fathers to undertake caring duties. No research about parenting programmes for teenage parents or expectant adolescents in Malta was found.

## **2.3 Foreign Research**

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, foreign research also tends to focus more on teenage mothers rather than on teenage fathers even when it comes to the development and implementation of parenting programmes. (Coren et al. 2003; Barnet, 2012; Chrisler et al. 2012; Hudgins et al. 2014). According to Daguerre & Nativel (2006), when discussing teenage pregnancy, policymakers focus on adolescent motherhood, and this might be linked to UNICEF's (2001) statement that in the modern society, extended education, two-income households and careers for women are becoming the norm. Generally speaking, for teenage mothers, it is a greater struggle to continue their education and focus on their careers than for adolescent fathers. Thus, policymakers might feel the need to focus more on adolescent mothers to help them be at par with their male counterparts. Both the United States and the United Kingdom have started to include young fathers in the layout of social policies meant for teenage parents, but it seems that advancement is quite slow (Daguerre & Nativel, 2006).

### **2.3.1 Fathers' Involvement**

Unfortunately, few studies are found about supporting young fathers to be adequate parents as it might be assumed that young men do not want to take any responsibility for, or play an active part in the upbringing of their child. A socially constructed impression of young fathers is that they are irresponsible and leave their partners as soon as they find out that they are pregnant or right after the baby is born.

Research on teen father participation in their children's upbringing, suggests that the majority of teen fathers were considerably involved in the lives of their children, maintained contact

with them and played a role in the children's upbringing. (Speak, 1997; Smith et al. 2002; Glikman 2004). Research shows that adolescent fathers who maintain active participation in the prenatal, neonatal, and postpartum period with the teenage mother have a higher likelihood of a stronger attachment with their child (Cox & Bithoney, 1995). Where there is a positive involvement with the father, particularly in the early years, better social, behavioural and psychological outcomes for the child may be expected (Robinson, 1988; Flouri and Buchanan, 2004; Carlson, 2006; Sarkadi *et al.* 2008). The findings in these qualitative research studies help to challenge the social construct of the irresponsible young father.

#### *2.3.1.1. Barriers to Fathering*

Under-involvement of adolescent fathers with their children results from internalisation of masculine ideas of parenting (Nylund 2006). A definition of masculinity, which is generally linked to financial status and occupation, might lead young fathers to minimally maintain contact with their children.

Research shows that unlike mothers who are aware of their baby growing inside their womb, give birth & spend a lot of time with their baby, fathers, especially young ones, who generally do not live in the same household as their teenage partner & child, do not feel appreciated or supported in their role (Fagot et. al., 1998). Their lack of involvement over time may have to do with a growing feeling of uselessness throughout the mother's pregnancy and after the child is born. A study conducted by Tyrer et al. (2005), shows that most of the young men who took part in the research felt left out from significant decisions from the onset of pregnancy. For example, they felt excluded from decisions regarding

whether the mother will keep the baby or whether to abort or to give the child for adoption. Most of the participants said that they tried their best to assume their fatherhood responsibility. However, they felt that it was not always easy to maintain their paternal role due to factors which they felt were beyond their control. These young fathers also reported little encouragement and support to help them adjust to their father role.

According to Speak (2006), there are several external stumbling blocks which are experienced by adolescent fathers when it comes to maintaining a relationship with their children. One of these is the legal system. When a young father is underage, it means that he has no legal right to his child, and as a result, he is not a father in the sight of the law. This is also the case in Malta for fathers under the age of eighteen years.

Speak (2006), found that the child's mother and the maternal parents may prevent the fathers from visiting their children if they consider them as unreliable, uncommitted and irresponsible. Maternal grandparents may show a hostile attitude to teenage fathers and be reluctant to his involvement in the life of their grandchild, especially if he has a criminal record. Since most of the relationships formed in teenage years split up, some young fathers might find it more challenging to access the child as there might be a conflict between the partners, or negative attitudes from the maternal grandmother and other extended family members (Speak et al. 1997). Berrington et al. (2005), found that the frequency of contact with the father also tends to decrease if the mother or the father is in a new relationship, or the father had other children. Bunting and McAudley (2004) also found that conflictual relationships with the child's mother and maternal grandparents are obstacles to the father's involvement in his children's lives.

Young fathers often complain that they don't find a lot of support from professionals throughout the pregnancy and during birth, as most professionals tend to focus their attention on the mothers rather than on the fathers. Fathers also remark that they feel unwelcome at antenatal and post-natal classes (Rolph, 1999). Birbeck (2004) found that 70% of the fathers he interviewed had not received any support from government services following the birth of their child. The remaining 30% only came into contact with medical services, such as midwives, through the mothers of their children. Speak (2006) also states that whereas the educational policy and professionals offer support services for pregnant and teenage mothers, teenage fathers are provided only minimal support from these institutions. Furthermore, some professionals might even discourage young mothers from continuing a relationship with the teenage father.

#### *2.3.1.2 Young Fathers' Aspirations*

In a study conducted by Tyrer et al. (2005), most young fathers expressed positive feelings towards their child and their role despite their initial shock at learning of the pregnancy. Others said that fatherhood had a calming effect on them, while others felt the need to do something to assume their new responsibilities, such as moving away from disruptive friends, finding employment or helping the mother with childcare.

Speak et al. (1997) found that a common theme that emerged from interviews with young fathers is that they hope to be more involved with their children than they feel their fathers were. For young men who grew up without their father or with very minimal contact with him, the wish to do things differently and rewrite their script becomes quite strong. They

observed that many young fathers want their children to remember them as being present in their lives.

Although young fathers are generally perceived as being absent or indifferent to their children's needs, this is not necessarily a realistic hypothesis (Speak, 2006). Some fathers take an active role in bringing up their children together with their mother and contribute financially to their needs; others meet their children regularly depending on court agreements or the decisions of the mother; others only visit their children occasionally or very rarely, eventually becoming estranged from their children altogether.

### **2.3.2 Supporting Adolescent Parents**

Family relationships play a vital role in helping adolescents to develop the necessary skills and confidence to become successful parents.

#### *2.3.2.1 Social Support for adolescent mothers*

Brooks-Gunn and Chase-Lansdale (1995), point out that while early studies reported several benefits of young mothers residing with their parents, more recent research has been highlighting the fact that the multi-generational family environment may not necessarily be supportive either to the young mother or to her baby. They note that mothers co-residing with their mothers report higher levels of stress (Chase-Lansdale et al. 1994). They conclude that the conflicting results may, to some extent, be explained by the different ages of the young mothers in the various studies. Therefore, they suggest that co-residence may be more beneficial for teenagers in the younger age group while it might be less helpful for those who

are older. Dennison and Coleman (1998) found that the best relationships between adolescent mothers and their mothers are associated with the grandmothers' validation of their daughters' parenting ability, and an acknowledgement of their maturity and need for independence. Family factors related to less stressful circumstances for the adolescent mother include early childcare for the teenage mother's child provided by the infant's grandmother, family support that allows the adolescent to finish school and playful interaction between the child and his/her father (Cooley & Unger, 1991).

#### *2.3.2.2 Social Support for adolescent fathers*

Research shows that the couple's relationship before the child is born is a significant factor in determining the role taken by the young father in the upbringing of his child (Speak, 2006; Arai, 2009). When young fathers are involved as early as possible during pregnancy, and during the birth of the child, they are more likely to maintain their involvement over time (Maxwell et al. 2012). Research also suggests that even if the parents of the child aren't in a relationship together anymore, regular interaction with fathers is associated with better social, cognitive and behavioural outcomes for children (Corlyon et al. 2009; Florsheim et al. 2012).

Bunting and McAudley (2004) found that the support received by young fathers from paternal grandmothers, that is, their parents may affect their involvement in the lives of their children. Shields and Pierce (2006) also found that social support from the adolescent father's mother had a positive impact on the father's involvement. This stresses the importance of the support given by the grandparents of the child born to teenage parents, not only the mother's parents but even the father's parents. This research also reinforces the significance of supporting both parents to be equally involved in the child's upbringing. Some mothers are

positive about encouraging their children to spend time with their father, both because they think that it is essential for the child's wellbeing and also because they want the father to share the responsibility even if they are no longer in a relationship together.

Paternal involvement is linked with both maternal and child advantages. Literature has shown that a father's involvement can have a positive influence on maternal depression, breastfeeding rates, parenting methods and the function of the family, as well as a child's well-being, including psychosocial, cognitive and behavioural outcomes (Leslie & Dibden, 2004; Pinzon & Jones, 2012). The early involvement of fathers, from the prenatal period onward, is crucial to facilitate their participation in their children's lives. It is essential for health care providers and other professionals to actively include fathers whenever possible.

### *2.3.2.3 Supporting adolescent parents together*

Professionals who work with expectant adolescents and their extended families need to provide a continuous follow-up, be engaging and non-judgmental, be trained in working with adolescents, and able to focus their support on continuing education as well as the use of contraception and family planning. These qualities successfully stimulate positive outcomes in child-rearing (Klerman, 2002). Klerman (2002) also found that when offering this type of support to adolescent-led families there is a chance for more and better employment, independence, a stronger commitment to continued learning, fewer multiple pregnancies and long-term contraceptive use.

Sometimes professionals might overlook adolescent parents' basic needs, such as food safety and housing, employment, childcare, and education needs. These vital essentials have to be

incorporated in the support provided for teenage parents to be able to better engage both parents in supporting each other to take care of their children (Garg et al. 2013). It is essential for professionals who work with young parents to keep in mind that these adolescents are in the phase of learning basic life skills at the same time as parenting and are often in difficult social and financial circumstances. Maintaining a long-term positive relationship and encouraging independent decision-making, along with constant reassurance, can contribute to resiliency and positive health outcomes for these young families (Thompson, 2016).

### **2.3.4 Parenting programmes for Adolescent Parents**

According to UNICEF (2001), teenage births are today seen as a problem mainly because they are strongly linked with a series of difficulties for the mother, her child, for society in general, and taxpayers in particular. Throughout Europe and the United States, it seems that there is an increasing awareness that the delivery of parenting programmes to young parents can provide additional forms of emotional support and can have short and long-term benefits for all the family members. Adolescent parents often lack knowledge about child development and practical parenting skills, as they have developmental needs of their own.

#### *2.3.4.1. Benefits of Parenting Programmes*

Parenting programmes with a specific focus on understanding the developmental needs of children are effective in improving psychosocial skills in teenage parents as well as increasing positive outcomes for their children (Barlow et al. 2011). Research proposes that particular interventions such as the delivery of antenatal and postnatal support have positive

effects on education, health, and social outcomes for young parents and their children (Hayes, 1987; Moore et al. 1989).

Research also implies that the acquisition of knowledge and skills, in conjunction with feelings of acceptance and encouragement from other parents in the parenting group, are essential in empowering parents to feel in control, and able to cope. Taking part in a parenting programme helps adolescent parents to feel less guilty and socially isolated, to feel more empathy towards their children, and feel more confident in dealing with their children's behaviour (Kane et al. 2007). The key factors that bring about positive change in parenting are the delivery of emotional support and parenting skills that improve the relationship with the children in ways that reinforce positive behaviour and offer new approaches that deal with challenging behaviours (Scott et al. 2006).

A study conducted by the Dublin Institute of Technology (Riordan, 2002), found that 96% of the participants in the parenting programme, believed that this initiative helped them with parenting by providing information on parenting and child development and reassuring them in their parenting role. The type of support needed amongst young parents was brought to light by the Joint Committee on Social, Community and Family Affairs of Dublin (2001). This report recognised that while pregnant teenagers require the same physical care as older women, they might need different consideration when it comes to psychological, emotional and practical support.

Another study conducted by Robbers (2008) on The Caring Equation, which is an intervention programme in the United States for teenage mothers and their male partners, found that after six months, inappropriate expectations of children significantly decreased, empathy significantly increased and positive attitudes toward the use of punishment were

reduced considerably. These changes suggest that the Caring Equation programme is positively changing parental attitudes and behaviours.

Most parenting programmes for teens also focus on positive responses to child behaviour, positive conflict resolution techniques & the use of natural & logical consequences for child behaviour. Research draws attention to the importance of encouraging a trustworthy parent-child relationship which can be supported by teaching parents emotional communication skills and how to relate positively and often with their children (Barlow et al., 2011; Clarkson, 2015). Other parenting programmes for teenage parents encourage the parents to attend the programme with their children so that this would provide them with an opportunity to practice the acquired new skills under supervision through interactions with their children and be praised for their competencies as parents (Bavolek & Dellinger-Bavolek, 1987; Riordan, 2002; Clarkson, 2015).

Several teen parenting programmes emphasise strengthening the relationships not only between teen parents and their children but also between teen parents and their families, that is, maternal & paternal grandparents. The type of family support available to young parents is an essential factor in their wellbeing and that of their children (Riordan, 2002; Kan et al. 2012; Allen et al. 2014; Clarkon, 2015).

#### *2.3.4.2 Involving Adolescent Fathers in Parenting Programmes*

The success of parenting programmes may depend on the ability to successfully engage both mothers and fathers (Piotrowska et al. 2016). By disregarding the role of the father during pregnancy and the child's early years, support services miss a significant chance to support

positive outcomes for the whole family (Lloyd, 2010). Several studies suggest that all adolescent parenting programmes should make a more intensive effort to engage the fathers (Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs,1991; Ekulona, 1994; East & Felice,1996) as father involvement in parenting programmes is essential for improving child outcomes: mainly increased inter-parental consistency in the implementation of parenting practices and reduced parenting conflict. (Lundahl et al. 2008). Fatherhood Institute in the United Kingdom suggests introducing programmes for young fathers to be, to help them to be better equipped for becoming fathers.

Young fathers should also be encouraged to attend such programmes even when they are not in a relationship with the mother of their children anymore. Deconstructing fathering styles helps adolescent fathers to choose their fathering approach knowingly (Nylund, 2006). When teenage fathers are more involved in parenting, most often, the mothers, who are usually looking for some support, feel grateful. These programmes offered for both adolescent parents might help them to reduce conflicts between them as they learn to discuss a more collaborative, shared parenting style.

#### **2.4. Conclusion**

This literature review gave an overview of the support needed by adolescent parents to enhance their relationship to be able to parent together. It also focused on how this support can be extended to parenting programmes provided for teenage parents to help them lessen conflict and stay in dialogue with each other. Throughout this review, a particular emphasis was placed on the involvement of adolescent fathers due to the lack of engagement of teenage fathers by local support services. From this literature review, it emerged that when adolescent

parents are supported and involved to take care and raise their children as a family unit, by inviting them to attend parenting programmes together, their relationship is strengthened, and this helps them to work together for the benefit of their children. It also emerged that little research is dedicated to the experiences and stories of adolescent parents, since parenthood is often socially constructed as motherhood, especially in the case of teenage parents. This research aims at providing a space for adolescent parents to facilitate the experience of new stories—narratives that are more empowering and satisfying for them. It also intends to give hope to these teenage parents for a better future and an opportunity to construct different identities for themselves. In the next chapter, I will present the methodology adopted in this research.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to describe the method employed in this study. I will start by discussing the rationale for choosing a qualitative approach, precisely an IPA approach to explore the benefits of a parenting programme for adolescent parents. I will then explore the epistemological stance and review the criteria for choosing participants and the recruitment process of the participants. The exact procedures that were followed, including data collection and data analysis, will then be outlined, and the ethical considerations discussed. Finally, my self-reflexivity process will be presented.

### **3.2. Research Design**

#### *3.2.1. Rationale for Choosing a Qualitative Approach*

The purpose of this research was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experience of the adolescent parents who took part in the designated parenting programme. I wanted to understand the meaning these adolescents attribute to their experience of taking part in a parenting programme together with the other parent of their child. The most appropriate way to understand these experiences was to obtain detailed personal narratives by conducting a qualitative piece of work. Qualitative methodologies make room for subjectivity as participants emphasise the exclusivity of their own, particular experience (Dallos & Vetere, 2005).

### *3.2.2 Rationale for Selecting IPA*

The methodology chosen is interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is a particular approach specifically created to understand experiences in a specific context (Smith et al. 2009). It focuses on how a person's perception of self, that is, their self-understanding – may change when they go through a particular experience (Farouk, 2014).

IPA is influenced by a postmodern epistemology, and thus it fits within a systemic framework. Similar to systemic concepts, IPA takes into consideration the importance of the researchers' self-reflexivity and the influence of second-order cybernetics (Smith et al. 2009). The phenomenological aspect of IPA is embedded in its aim to explore the participants' personal experience and the meaning they make of this experience (Smith et al. 2009). Consecutively, researchers must also acknowledge their own beliefs, to be genuinely phenomenological in their research. Thus, IPA is also interpretative and makes use of 'double hermeneutics in which the researcher tries to make sense of the participants' personal world (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

### *3.2.3 Consideration of Alternative Analyses*

Smith et al. (2009) maintain that the most crucial point when deciding on a suitable methodology is that it is in line with the epistemological stance from which the research is considered. The initial aim of this research was to focus on the lived experience of adolescent parents who attend a parenting programme together.

Discourse analysis is another methodology with particular attention to the constructive quality of language (Burr, 2003). Discourse analysis could have been used to look into the

experience of the adolescent parents after taking part in a parenting programme. However, I wanted to focus more on the meaning given by the participants of their experience rather than on the role of the language used by the participants.

Narrative analysis was also not considered because it focuses specifically on the participants' stories (Willig, 2013). Since my research question focuses on the experience of a particular phenomenon rather than on a narrative of their story, I concluded that since IPA focuses on people's experiences and understandings of specific events, it would be the most appropriate methodology to adopt to conduct my research.

#### *3.2.4 Epistemological Stance*

A researcher's epistemological stance is the first essential factor which needs to be made clear as this position has a direct influence on the methodology chosen, which in turn justifies the method used to gather the data (Carter & Little, 2007). Throughout this research, I adopted a social constructionist position because when staying with the experience of the participants, as well as taking into consideration the context, the understanding of the experience becomes a construction (Maxwell et al. 2012).

The reality of the participants' experience depends on the perception of the participants (Gil-Rodriguez & Hefferon, 2015). As people are always surrounded by different contexts, all knowledge depends on that particular context and therefore, that experience depends on the person's perspective (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1998). IPA attempts to uncover the meaning and in turn, the reality of people's experiences in the social world. IPA does not view reality as objective, nor does it attempt to define or obtain facts or seek the truth. Instead, it aims to understand the person's own experience, the meaning they make of it and, crucially, the

interpretation which the researcher makes of the person's meaning. IPA's epistemological stance lies on the person's account of their experience. The primary interest of IPA is the lived experience of the participants and the meaning they make of it. The result is the interpretation of how the researcher thinks the participants are thinking (Smith et al. 2009).

Before conducting this research, I was aware that each participant might have a different experience from the others and that each interviewee might have a different perception of the effect of this programme on their lives and in their relationship with their child/children. All the participants' experiences were considered valid, and all knowledge was taken as being specific to the participants' particular context because an IPA researcher acknowledges that all individuals perceive the world and reality in different ways (Oxley, 2016). IPA helps the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding on the subject, in this case, of the benefits of a parenting programme for adolescent parents, and of the personal experience of each participant who took part in the programme.

The researcher is also involved in the research process because he/she is undoubtedly a part of the context and therefore he/she takes an active role in the discovery and construction of knowledge (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1998). In qualitative research, the researcher is not seen as objective but instead brings his or her own assumptions, biases and beliefs to the analysis (Willig, 2013). From a social constructionist view, each experience is a result of a co-creation between one individual and another, in this case, me as a researcher.

Osborn and Smith (1998) state that IPA does not declare to produce a 'true' interpretation of the participants' experience. On the contrary, the results of this analysis are a co-construction between the participants and the researcher because they emerge from the relationship built

between the researcher and the participants, especially in my case in which I conducted a six-week parenting programme with the participants before carrying out the interviews.

### **3.3 Procedure**

#### *3.3.1 Sample*

Within IPA studies, samples should be purposive and homogenous as they need to be drawn from the identified 'expert group' of participants for whom the research question will be meaningful (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez 2011). The purpose of my study was to offer a parenting programme to adolescent parents and identify the subjective perception of this programme through their own experience of it. Thus, for the intention of this research project, since Servizz Għożża, is the only government agency in Malta which offers psychological services and guidance to pregnant teenagers, young mothers and their families, the adolescent parents were recruited from this organisation.

Firstly, I spoke to the officer in charge of Servizz Għożża, who agreed to contact all the expecting students and young mothers attending the institute and their partners/fathers of their child who at least one of the parents was between the ages of 12 and 19 years. All the fathers on record of the students' children were contacted, irrespective of whether they were still in a relationship or not because the focus of my study was on parenting together rather than on the couple relationship. The lowest recorded age of parents or parents to be at Servizz Għożża was that of 12 years of age. The upper age limit of 19 for at least one parent was used because this is coherent with the WHO definition of adolescent parents (Ganchimeg et al. 2014). Since Servizz Għożża caters mostly for young mothers up until their child is three years old, my sample was open to expectant parents and parents of children whose youngest

child was not older than three years of age. Both parents had to agree to take part in the research for them to be eligible since the purpose of the study was to provide a parenting programme for both adolescent mothers and fathers.

After contacting all the eligible participants, eight couples agreed to take part in the study. These couples were invited to come to Servizz Għożża to be given the participant information sheet to sign and be given more information about the research project. The participant information sheet was distributed in Maltese since all participants were Maltese speaking. Eventually, only four couples and a young mother out of the eight couples who signed the participant information sheet attended the full parenting programme and were interviewed. Thus, the sample size was that of nine participants, that is, four couples and one mother, which is considered to be sufficient for IPA since it aims to achieve a detailed account of the participants' individual experience (Smith et al. 2009). It is accepted that there will be a lack of generalisability with IPA studies, due to the unique qualities of the 'expert group' and the small sample size.

### *3.3.2 Data Collection*

For the purpose of this research, I decided to deliver a six-week parenting programme to the adolescent parents who agreed to take part in the study, that is, nine parents in all. The programme consisted of six group-based sessions of one hour per week in the first term of the academic year 2018 -2019 at Servizz Għożża. The programme was held in the evenings, to give more flexibility to those parents who were in employment, to participate.

Throughout the parenting programme, I referred to Michael Popkin's most recent book 'Active Parenting – First Five Years Parents' Guide' (2017). This book gives real-life

situations and hands-on activities which parents of children under five years of age can use to build a positive relationship with their children. This is done through the use of natural and logical consequences, by recognising the goals of behaviour, family meetings, problem-solving skills and the importance of encouragement. The programme aimed to provide teenagers with parenting skills which would assist them to be more successful, responsible and nurturing parents. The objectives of the parenting programme offered to both adolescent parents was to support them in using various strategies that promote the wellbeing and healthy development of their child, such as positive parenting approaches which reduce the practice of punishment, acquire emotional communication skills, interact positively and frequently with their children and create a supportive home environment.

To identify the personal benefits of the parenting programme, I conducted semi-structured interviews with adolescent parents who took part in the programme. I decided to hold the interviews myself since after delivering a six-week parenting programme to these young parents, I had developed a relationship with them. Instead of creating a bias, the fact that I conducted the interviews facilitated the participants' expression of the experience they had just been through. This is because, in this research, I wanted to gain insight into the participants' experience and not measure the programme's efficacy. The meaning given to the participants' experience of the parenting programme was regarded as co-constructed by the participants and me as the interviewer, rather than as located inside of the participants. On the other hand, if the research aimed to measure the efficacy of the parenting programme, I would have asked any one of my peers to conduct the interviews him/herself.

To be able to offer a systemic perspective of the parents' experiences, I decided to interview both parents together. Participants could narrate a description of their own and each other's

experience, both of their participation and on whether they experienced any adaptations to parenting after taking part in the programme. Semi-structured interviews allowed adolescent parents to share detailed explanations of their personal experience of taking part in a parenting programme, in a non-judgemental atmosphere through the use of open-ended and non-directive questions. These type of questions also allowed the participants to engage in a genuine dialogue without inhibitions since I, as an interviewer, didn't need to limit myself to a set of questions but instead moved with the flow of the interviewees' account of their own experience. The style adopted for these interviews also allowed for enough flexibility to change or leave out any questions, depending on the participants' experience. This was fundamental because being an IPA study, I was looking for the experience that was lived by the participants, and so I could anticipate that each interview might take a different direction.

To look into the personal experiences of the participants, I developed the following research questions:

- What was your overall experience of the parenting programme?
- How did you experience it as a father/mother?
- What did you learn about yourself as parents?
- Did you learn anything from the other members who took part in the programme?
- What have you noticed, if anything, about your relationship with your child since taking part in the programme?
- Do you have any suggestions on how the programme could be improved?
- Would you recommend this programme to other young parents? Why?

The interviews were also held at Servizz Ghözza, and the length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to one hour. Each interview was audio recorded with the participants' permission, using an application on my mobile device, and transcribed verbatim. The data was stored in a password-protected laptop.

### *3.3.3 Data Analysis*

The interviews were analysed, one by one by me, in accordance with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis procedure, as outlined by Smith et al. (2009). I read each transcript more than once to be able to explore codes, that is, describe the content, examine the language used by the participants and interpret the meaning, before identifying recurrent themes (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez 2011). While reading the transcripts, I listened again to the audio recording to attentively understand the experiences shared. I divided each transcript into three columns, my ideas and comments were taken down on one side, and interpretative themes were recorded on the other side.

Consequently, I explored the emergent themes of each transcript in more detail, joined them into clusters, and set up relations between the themes. Finally, I analysed the themes across the transcripts in order to find shared themes that describe the perceived meaning of the participants' experience of the parenting programme and produce a final set of superordinate themes with two to four subordinate themes within each one. Through this process, the researcher understands the participants' world and gives meaning to the participants' experience, dividing the texts into meaning units (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

### **3.4. Ethical Considerations**

This research was granted ethical approval by the Institute of Family Therapy, Malta. Permission to conduct this study was obtained both from the officer in charge of Servizz Għożża and from the Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability within the Ministry for Education and Employment.

The parenting programme was held under the remits of Servizz Għożża, a place where the students, especially the ones under eighteen years of age, were quite familiar with and could request sessions with the guidance teachers and counsellor anytime they felt the need to. Participants under eighteen years of age had to have the consent forms signed by their parents/guardians, permitting them to take part in the study. All participants, even those who were eighteen years and over, also needed to sign the participants' information sheet to give me their informed consent. The explanation of the research project was also provided by word of mouth.

Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. The participants' identity was protected from public exposure at all times. Signed participants' information sheets were kept under lock and key in the office of the officer in charge of Servizz Għożża. Their names and other identifying information were anonymised in the presentation of findings, and they were also assured that their narratives would be treated in strictest confidence. To protect the participants' confidentiality, the subjects' names, as well as anyone mentioned in their experiences, were changed to a pseudonym. Participants were informed that the interviews would be audio-recorded to help with the analysis and that the audio recordings and

transcriptions would be securely stored in a password-protected laptop and then destroyed after the research was completed.

### **3.5 Self – Reflexivity**

Reflecting on my personal beliefs and prejudices about adolescent parenthood both as a parent myself and as a professional working with teenage parents was important throughout the whole research process to help me become aware of my impact as a researcher on the study itself. Recognising that my interest in this research area was mainly coming from my profession as a guidance teacher helped me to make my biases more transparent.

Combining research with one's place of work is more challenging than researching a group of people one has no relationship with (Chang, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Tullis, 2013). On the other hand, Dallos & Vetere (2005) suggest that there are intense benefits when we research our organisations or the organisations we work at. These type of studies can increase our knowledge and might even improve our practice and our organisations because through research, we try to understand and confront our own and others' assumptions and lived experiences while going about our day-to-day interactions.

Since I work with pregnant teenagers and young mothers at Servizz Għożża, I had already developed a relationship with the mothers who took part in the parenting programme. Throughout the research, I was aware that I had not developed the same kind of relationship with the fathers who took part in the parenting programme. Simon (2014) argues that, according to social constructionist systemic principles, the researcher is not expected to be neutral or objective, but rather to own his/her prejudices and work with them. When I started

delivering the parenting programme, I had already reflected on my biases and did not want to come across as understanding the mothers too quickly or giving more value to the mothers' perceptions. Being a woman and a mother myself, I needed to continually be aware of my biases throughout the parenting programme so as not to be perceived by the participants as siding with the maternal figure in the couple and maybe giving less importance to the paternal figure.

During the parenting programme, even though I was following Michael Popkins' programme of Active Parenting (2017), I still tried not to take on an expert position. Instead, I sought to collaborate with the participants to encourage them to express their views about the content of the programme and share their experiences of what worked for their family and what didn't. I tried to use my expertise as a guidance teacher and a trainee family therapist to ask questions to help the participants reflect on their behaviour and that of their children and to consider different perspectives.

During the interviews, it was essential for me to cautiously reflect on my interpretation of the participants' experience and think about how the meaning of the participants' experience would be co-constructed, mainly because I had a very active role in the parenting programme and I had my ideas and reflections of how it could have been beneficial for the parents. This is a typical position for postmodern, social-constructionist self-reflexive practitioners, who strive to be constantly aware of how they affect and are affected by what they do and think and feel, and how they, together with their clients, construct the situation (Cooper, 2009).

It was also crucial for me to remain curious and not to assume an expert position during the interviews. I tried to equally involve both parents, mainly because I observed that most mothers tended to voice their opinions and recount their experience more than the fathers.

Had I not known the participants at all, I might have acted differently both in the programme and in the interviews and their responses might have been altered in some way or another.

An ethics of care during research, involves being empathic, non-judgemental, collaborative and not taking an expert role, that is, adopting the clinical and therapeutic skills I am in the process of learning. Writing about my study involves taking a compassionate approach in the way I reflect on the words of the participants interviewed (Ellis, 2017).

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I described the design and methodology implemented in the research. A qualitative design was chosen to study the benefits of a parenting programme for adolescent mothers and fathers. The results which have been analysed using IPA, are presented in Chapter 4, Main Findings.

## **Chapter 4. Main Findings**

### **4.1. Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to present the main findings that emerged from this research. The profile of the participants will also be explained. This will be followed by a presentation of the superordinate and subordinate themes which were brought forth from the interviews with the four couples of parents and one mother. A discussion of the results follows in Chapter 5, where the themes will be further explored.

## 4.2. Participants' Profile

All the participants who took part in the parenting programme were still in a relationship with each other. Even the mother who attended the programme on her own was in a relationship with her children's father. A pseudonym was given to each participant to ensure confidentiality. The following table illustrates their profile and demographic details:

	<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Ages</b>	<b>Number of children</b>	<b>Age of Child 1</b>	<b>Age of Child 2</b>	<b>Age of Child 3</b>
Parents couple 1	Emma James	19 24	1	18months		
Parents couple 2	Isabelle Liam	15 18	1	2months		
Parent 3	Lisa	19	2	6years	18months	
Parents couple 4	Maya Jacob	18 19	2	3years	1month	
Parents couple 5	Charlotte Luke	19 32	4	4years	2years	2month old twins

### 4.3. Table of Themes

Four superordinate themes emerged from the interpretative analysis and these were shared by all parents: Peer Support; Improved Parenting; Self Awareness and The Challenges of being Young Parents. Each superordinate theme has between two and four related subordinate themes. These are presented in the table below.

<b>Superordinate Theme</b>	<b>Subordinate Theme</b>
<b>Peer Support</b>	Feeling validated as a parent Shared experiences
<b>Improved Parenting</b>	Encouraging positive behaviour Parenting together
<b>The Programme as an Opportunity to Reflect on Parenting</b>	Corrective Script Gender differences
<b>The Challenges Experienced</b>	Couple Time Familial support Influence of Society Parenting struggles

Although themes can be seen as separate in the table above, yet many of them are interrelated. This is visible throughout the participants' narratives. Thus, it is important to take into account each theme in relation to the participants' whole accounts. Transcript extracts in the form of quotations will be included to present the phenomenological aspect from which my interpretations have developed. Excerpts from at least half the participants who related to each subordinate theme will be included to support the claims made (Smith, 2011). Throughout this chapter, I have aimed to bring to light both shared and distinct experiences, therefore capturing convergence and divergence between experiences, to identify ways in which accounts from participants are similar but also different (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

#### **4.4. Themes**

##### ***4.4.1. Peer Support***

All the participants expressed an appreciation of the group formed throughout the parenting programme and the support which was received across different phases of child-rearing. Since all couples of parents had at least one parent who was at least 19 years old or younger, they were very similar in age to each other, and this might have helped them to feel more understood.

#### *4.4.1.1. Feeling validated as a parent*

Being part of the group helped the participants feel validated as parents because when they shared their experiences, they realised that most parents at times feel disheartened and that it is acceptable for parents to make mistakes as long as they reflect upon them and try to learn from them. Most of them felt satisfied with how they are raising their children so far, even though sometimes they face some mishaps. The resources used during the programme, such as video clips and quotes from various parents, also helped them to feel satisfied with their parenting styles after comparing themselves with other parents.

*Emma – For example, when you showed us those video clips during the first or second session, of that lady whose children were making fun of her and wouldn't obey her. I think I feel good compared to her, compared to that lady. I think I'm doing a good job. He's still very young, but I try to be consistent. I try. I tell him "Don't hit", and I keep on repeating it every time he tries to hit someone.*

Being adolescent parents, most participants lacked confidence in their parenting abilities and people around them might have constructed a narrative that they wouldn't be able to take care of a child as older parents would be. However, after the programme, they realised that they do have internal resources which they were already using to parent their children.

*Maya – Nowadays I feel that I'm raising him much better than my aunt is raising her son & she was 35 years old when she had him. She is too obsessed with him. It's not about being too young or too old. And during the programme, we learnt a lot of stuff, but I already used to do most of what you told us. Even Jacob. That's the way we raise our son. We learnt that there are things which we can change, but we realised that we are managing quite well.*

Being willing to learn and challenge their constructs helped them to be open to reflect on their parenting styles and to be open to different strategies parents can use to discipline their children, without feeling that what they were doing was in some way wrong.

*Lisa – It doesn't mean that because I became a mummy, I know everything there is to know about children. There are things I don't know and things which I can change. I try to take some tips from you and the others and give tips as well.*

#### *4.4.1.2. Shared experiences*

Participants described an atmosphere in which they felt at ease to share their experiences. They also thought that they had benefited from listening to the narratives and opinions of the other members. They described learning new things and most found it encouraging to hear that other parents also went through difficulties, which seemed to reduce their feelings of loneliness and incompetence. Feeling in the same situation as other parents who are of the same age and who are coping in similar ways to the struggles of parenthood, helped the participants to feel more secure and valued in their role of parents.

*Lisa – After each session, I used to feel relaxed because I used to say “Ok, so it’s not only me who behaves this way or the other.” I used to feel a sense of security that I’m doing it right.*

*James – We learnt from this experience, and we shared our opinions.*

*Emma – It’s good to listen to the others’ experiences because then you can compare yourself to the others and check whether you’re on the right track or not. In reality, no one is a 100% good parent, but I think it’s good to see the difference between you and other parents.*

Being able to discuss how they coped with particular phases of childhood and sharing tips helped them to acquire new ideas and different perceptions. Sharing their experiences also enabled them to experiment with different skills which they might not have thought about before.

*Maya – It helped to discuss with other parents. To see what their experiences were. For example, we picked up some ideas on how to cope with some challenges we had, such as potty training.*

Isabelle and Liam were still expecting their first child when they attended the programme, and this helped them to listen to other parents’ experiences to assimilate some ideas on parenting.

Isabelle – *When you listen to the other parents' experiences, you know what to expect, especially since they already had given birth and were living the experience of being parents. It became more real when we were listening to the others' experiences because they had already gone through it. We were ready for it. We knew what to expect – how children behave at what age. How to handle them.*

Liam – *How to deal with them and what to do at what age. For the rules, we are planning to make, for example, when to let him eat sweets, etc.*

Reduced perception of their child's difficulties appeared to have been achieved through favourably comparing their child to the children of other parents in the group.

Lisa – *I realised that it's OK if my child behaves the way he does. It's not just because he's autistic. I realised that all children his age have tantrums every now and then. Not because my child is different.*

Since Lisa was the only participant who attended on her own, she described that the programme would have been very beneficial for her partner since it would have normalised both his feelings as a parent and their children's behaviour.

Lisa – *If he had come with me, he would have seen other fathers who attended, and he would have said: "Look, it's not only me who feels this way about my children or who thinks or behaves this way." He would have realised that even other children behave the way ours do so it's not a big deal if our children do this or do that.*

When asked about their suggestions to improve the parenting programme, two of the participants wished that there were more participants so that they could share their experiences with more adolescent parents. Lisa, whose son was diagnosed with autism, also wished that more parents whose children were diagnosed with some form of disability had attended the programme. This would have helped her to listen to their experiences.

*James – There would be more people. More participation.*

*Emma- Because it's really good and those who didn't come have lost the opportunity.*

*James – It was really interesting. It would have been better had there been more people because there would have been more experiences to share.*

*Lisa – If there were more people, more couples, even couples with children with some form of diagnosis. Because it's not a taboo to talk about different experiences. I found it very helpful.*

#### **4.4.2. Improved Parenting**

Positive changes in the parents after the programme included the encouragement of positive behaviour in their children rather than relying on punishments every time the children behaved in an undesired way and being more involved in parenting together as a couple. Some parents also observed a desired change in their children's behaviour, which they linked to them being calmer and more positive with their children.

#### *4.4.2.1 Encouraging positive behaviour*

Participants seemed satisfied with the attainment of new perceptions and skills, including giving options and choices, being positive in their language and being calmer when talking to their children.

*Isabelle – I learnt how one can discipline one's children without being negative. By being positive. Sometimes at night, I would be exhausted, and it's very tempting to get mad, but I do my best to stay calm.*

*Emma – That of punishments. It wasn't easy because sometimes I tell him "Don't throw the car or else you will go to bed." I realised it doesn't make sense. I will take away the car, but I won't take him to bed. That's a consequence, not a punishment.*

*James – I'm a calm person, but sometimes I get angry with him, especially at night. I'm trying to stay calmer. And I observed that the more I stay calm, the calmer he is.*

*Lisa – I became calmer, and I try to adapt to certain behaviour and try to teach him (her partner) what I learnt as well. If my daughter is crawling and she falls and starts crying, I will tell him to wait for her to get up on her own. Before the programme, we used to pick her up immediately, and she used to cry more when she would see us panicking. Now she's crying less.*

It wasn't easy for all the participants to learn to stay calm and focus on positive behaviour. Maya was still struggling with the idea of punishments. However, after attending the

programme, she had started to take more time to explain chores and rules to her son rather than expecting him to obey once she gave him a task to do.

*Maya – He’s very stubborn, so it’s challenging for me not to give him some time out for a few minutes or not to punish him or shout at him. But I’m doing my best even though at times I struggle. I try to give him options and to try to help him understand why he can’t do this or that. Once the baby is born, I’m planning to involve him. For example, I will tell him to get me the wipes and nappy or the bottle.*

Some participants also realised that they need to adapt to the situation and that sometimes, parents need to act according to the child’s temperament and to the context.

*Emma – I’m trying to avoid shouting at him, but it seems that he only stops when I yell. When I say “No” in a soft voice, he ignores me. So, if sometimes you shout at them, it doesn’t mean you’re doing something wrong. Sometimes it’s effective.*

Participants also became aware of the way children model adults’ behaviour, especially that of their parents and how important it is to behave in a way that they would want their children to behave.

*James – I realised that you need to be very careful of what you do in front of them. And obviously of what you say. Because they will copy you. What you will say they will say.*

Luke and Charlotte also started to involve their children more in everyday household chores and to encourage them to be more independent.

*Luke – When you showed us that video clip, there was a parent who told us what to do when the children are playing with a lot of toys and making a mess. I started to tell the eldest “Let’s go play with another toy.” She doesn’t always obey, but 8 out of 10 times I manage to do it. That’s good for children because I’m not shouting all the time like before. And when I’m cooking, I tell them to help me, and they behave really well. I tell them to mix the ingredients or to put them in a bowl.*

*Charlotte – I started to tell them “When you clean up all your toys, we will go to the playground.” Instead of “If you’re not going to clean up, I will punish you.” And it’s working. I learnt to stay calmer because before the babies were born, I used to shout more. I also started to let them have a bath on their own. I stay near them, but they do everything themselves.*

#### *4.4.2.2. Parenting together*

Participants expressed that their reflection after attending the programme together helped them to realise how important it is to parent together as a couple, to support each other in the decisions they take regarding parenting and to be consistent in their parenting styles.

James – *This is the most important thing because we are raising him together. I can't say one thing, and she will say another thing. I go one way & she will go the other way. We need to agree.*

Emma – *If he says something and I don't agree because for me it doesn't make sense, I still try to agree with him because I want him to agree with me. It's a bit of give and take.*

Maya – *We are trying to keep our word and even each other's. We try not to put down each other's word. Sometimes I do, but I try not to. So that Kyle doesn't do what he wants. Because we will cause more problems this way.*

Jacob – *If I tell him "Yes", she won't tell him "No". We need to keep each other's word.*

Some parents realised the importance of communicating with each other about parenting strategies that work with their children especially since some of the mothers remained at home with their children while most of the fathers spent a significant part of their day at work.

James – *We started to discuss what we do & what we don't when it comes to dealing with him.*

Emma – *I spend more time with him so if he's whining and he calms down when I give him a particular toy, I will communicate this to James so he will know what to do when Nicky is whining. This is our first baby, so we are learning through our own experience.*

They also validated each other as parents and expressed their gratitude to each other for being calm with their children or waking up in the middle of the night even if they needed to wake up for work the next morning. Emma also stated that she wants her son to grow up to be just like his father.

*James – She started being calmer with him, even when he wakes up in the middle of the night.*

*Emma – I appreciate that he wakes up with him sometimes, because I know that he needs to wake up at 6 am, even before that sometimes. If my son had to meet a girlfriend one day, I would want him to be just like James is with me. We're not perfect. But I wish that when he grows up, people will look at him and say "He's so well-behaved".*

Isabelle also validated Liam and mentioned how much he helps and supports her. However, I observed that Liam wasn't impressed because he feels criticised most of the time.

*Isabelle – He helps me. He helps me and supports me.*

*Liam – I never hear her say this. Indeed, I always hear her say negative things about me.*

When asked whether they think it makes a difference whether couples should attend parenting programmes together or not, the parents insisted on the importance of attending together, even Lisa, who participated in the programme on her own.

Liam – *It's useless if the mother learns something and the father doesn't know anything about it or the other way round. Both parents need to know how to raise a child.*

Lisa – *The children are ours, not only mine so it would have been beneficial if he had attended so he would get some ideas as well. Child-rearing should be divided between both parents.*

James – *We are raising him together, so it is very important to attend together. We need to agree on how we're going to raise him.*

Michelle – *It's very important to come together because we need to be in this together. Both of us learnt new things together and tried new things together.*

#### **4.4.3. The Programme as an Opportunity to Reflect on Parenting**

It seems that this parenting programme has been an opportunity for the participants to start reflecting on their childhood to deconstruct their beliefs about child-rearing and compare their upbringing with the way they wish to raise their children now that they have become parents. Gender differences were very evident throughout the interviews as the participants addressed the stereotypes in parenting styles of mothers and fathers.

#### *4.4.3.1. Corrective Script*

Most participants recalled their own or their siblings' childhood during the interviews, especially in relation to punishments and self-esteem. They associated punishments and shouting with negative feelings and a lack of self-confidence, and this reflection has led them to think more about how they would like to raise their children. It seemed to me that some adolescent parents were attempting to correct the mistakes they felt that their parents made, by bringing up their children in a different way.

*Emma – When I was young, every time I misbehaved, my mother wouldn't let me attend football lessons for a whole month. That used to hurt a lot. It doesn't make sense. I needed my recreation time. She used to humiliate me. I will never do that to Nicky. I wouldn't stop him from doing something he enjoys. I would find another way to teach him.*

*Liam – When my parents discipline my brothers, they shout at them and threaten them “I won't give you this” or “Now you won't take this”.*

*Isabelle – It seems that you can't do anything right as a child. You will affect their self-esteem. You need to try to fix your parents' mistakes. I don't want to ruin his self-esteem when I correct him. I want to focus on his positive qualities because my parents never focused on that.*

*Liam – I can't imagine myself being like my parents. Even if he does something wrong. I will emphasise on the positive, not on the negative.*

Luke – *I want to be their friend. If for example, they do something wrong, I don't want to shout at them but explain to them why it's wrong. Not like my father. He used to smack us. Not because he was a bad man but because we were very naughty.*

Charlotte – *He's right. Even my mum. She used to smack me on my thigh. Like I do. But my mum used to shout & I used to challenge her. More. And that's what I wish. That I don't shout at my kids like she used to do. I want to stay calm and explain to them.*

Luke also reflected on how important it is for him to be present in his children's life, unlike his father, who worked a lot and was rarely at home.

Luke – *When we were young, my father used to work a lot even at night. My mother raised us on her own. I don't want to raise my children like that. I want them to say "My father is my best friend". I want to be the first one to notice when they have a problem.*

Some parents who had more than one child also reflected on how they want to parent their second-born differently, now that they were more experienced.

Lisa – *I was so obsessed about the first baby, not taking care of myself at all. Now that I have another baby, I realise that she doesn't need to take up my whole day. I let her play on her own & I want her to be more independent.*

Maya – *This baby’s upbringing will be better because we will be living on our own & so it would be only our way of discipline. No interference & fewer clashes.*

#### 4.4.3.2. Gender Differences

Both during the programme and the interviews, I observed that most mothers could recount their narratives more fluently than the fathers, and they were more at ease while answering the questions. Most fathers also seemed to approve and agree with all that the mothers had to say, by repeating what they said and nodding. It also seemed that most fathers looked up to the mothers and perceived them as the experts in the parenting department. The only father who participated more than the mother, both in the programme and during the interview, was Luke who is thirteen years older than his partner and was the eldest member of the group who took part in the parenting programme.

It seemed that some mothers also perceived themselves as being more experts in parenting than the fathers because when I asked James how he learned to be a father, Emma immediately replied – *I gave him a good example because I spend more time with Nicky than he does.*

Even Liam implied that Isabelle thinks that she is a better parent than him.

Isabelle – *As soon as we left here I immediately told him “Don’t contradict what I say to our son”. Because I already know that he won’t be as strict as I am.*

Liam – *I can’t do anything about it. Her way is the good way. Mine is not.*

During the interviews, I observed that the lack of agreement about parenting styles and having different opinions about the best way to raise the children might put a lot of pressure on the relationship between the couple because the couple might start competing against each other about who is the better parent.

*Lisa – There's a high tension because I have my opinion and he has an entirely different view, so it's not easy. I understand it one way, and he understands it differently. I don't care if my child has a tantrum in public and people stare at us. I let him be. But he feels that he has to control him because he feels very uncomfortable when people stare at us.*

*Luke – When I'm on my own, the girls seem to behave better than when they're with her*

*Charlotte – I don't know what's wrong with me. Even the babies wake up when they're with me.*

*Luke – Even when I sleep with them, they sleep throughout the night. When she sleeps with them, she tells me "They didn't let me sleep".*

Sometimes, spending more time with the children than fathers might be quite stressful for mothers who might feel overwhelmed.

*Lisa – The baby belongs to the mother and father, not only to the mother. Is that right? But it seems that the mother has more influence on the baby because the father spends most of his day at work, so the mother does all the work with the baby during the day.*

Some parents pointed out the difference in the couple's parenting styles, with mothers being perceived as being stricter than fathers, and that fathers tend to treat their children as they would treat their friends, which might lead to spoiling them.

*Maya – Because they're like two friends. I'm stricter. He sees Jacob as a friend. Maybe because he's got a sense of humour and makes him laugh. He tries to be strict but then he bursts out laughing. I will never do that.*

*Luke – She's stricter with them than I am. Because she doesn't think twice to smack them. I tell her "Charlotte calm down". I rarely do it.*

*Charlotte – On the thigh. It's been a while now. But when I start, I can't seem to stop.*

*Luke – I cuddle them more because I feel really sorry when she smacks them.*

*Charlotte – He spoils them and then they don't obey him.*

Maya also reflected on the different ways mothers and fathers play with their children, with fathers tending to involve themselves more in rough play.

*Maya – I realised that he plays more roughly with him. And he wants to play rough with him. He doesn't play rough with me. I realised this during the course. He seeks me for a different kind of play. When he's drawing, he asks me to draw with him. We bond with him in different ways. He cuddles more with me.*

When it comes to sharing household or parenting responsibility, sometimes couples might struggle with gender stereotypes by believing the construct that parenting & house chores are the female's responsibility and the male's role is to help out when needed.

*Luke – I help her. For example, when she can't go on the roof to hang up the clothes, I go myself.*

*Charlotte – He helps me a lot. He helps me. Even when I need to go out, he stays with the kids. Even though he calls me a million times.*

*Liam – During the day I go to her house to help her with the baby and hold him for her so she can do something else.*

During their interview, Emma and James reflected on their observation that when mothers meet other mothers, they often talk about child-rearing and share tips. However, when fathers meet other fathers, they rarely speak about child-rearing. It seems that fathers only speak to other mothers, such as their mothers or sisters about child-rearing.

Emma – *I think that as a father, he needed this course more than I did because I talk to other people. I don't think that fathers give a lot of importance to this. They don't talk to each other. For example, my uncle wouldn't talk to James about taking care of children, but James' aunt would talk to me about child-rearing.*

James – *No, I only talk to my mother and sisters.*

#### **4.4.4. The Challenges Experienced**

All the participants expressed that becoming parents at a young age has been challenging in one way or another. One of these challenges is lack of quality time for the couple relationship since most young couples do not live together or live together with one of the couple's parents. Having more than one or two children also affected the couple relationship. Another challenge is the influence of society and the way some participants feel judged by the people around them for getting pregnant during their adolescence. Other difficulties mentioned by the participants are generally experienced by other parents irrespective of their age.

##### **4.4.4.1. Couple Time**

Jacob and Maya expressed how their living arrangements impact the quality of couple time. Apart from affecting the couple's relationship, living apart or with one of the couple's parents, was also experienced as making it challenging for them to parent their children the way they would like to.

Jacob – *Moving out of their house will surely help our relationship. Because we can't even talk. Her mother is always interfering.*

Maya – *We have more clashes because we're living with my parents and brothers. When we're arguing, they want to tell us what they think. We definitely need some time on our own, even without the children. We fight a lot because of my parents because they don't listen to us when we try to explain our rules. For example, if we tell him "No", my parents will tell us "Let him be". And we end up fighting between us.*

Isabelle, who does not live with her baby's father, also expressed her frustration at having to take care of the baby on her own especially at night time since most of the children live with their mothers when the couple are not co-habiting.

Isabelle – *When I spent those two nights at the hospital, everything was perfect because we used to share feeding him and putting him to sleep at night. But now I do everything on my own. Nighttime duties are for me only.*

Luke and Charlotte, who live together without their parents, expressed a lack of intimacy, which they associated with having four young children who take up a lot of their time, including night time.

Luke – *Our relationship has always been good, but now we have eliminated sex completely. It's been a long while since we touched each other.*

Charlotte – *I'm exhausted.*

Luke – *Before we had the twins, we used to have some time for us because the girls used to sleep before us. But now with four children, it's almost impossible.*

When asked what helps them to keep their relationship functioning, they described communication and humour as essential elements for a couple to feel close to each other and stay together, even when they have disagreements.

Luke – *In a relationship, there needs to be communication. We are each others' partners, friends and spouses because we live together. Sometimes we argue & we burst out laughing in the middle of an argument. In my previous relationship, when we used to fight, we used to spend even a month, not talking to each other.*

Charlotte – *We start talking to each other again at that very moment we are arguing.*

#### 4.4.4.2. Familial support

When asked about the support they receive from their families, some participants did not answer the question and preferred to talk about their experience of the parenting programme rather than about their families. Two couples felt that their family members support them by taking care of their children when they need to go out or spend some time alone as a couple. However, these couples mentioned that they still prefer to take care of their children themselves since they feel that they are the ones responsible for them. When asked whether they wish to be supported differently by their families, both these couples would have liked the grandparents to follow their parenting style, as they perceive them as being too laissez-

faire with their children. One participant even felt that she and her family are not being supported at all by their families of origin.

*Maya – We do find support from our parents especially when we want to go out on our own as a couple. But we still prefer to take him with us because we are the parents. We are responsible for him..... My parents are too soft with him. They let him do whatever he wants to.*

*Luke – When we go out to eat, we prefer to find a restaurant with a play area to take them with us. We don't like to leave them with their grandparents because we want to raise them ourselves.....At the grandparents, it's like a free country. They can do whatever they like. I don't want that.*

*Charlotte – When I leave them with my mum, I spend all night calling her to check on them. So, I prefer to take them with me wherever I go. We believe that we made the children, so we'll raise them ourselves. I don't want them to see their grandma as a second mummy.*

Having a child diagnosed with autism, Lisa finds it very difficult to help her family to understand why her son cannot speak or why at times he behaves differently than typical children or is not comfortable to be in a crowded or noisy place. She feels misunderstood and left out and that she cannot turn to her family for the support she needs to raise her child.

*Lisa – Even family members don't understand you. You ask me "Is that possible?" They think that they understand me, but I feel like they are dropping a bomb on me every time they take my son to certain places. It's like I'm putting him in hell. And they cannot accept that he is different from other children. For them it's a hassle to adapt to his needs. They don't understand him.*

#### *4.4.4.3. Influence of Society*

Couples, especially females, talked about how they, at times, feel judged by others for being young parents and how this judgement might influence how they perceive themselves as parents. The older males had a different experience because they didn't feel judged by society. It seems that the construct surrounding younger males was that they were expected to provide for their family when they were about to become fathers.

*Emma – I used to think that because I was young when I got pregnant, I wouldn't be able to raise him like I should. That's what people led me to think because they used to tell me that I'm not ready to be a mum.*

*James – I never experienced being a young father negatively. Maybe because I'm older than her and also perhaps because I'm a man. No one ever told me that I wouldn't be a good dad.*

*Isabelle – People used to feel sorry for me when I was pregnant, telling me that I was too young. And that I was still a student & my life would be over once I had the baby.*

*Liam – Even I. Especially because I'm still studying and not working yet.*

*Lisa – We're still young. Our children came early. Maybe before they should have come. But we're still parents. We still know how to take care of them. I have often heard people telling me that I don't know how to take care of a child because I'm still a child myself. But I felt better when I met others who went through similar experiences.*

#### *4.4.4.4. Parenting struggles*

One of the parenting struggles, which was emphasised both throughout the parenting programme and even during the interview with Lisa was having her son diagnosed with autism and her difficulties to understand his behaviour and meet his needs. Throughout the interview, she has expressed how she would have liked her partner to attend the programme so that he could normalise their son's behaviour and his feelings. She also struggles with the lack of understanding from her family, whom she believes have not yet understood what autism is all about.

*Lisa – I would have liked him to hear the others say that they can't just decide to go anywhere since they have young kids. It's not just us that we struggle when we go to a restaurant. I know I struggle more because I need to adapt to a child with autism and a 1-year-old baby. But if my son enjoys himself, I will enjoy myself for sure. Our families can't understand that we can't go to any restaurant with them because my son can't take it. They tell me that I'm keeping him away from the rest of society. For them, autism doesn't mean anything. My son will not tell me "I've had enough". He will shout. It's a struggle.*

Other parents mentioned different struggles associated with their children's behaviour, which they as parents can't always understand. They also worry that their children's behaviour is not typical of their age or that something is "wrong" with their child.

*Maya – He's almost 3 years old & he's all the time seeking attention. I don't know what we can do about this. Sometimes I wonder if there is something wrong. Maybe because we're still living with my parents & he has too much attention all the time. He wants someone to play with him all the time. It seems that he doesn't know how to play on his own.*

*Emma – Sometimes, I get very frustrated because he spends days & nights whining. Just because he doesn't get what he wants. I can understand if he cries because he's in pain, but he cries for nothing. I try to be calm with him, but sometimes it's too much.*

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented the results attained from the analysis of the interviews carried out with the nine participants who were made up of four couples of parents and one mother. Their experience of taking part in an adolescent parenting programme was explored. Four main super-ordinate themes emerged. These included: Peer Support; Improved Parenting; The Programme as an Opportunity to Reflect on Parenting and The Challenges Experienced. Each super-ordinate theme was made up of two to four subordinate themes. These themes

exhibited the meaning which was made of the lived experience of the participants. In the next chapter, I will be presenting a discussion of these results.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

### **5.1. Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to consider the research findings in relation to the previous literature in this study and to discuss how this literature can support these findings. Some additional literature not presented in the literature review will be included in this section to promote further understanding (Smith et al. 2009). My interpretative analysis will also be provided.

This study sought to answer the research question: What are the benefits of a parenting programme for adolescent mothers and fathers? Four superordinate themes emerged from the interpretative analysis. These were: Peer Support; Improved Parenting; The Programme as an Opportunity to Reflect on Parenting and The Challenges Experienced. They will each be presented and discussed in turn.

### **5.2. Peer Support**

The transition to parenthood signifies a major developmental milestone for most new parents but might be particularly stressful for young parents who are at the same time struggling to cope with the normative developmental changes such as, identity formation, associated with adolescence. The National Maternal and Infant Health Survey in America shows that 53% to 67% of adolescent mothers experience significant depressive symptoms (Deal & Holt, 1988) while only 13% of adult women go through similar episodes (O'Hara & Swain, 1996). Furthermore, research has found that the depressive symptoms experienced by adolescent

mothers can last throughout the first three years postpartum (Leadbeater & Linares, 1992). When it comes to teenage fathers, research shows that in addition to being psychologically and financially disadvantaged, they are less interpersonally mature than adult fathers (Palkovitz, 1996).

Providing adolescent parents with a peer support group, helps the adolescents to experience each other as role models and may enhance self-efficacy in the adolescents serving as instructors and in adolescents being instructed about parenting (Pinzon & Jones, 2012). The adolescents who took part in the parenting programme expressed that they felt validated as parents after they shared their experiences and listened to their peers' experiences. One of the adolescents described feeling "a sense of security" after each session of the programme.

All the participants who took part in the adolescents' parenting programme expressed an appreciation of the support received from the group throughout the six weeks of the programme. They felt validated as parents and benefitted from sharing their experiences. This finding is consistent with Kane et al. (2007)'s research, who found that taking part in parenting programmes helps adolescents feel less socially isolated and more emotionally supported. Feeling accepted from the rest of the group and encouraged by other parents who are going through similar experiences empowers parents to feel in control and able to cope. All the participants expressed how the emotional support they received from their peers and the parenting skills learned helped them to feel satisfied with themselves as parents. In fact, The Dublin Institute of Technology (Riordan, 2002) found that the majority of the parents in their study benefitted mostly from the reassurance of their parenting role.

Using technology and media has also proven to be a useful tool to provide adolescents with parenting skills (Black & Teti, 1997). The adolescents interviewed have described the video

clips of parents recounting issues that they are having with their children as being useful for them to reflect on themselves as parents. In 2009, Yardley found that the benefits of support services for teenage mothers provided in a group were, making new friends, meeting other mothers of the same age, reducing isolation, sharing advice with others and opportunities for their children to play with other children. These findings are consistent with this study as most parents used to attend the programme with their children, who used to play together while their parents took part in the programme.

Since this was the first parenting programme for adolescent parents in Malta, I was very interested in finding out what impact did this programme have on the fathers and whether they found it beneficial for them. Two male participants expressed how important it was for them to share their experiences of fatherhood with the others and to listen to other parents' opinions. As Mamo (2007) found out in her research carried out locally, adolescent fathers wish to be involved more in support services aimed for teenage mothers, so they can share their experiences with other adolescents who are going through similar situations. When the participants were asked what their suggestions for improving the programme were, one male participant answered that he would have preferred more participation from other adolescent parents because he felt that the more the participants, the more experiences there were to share. Foreign research also supports these findings. In 2005, Tyrer et al. found that adolescent fathers to be and teenage fathers felt that they did their utmost to assume their fatherhood responsibility but thought that they did not find the support they needed. They felt excluded from important decisions regarding the pregnancy and the upbringing of their children.

This study would have been more interesting if even parents who were not in a relationship anymore had attended this programme together. Unfortunately, when the officer in charge of Servizz Għozza contacted the mothers who made use of the service, those who were not in a relationship with their child's father anymore, were not interested in attending the programme. Both Meli (2006) & Aquilina (2012) found that fathers who were not in a relationship with their child's mother were not involved at all in their children's lives. According to Speak et. al. (1997) and Bunting & McAudley (2004), this estrangement might happen because some young fathers might find it challenging to access their children as there might be a conflict with the mother of the child or negative attitudes from maternal family members. Berrington et al. (2005) found that the frequency of contact with the father also tends to decrease if the mother or father is in a new relationship or if the father had other children.

On the other hand, in their study, Bezzina & Dibben (2002) found that all the partners of the mothers interviewed, remained involved in their children's lives, even if they were not in a relationship with the mother anymore. This local study is parallel to foreign research which shows that the majority of adolescent fathers were relatively involved in the lives of their children, maintained contact with them and played a role in their upbringing (Speak, 1997; Smith et al. 2002; Glikman, 2004). It would have been interesting to have parents who were no longer in a relationship attend the parenting programme, as I would have asked both parents what they think had helped them to co-parent their children despite not being a couple anymore.

### **5.3. Improved Parenting**

All the participants who took part in the parenting programme expressed some form of reflection on their behaviour and how this behaviour is impacting their children's behaviour. For some participants, this reflection also led to a change in behaviour and a shift in their thoughts and beliefs about parenting. Throughout the interviews, I have observed a pattern in some of the participants, who described a feeling of satisfaction and validation as parents after each session of the programme. These confident feelings have helped them to act in a more positive manner with their children, be calmer and less anxious, which in turn had a positive effect on the children's behaviour. The change in the children's behaviour has helped the parents to feel even more validated as parents.

Most participants who were interviewed after the completion of the parenting programme described that they are trying to be more positive and calmer with their children and most of them mentioned that they are also trying to reduce punishments and rely on the use of natural and logical consequences instead. One participant said that she realised that now that her daughter is crawling, she and her father need to help her become more independent and thus, they are no longer picking her up immediately after she falls, but they are instead waiting for her to get up on her own. Another couple who have older children also mentioned that they have started involving them more in household chores, such as helping them to mix ingredients in a bowl while cooking and encouraging them to take a bath on their own. Congruent to these findings, research shows that when during parenting programmes, the developmental needs of children are explained, the parents' psychosocial skills are improved, and consequently their self-esteem is increased and their anxiety is reduced. Eventually, positive outcomes for the children, such as parent responsiveness to the child and parent-child

interaction are increased (Barlow et. al., 2011). A study conducted by the Dublin Institute of Technology (Riordan, 2002), also found that providing information on child development helps parents improve their relationship with their children.

Kane et al. (2007) found that taking part in parenting programmes helps adolescent parents feel more empathy towards their children and feel more confident in dealing with their children's behaviour. Scott et al. (2006) also found that parenting skills that reinforce positive behaviour and offer new approaches to deal with challenging behaviours, improve parents' relationship with their children. Almost all the parents whom I interviewed mentioned that they are trying to give options instead of punishments or give a consequence such as removing a toy which the child is throwing. One mother also said that she started trying to explain to her child why particular behaviours are dangerous, and one father described that he started trying to distract his child with other toys rather than shouting. Another mother started practising the When you..... then we.....rule instead of If you don't..... then I'm going to..... to be more positive with her children.

Research also shows that attending parenting programmes with one's children, provides an opportunity to practice newly acquired skills under supervision through interactions with the children (Bavolek & Dellinger-Bavolek, 1987; Riordan, 2002; Clarkson, 2015). I have observed this happening throughout the parenting programme as most parents attended together with their children and as a facilitator of the programme, I took the opportunity to praise the parents whenever they interacted positively with their children, and this helped them to feel more validated as parents.

Another study conducted by Robbers (2008), evaluated the Caring Equation, which is an intervention programme in the United States for teenage parents, aimed at teaching and

improving parenting skills. This study found that after the programme, parental attitudes and behaviours, such as empathy and favourable attitudes towards the use of punishment changed in a positive manner. Robbers (2008) also found that adolescent parents who participated in the Caring Equation programme were more likely to parent together. After carrying out a research study about teenage parents, The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (2012) also emphasised the importance of supporting both teenage parents in bringing up their children. Most participants who participated in the parenting programme expressed that the programme helped them realise how vital it is to parent their children together and to support each other as parents. They emphasised the consistency in parenting styles and how important it is to agree on the same rules and consequences for their children.

Almost all the participants insisted on how important they believe it is to attend parenting programmes together rather than separately because according to them, children need both parents to be involved in their upbringing and child-rearing should be divided between both parents. In fact, according to Piotrowska et al. (2016), the success of parenting programmes may depend on the ability to engage both parents successfully. Likewise, Panter-Brick et al. (2014) implied that behavioural change is unlikely to continue when only one parent attends the programme, highlighting the need for engaging the parenting team in the programme. Lundahl et al. (2008) also recommended that father involvement in parenting programmes is essential for improving child outcomes: mainly increased inter-parental consistency in the implementation of parenting practices and reduced parenting conflict. Some participants who took part in the parenting programme validated each other as parents and expressed gratitude for the support received from each other in the upbringing of the children. Contrastingly, Liam expressed that he doesn't feel validated as a parent since he perceives Isabelle as being critical towards him.

Throughout the interviews, all the young fathers expressed how important it is for them to be involved in their children's lives and to discuss their ideas of parenting with their partner. Research shows that the father's involvement in the upbringing of the children can have a positive influence on the mother, the function of the family, and also on the child's well-being (Leslie & Dibden, 2004; Pinzon & Jones, 2012). Bagner (2013) maintained that father involvement might lead to increased parental consistency at home, which consequently might help to support positive changes in children's behaviour.

#### **5.4 The Programme as an Opportunity to Reflect on Parenting**

Most adolescent parents who were interviewed after taking part in the parenting programme recalled their childhood, and this led them to want to raise their children in a different way in which they were raised, mainly because as children they were punished several times and they felt that these punishments affected their self-esteem. Since these childhood experiences were not perceived as positive, they desired to restore their family of origin script into a more successful one and construct a different way of family life (Byng-Hall, 1985,1998). In his research, Azzopardi (2007) also found that couples tried to repair their script for their future marital relationship when their family of origin's script was not experienced as a pleasant one.

Byng-Hall (1985) states that during adolescence, most people start reflecting on their childhood because they either leave home and review their parents' behaviour from a distance, new partners provide a different perspective to their past, or they start thinking of starting a family of their own. With their children, they either play the same roles as their parents did or use a corrective script, with parents trying to do the contrary to their parents to

try to fix mistakes they felt their parents made. Three couples who were interviewed spoke about their childhood and recalled the negative feelings they used to have whenever their parents punished them, shouted at them, smacked them or did not praise them as much as they would have liked them to. All of these couples stated that they wish to be more positive with their children by finding different ways to teach them right from wrong and explain to them why they are not allowed to behave in certain ways. Out of these three couples, both the male and female partners agreed with each other that they want to raise their children using a more positive attitude than their parents.

In 1997, Speak et al. found that young fathers hope to be more involved with their children than they feel their fathers were because they want their children to remember them as being present in their lives. One father who was interviewed insisted that he doesn't want to raise his children the way he was raised, where his father worked long hours and was rarely present. He associated his presence in his children's lives with being their best friend and being the first one to realise when they have a problem. Glikman (2004) found that young men who grew up with an absent father used their experience with their father as a yardstick to consider how they would play the father role. Two fathers who took part in the parenting programme insisted that they don't want to be like their parents and that they wish to offer a different upbringing to their children.

Nylund (2006) suggested that helping young fathers deconstruct their ideas of fathering styles helps adolescent fathers choose their fatherhood approach knowingly, as most young fathers are coached and mentored by the mothers of their children on how to be fathers. Mothers seem to adopt behaviours consistent with an intensive care practice and limit the fathers' involvement in parental tasks to ensure the high-performance level that is expected from

mothers (Johnston & Swanson, 2006). One of the mothers interviewed implied that her partner learned how to be a father by observing her, while another father suggested that his partner believes that she is better at parenting than him and thus he leaves it up to her to take care of the rules. Fagot et al. (1998) suggested that fathers, especially young ones, need to be engaged from the very beginning of the pregnancy since most of them do not live in the same household as their children and might feel less involved in their upbringing.

Paschal (2004) found that many young fathers who were not involved with their children go along with the traditional ideas of masculinity. Throughout the parenting programme and the interviews, I could observe that these young fathers who took part in this research, tended to internalise patriarchal ideas of parenting and this might have affected their involvement in their children's lives. Couples used the words "I help her" or "He helps me" when referring to house chores and "I hold the baby for her" when referring to parenting, suggesting that the social constructs of parenting propose that mothers are responsible for parenting and fathers, at best, help out.

Out of the four fathers who participated in the parenting programme, only two of them answered when asked about their experience of the programme. The other two agreed with their female partners but did not elaborate on their own experience. Both while I was conducting the parenting programme and while I was interviewing the participants, I observed that the female participants tended to participate more. At times, I found it more challenging to connect with the male participants, who were less involved and tended to agree with their partners whenever I asked them a question. This lack of participation might have been affected by their perception that mothers tend to be more experts in parenting than fathers. In fact, during the interviews, I observed that at times, some parents became caught

up in a competitive match between them by comparing their parenting styles, with mothers tending to insist that their parenting style is better than the fathers'. The only couple who expressed that at times the father manages to help the children behave better more than the mother were Charlotte and Luke, whose age difference is thirteen years and thus the age factor might have influenced their different perception.

The fact that I am a woman and I have conducted both the parenting programmes and the interviews might have also positioned the male participants to feel less connected and understood, even though I was careful to interact with both males and females throughout the whole process. In therapy, Garfield (2004) recommends that to maintain balance and strengthen the therapeutic alliance, the therapist needs to spend more energy connecting with the male partner at the beginning of therapy, while still keeping the female partner engaged. Research also shows that as men and women experiment with behaving in ways that oppose traditional norms, they will encounter social penalties (Moss-Racusin et al. 2010). Since men tend to allow women to take care of the physical and emotional needs of their children (Gatrell, 2005), they might find it more difficult than women to participate fully in parenting programmes and talk about their experience of parenting.

In this study, I have observed that two couples have perceived the mothers as being stricter than the fathers, despite the social construct that mothers tend to be more nurturing and the fathers more controlling. Recent research suggests that despite these stereotypes, mothers and fathers tend to differ in parenting styles, and that gender doesn't make a difference in the parenting style one tends to adopt with his or her children (Garcia & de Guzman, 2017).

### **5.5. The Challenges Experienced**

One of the difficulties I have faced myself throughout this research was to find literature linked to adolescent parents. The majority of the studies I have come across focus mainly on challenges faced by teenage mothers and on how the fathers can support the mothers rather than on challenges faced by the adolescent parents (Klerman, 2002; Arai, 2009; Barnet, 2012; Coren et al. 2003; Bunting & McAudley, 2004). Betty Carter, Monica McGoldrick, & Nydia Garcia-Preto (2013) also suggested that family therapy should be aimed at protecting the young mother's and the baby's development. They also claimed that the baby's father involvement should depend on what kind of relationship he has had with the mother, whether they plan to remain a couple, and whether he can provide financial support. It is very interesting to note that these therapists are all women, whereas David Nylund (2006), who is a male therapist who has worked with a lot of teenage fathers believes in challenging societal stereotypes to help young fathers become more involved in child-rearing, irrespective of whether they are still in a relationship with their child's mother.

Most of the research found on both adolescent parents focus on the co-parenting relationship rather than on the couple relationship (Lundahl et al. 2008; Lewin et al. 2012; Clarkson, 2015; Mollborn & Jacobs, 2015). The couples who were interviewed mentioned couple time to be quite a challenge, especially for those young couples who live together with one of the couple's parents or live separately in different households. Research shows that unmarried visiting couples have lower-quality relationships than cohabiting couples as co-residence allows both parents to interact regularly with the child, while a non-resident parent faces greater barriers to frequent interaction (Osborne 2005).

On the other hand, the experience of the couple whose male partner is 32 years old was very different from the experience of the other participants. Though they described their struggle to find some time for them as a couple and to share intimate moments, being that they have new-born twins along with two other young children, they also reported that since they live together on their own with their children, they have more time to spend together. Fraenkel (2011) theorises that shared time experiences are central to relationship satisfaction and that couples should be encouraged to construct their intimate moments.

The literature found on teenage fathers stresses that the couple's relationship before the child is born is a significant factor in determining the role taken by the young father in the upbringing of the child (Speak, 2006; Arai, 2009). As a guidance teacher who works with adolescent mothers, I believe that it is essential to focus on the teenage couple's relationship because although not specific for adolescent parents and mostly focused on married couples, literature shows that marital quality and relationship quality are linked to positive parenting and outcomes for children (White 1999; Kitzmann 2000; Krishnakumar & Buehler 2000; Orbuch et. al., 2000; Shapiro et. al., 2000). This type of research is based on the theory that the family is a social system in which dyadic relationships (mothers and fathers, parents and children, siblings) between family members affect both individuals and other family relationships (Cox & Paley, 1997).

This research links the importance of couple time with the support from the couple's families and how significant it is for the teenage couple's families to become aware of the positive impact of the couple relationship on the outcomes of their children. Unfortunately, research on the familial support to adolescent parents focuses more on support with child-rearing

rather than on supporting the relationship of the young couple (Klerman, 2002; Bunting & McAudley, 2004; Shield & Pierce, 2006).

When it comes to familial support, research shows that support offered to adolescent parents from their parents helps to diminish the stress these adolescents might experience due to an unplanned pregnancy at a young age. Childcare provided by the grandparents, and family support that allows the adolescents to finish school, are family factors that are related to less stressful circumstances (Cooley & Unger, 1991). Dennison & Coleman (1998) found how important it is for adolescent mothers to feel validated for their parenting abilities by their mothers and to feel acknowledged for their maturity and independence. Research also shows that support received from parents and in-laws affects adolescent fathers' involvement in their children's lives (Bunting & McAudley, 2004; Shields & Pierce, 2006). In this current study, participants who were interviewed seemed quite reluctant to talk about the support that they received from their parents. Throughout the interviews, it seemed as if the familial support or lack of it was perceived negatively by the participants. Only two couples mentioned the childcare provided by their parents which they appreciate but do not want to rely on since they believe that they are the ones who should take care of their children. One reason for this was because both these couples perceived the grandparents as being too permissive with their children. Being young parents, they also might feel a strong need to be validated as parents, and this might lead them to strive to be more independent parents and prove their worth to society.

In fact, another struggle faced by adolescent parents was the influence of society on their perception as parents. The teenage mothers who were interviewed mentioned that at times, during the pregnancy and after their child was born, they felt judged by society for becoming

mothers at such a young age. In a study carried out in Malta, Bezzina & Dibben (2002), found that adolescent mothers perceive society as being very judgemental towards them for getting pregnant at such a young age. They feel that, unlike young males, they are judged for getting pregnant at an early age, whereas the males might be congratulated for becoming fathers. One young father who was interviewed never felt judged by society, and he linked this to being older than his girlfriend and also to being a male. However, when interviewing young fathers, Mamo (2007) found that at times, these adolescents also feel judged by society for becoming fathers at a young age as they are perceived as being irresponsible.

Only the youngest father who was interviewed, Liam, mentioned that he felt judged by society for being young and for not being able to provide for his family since he is still studying and not working. In 2006, Borg Xuereb (in Aquilina, 2012) found that for most Maltese teenage fathers, fatherhood means financial responsibility, and they recognise that to be fathers, they need to work harder. This might be a social construct of fatherhood in Malta which is passed on from one generation to another.

During the interviews, I realised that these young parents' experience struggles which are similar to other parents who might be older and more independent and financially secure than they are. However, being parents, especially, for the first time, puts them in the same position which is filled with worries, struggles and concerns for their children. Research shows that some parental concern is normative, as it is reasonable for parents to experience a degree of anxiety about their children (Fisak et al. 2012). Most parents, like the adolescent parents who took part in this research, worry mostly about psychosocial issues such as temper tantrums, discipline, crying or whining, adverse effects of divorce and parents spending too much time at work (Triggs & Perrin, 1989).

One parent who attended the parenting programme and has a son who was diagnosed with autism shared her hardships as a mother especially when she comes to relate with her partner or with other members of her family, both of whom she feels don't understand this disorder. In fact, though parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder report positive parenting experiences (Kayfitz et al. 2010), they also recount an elevated level of child-related challenges such as managing the child's symptoms and behaviour problems and attending to everyday life activities (Hayes and Watson 2013). These child-related challenges influence a range of family dynamics, including parents' couple relationship (Hartley et al. 2010). This mother, Lisa, used the word "struggle" continually throughout the interview and described the parenting programme as a "stress-reliever" which she would have liked to share with her partner since he didn't attend. Even though the programme was not specified for children with disabilities, she still found it very useful as she could normalise her son's behaviour and not link it solely to autism. Lisa's experience helped me realise how important it is for us professionals to support these teenage parents by creating a link with their families to educate them on the children's developmental needs and how these might differ across children.

Throughout this research, I have realised that although these parents are young, most of their struggles and concerns are very similar to other parents who might be older and regarded as self-sufficient by society. The conflicts mentioned by these adolescent parents, especially when it comes to couple time, familial support and worries about the development of their children, are very similar to other parents' struggles worldwide. This awareness might be an eye-opener for us educators and other professionals who work with adolescent parents to support them in strengthening their relationship to become more effective parents and to widen our services by including these adolescents' families to help them further.

### **5.6. Connecting the Findings of this Study**

The themes discussed above show a systemic interrelation that shows how beneficial it is for both parents to attend a parenting programme together. Attending a parenting programme along with other adolescent parents helped these teen parents to feel validated and share their experiences with other young parents. The more they felt validated the more they were likely to improve their parenting by encouraging their children to engage in positive behaviour and parent them together. Improved parenting led these adolescents to reflect on their childhood and gender stereotypes and how these might affect their parenting. Consequently, these reflections helped them to talk about their challenges, both as young parents and even challenges faced by parents of all ages.

When adolescent parents speak to us professionals, being educators, social workers and medical staff about these challenges, it would be helpful to encourage them to attend a parenting programme together to help them improve their parenting and face these challenges. This study further reflects the need for educators who guide adolescent mothers, to widen their services to adolescent or young fathers for the benefit of their children and to involve the extended family in the delivery of services. Family involvement in the delivery of services helps us professionals and the adolescent parents' families to support teenage parents together (Mollborn & Jacobs, 2015). By extended family, I mean both the teenage mother's family and the teenage father's family as both adolescent parents hold a vital role in the child's life. Since the majority of teenage parents still live with their parents and siblings, they would need their families' support throughout the pregnancy and child-rearing years. The challenge of such services derives from the fact that these adolescent parents are both in need of parenting that promotes their development and, at the same time, they need to be

guided in parenting their children. If in addition to peer support, these adolescent parents are also offered familial support as part of the parenting programme, there might be an increased likelihood for them to feel validated as parents and improve their parenting as they would be supported by both their peers and their families to parent together as a couple or as co-parents.

Throughout the parenting programme, my focus as a facilitator was on the parental system and other systems which might affect the parents throughout their life. I also wanted the participants to understand that difficulties do not arise within individuals but in the relationships, interactions and language that develops between people. This systemic framework is essential when involving the families of these adolescents and other professionals to create a new context in which problems are perceived differently, and these different perceptions might lead to a different belief about the situation (Dowling & Osborne, 2003).

Since I was the facilitator of this parenting programme, the relationship developed between myself and the participants throughout these six weeks is significant. The interaction between myself and the participants has influenced the creation of our constructs around parenting. From the interviews, I could realise that one of the most considerable influence I had on the participants was the construction of positive parenting ideas derived from the impact of Michael Popkin's Active Parenting programme (1993, 2007). Throughout the programme and interviews, the participants have impressed me with their eagerness to learn and change to be different parents to their children by trying alternative styles of parenting. Consequently, this optimistic attitude has filled me with positive energy to open this programme for other teenage parents and to widen this service to their families. In this respect, it would be

interesting if this parenting programme would be facilitated by a couple of adolescent parents rather than by a guidance teacher. This would give the programme a more collaborative stance and maybe more active participation from the adolescents as they would not perceive the facilitators as the sole experts in relationships and parenting.

This research can also be described as systemic because throughout it all, I had multiple perspectives influencing the way I co-constructed the meaning of the participants' narratives.

The input of my supervisor and the ongoing conversations with my fellow peers and my colleagues throughout these two years have affected my interest in the research, the questions asked during the interviews and the meaning given to the narratives of these adolescent parents.

## **5.7. Conclusion**

The emergent themes were discussed in this chapter considering previous studies that have tackled the topics of adolescent parents and parenting programmes. The conceptual framework adopted in this study supported the discussion of the findings. In the following chapter, I will present the concluding remarks and limitations of this study, while putting forward recommendations for future studies.

## **Chapter 6. Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to present the main conclusions from the research and discuss the potential limitations. I will also consider how the findings can translate into recommendations for practice and future research into the area.

### **6.2. Summary of Findings**

This study aimed to gain insight into the experience of adolescent mothers and fathers after attending a six-week parenting programme. This research turned out to be significant due to the lack of parenting programmes for both teenage parents in Malta.

The main super-ordinate themes which became apparent as a result of data analysis were the following; Peer Support; Improved Parenting; The Programme as an Opportunity to Reflect on Parenting and The Challenges Experienced.

The findings of this study showed that when the adolescent parents attended a parenting programme together with other teenage parents, they felt supported and understood by their peers. Most of the participants believed the social construct that because they were young parents, they were not good enough to take care of their children. However, the programme offered them a social support system which helped them to feel validated as parents and satisfied with their parenting styles. Throughout the parenting programme, they worked on deconstructing their ideas on how to be a parent and tried different strategies to discipline

their children. Participants also felt at ease to share their experiences with other young parents. Realising that their feelings and thoughts were similar to other young parents' helped them to feel more valued and secure in their role of parents.

The programme also helped these adolescent parents to improve their parenting by encouraging their children to engage in positive behaviours, by giving them options and choices, being positive in their language and being calm when talking to their children, instead of punishing them like they used to do before the programme. After the programme, the adolescent parents also realised the importance of parenting together, of supporting each other in the decisions they take regarding parenting and of being consistent in their parenting styles. The participants thought that it was very beneficial for them to have attended a parenting programme together since they believed that child-rearing should be divided between both parents.

Throughout the parenting programme, these adolescents also reflected on their childhood, and this reflection led them to deconstruct their beliefs on parenting and think about corrective scripts that they wish to use to raise their children, especially to eliminate the use of punishments, shouting and smacking, which they associated with low self-esteem. Gender differences between the parents were very evident, especially surrounding their constructs about child-rearing and household responsibilities. I observed that these issues affected the couple's relationship because at times the parents seemed to compete against each other to find out who is the better parent between them.

Finally, the participants also reflected on their challenges, which were mainly, lack of time for them as a couple, perceived lack of familial support, the influence of society and other parenting struggles concerning disability and other issues regarding child-rearing. Finding

time for them as a couple was one of the challenges for the adolescent parents especially for those young couples who live together with one of the couple's parents or live separately in different households. Familial support was also a challenge. Though most of the adolescents described their family members as being supportive, such support was not always perceived as helpful by teenage parents. Another struggle was the influence of society since sometimes, these adolescent parents, especially the females, felt judged by society for being young parents. Other parenting concerns which were mentioned were temper tantrums, discipline, crying or whining, and even developmental delays and disability issues which turned out to be quite challenging for these adolescent parents.

### **6.3. Limitations of the study**

The methodology which was chosen for this study fitted with the aims of the research, resulting in an analysis of the experience of adolescent mothers and fathers after attending a parenting programme. Since IPA is an idiographic approach, this study cannot be generalised to all teenage parents. However, this study did show some similar findings with previous research, both local and foreign, that could provide additional awareness and a systemic understanding of the experiences of adolescent parents who attend parenting programmes.

IPA aims to gain the participants' perspective on their experience, and this is achieved through listening to and analysing the language they use to describe these experiences. This analysis relies on participants having the ability to express their thoughts and feelings. However, Willig (2013) argues that it is a great challenge to communicate the complex details of one's experiences, especially when people are not familiar with talking about them. Smith et al. (2009) also argue that our interpretations of our experiences are always shaped

and limited by our language. As I have mentioned in the previous chapters, during the interviews, the females were more verbal than the males as at times the males only nodded or agreed with their partners when answering certain questions. Thus, at times, during the interviews, I felt that I couldn't grasp the fathers' experience of the programme like I could understand the mothers' perception of the same experience. It was crucial for me to understand how the adolescent fathers were making sense of their experience of attending a parenting programme for the first time. However, the fact that it was the fathers' first experience of a parenting programme, might also have hindered them from finding the words to express themselves. Since I knew the female participants from my role as a guidance teacher at Servizz Għozza, they might have felt more at ease in my presence both during the parenting programme and during the interviews and this may have helped them to feel more comfortable to open up about their experience.

Since I took an active role in the research process, both by conducting the six-week parenting programme and the interviews and interpreting the findings, I recognise that I cannot eliminate my preconceptions. The interview guide has aided me to minimise bias, and I tried to adopt a reflective approach to the research to reduce the impact of my prejudices on the study. My reflexive awareness was crucial, as throughout the whole process I tried to be aware of my previous experience with adolescent parents, especially mothers, and how this might impact the outcome of the study. I am aware that at times, I have focused more on the fathers than the mothers since this was the first parenting programme in Malta for adolescent parents together. Thus, I was very interested in the experience of the fathers and how their experience of attending a parenting programme together with the mother of their children might affect the parents' relationship with their children.

#### **6.4. Recommendations for Practice**

Although the parenting programme had a different impact on each of the adolescent parents who attended, several key themes emerged from the interpretative analysis. When considering these in relation to the literature, some implications for practice can be tentatively suggested regarding the role of professionals who work directly with adolescent parents and parents to be, mainly *Servizz Għożża*. Throughout this study, it has been shown that through supporting both parents throughout the pregnancy and the first child-rearing years by implementing a parenting programme for both adolescent parents, a shift is more probable to occur towards enhanced relationships on a family level.

Such an adolescent parenting programme would ideally be available for both teenage parents as soon as they find out about the pregnancy so that contact could be initiated with both the parents to be, and the guidance teachers would be able to invest in a relationship with both parents. Peer support was one of the main themes which emerged from this study, and this shows how significant it is for adolescent parents to feel less socially isolated and more emotionally supported both by professionals and other adolescents who are in similar situations (Kane et al. 2007).

Involving both sets of grandparents from the very beginning of pregnancy would be beneficial for everyone involved in the lives of the children about to be born. Since a programme for the grandparents to be has been already implemented at *Servizz Għożża*, both programmes for adolescent parents and their parents might be conducted concurrently, so the adolescents' parents could become aware of the support needed by their children at different stages throughout their pregnancy and after their child is born. It would also be interesting if a number of sessions would be held with both the adolescent parents and their parents

together so that they all could listen to each others' perceptions and needs. Eventually, this project would also support guidance teachers, counsellors and therapists to continue working with the couple and grandparents postnatally to assist them further.

Consistent with the suggestions put forward by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality, in 2012, this study has shown how beneficial it can be to organise programmes to raise awareness of the value of equal sharing of responsibilities between parents and to encourage more fathers to undertake caring duties. Parenting together has been a very strong sub-theme in this research which, together with learning positive parenting skills, has led the adolescent parents to report an improvement in their parenting. This type of programme could also be extended to offer support to teenage parents on continuing education as well as on the use of contraception and family planning to successfully stimulate positive outcomes in child-rearing (Klerman, 2002).

Since Couple Time was one of the themes which emerged from the findings of this study, it would be beneficial to link couple work exercises with parenting skills to also support those adolescent parents who are still in a relationship. This kind of programme would help these couples to strengthen their relationship while working on improving their parenting as research shows that the couple relationship affects other family relationships (Cox & Paley, 1997; White 1999; Kitzmann 2000; Krishnakumar & Buehler 2000; Orbuch et al., 2000; Shapiro et al., 2000).

Widening the implementation of such programmes for both adolescent parents and parents to be to other service providers such as medical staff, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists would support teenage parents and their children further in a more holistic

manner. Home visits can also be powerful ways to engage families in services as it might be a way to enhance the agency-family relationship (Solomon & Liefeld, 1998).

In relation to the social constructionists ideas applied in systemic family therapy, it is essential for guidance teachers and other professionals working with adolescent parents and their families, to be aware of their attitudes and beliefs regarding teenage motherhood and fatherhood. This awareness would help them to remain open to offer their services and support both parents and their families whenever possible.

### **6.5. Recommendations for Future Research**

The current study aimed to enhance understanding regarding adolescent parents' experience of a parenting programme. Future research in this area is important to aid further understanding of the support needed by adolescent parents and their families.

Since the literature found showed that the parents' relationship quality is linked to positive parenting and outcomes for children, it would be very interesting for future research to focus on adolescent parenting programmes which purpose would be both to enhance the couple relationship as well as to improve their parenting skills.

Other research could also focus on developing parenting programmes for adolescent parents who are not in a relationship anymore but wish to co-parent their children. Being in a group made up of co-parenting adolescents only, might be an incentive for adolescent parents to attend together.

A study which could also prove insightful would be to carry out research which focuses on familial support needed by adolescent parents and parents to be. Rather than focusing solely on the adolescents' parenting needs, such research could also focus on the support required by teenage parents to enhance their couple relationship or their co-parenting relationship in the likelihood that some adolescent parents would not be in a relationship anymore.

### **6.6. Concluding Remarks**

Engaging in this research has been personally rewarding as I feel that I have succeeded in introducing a local programme for both adolescent parents through which I have helped them to reflect on their constructs regarding parenting. Throughout the programme, I have also engaged in self-reflexivity by reflecting on my own biases and how these might have influenced the participants. One of these biases was that since these parents were very young, my focus was to help them learn parenting skills, and this prevented me from going into the couple relationship. However, the participants mentioned couple time as one of the main challenges they face as parents, and thus I would be very interested in addressing the couple relationship together with parenting skills if I had to conduct this parenting programme with other adolescent parents.

After conducting this research, I am very eager to discuss this programme and its benefits with my superiors and colleagues so that it might be added as an ongoing programme at Servizz Ghozza. Being a guidance teacher, a trainee systemic family therapist and a parent myself, throughout this year I have realised what a positive impact this programme might have on the adolescent parents I work with and their children. I believe that the implementation of this parenting programme for teenage parents would create a positive shift

in the education of adolescent parents and parents to be and their families with the help of the professionals who work closely with these families.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Ethical Approval Form

IFT-Malta ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

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**Institute of Family Therapy Malta**  
**Ethics Approval Form - Trainees**

This form should be completed by the trainee and passed to the supervisor prior to a review of the possible ethical implications of the proposed research dissertation or project.

**No primary data collection can be undertaken before the supervisor and the Institute's Research Ethics Committee has approved the plan.**

If, following review of this form, amendments to the proposals are agreed to be necessary, the trainee should provide the supervisor with an amended version for endorsement.

The final signed and dated version of this form must be handed in with the dissertation. Failure to provide a signed and dated form on hand-in will be treated as if the dissertation itself was not submitted.

INSTITUTE OF FAMILY THERAPY

24 JUL 2018

MALTA

**1. What are the objectives of the dissertation / research project?**

The objective of this study is to identify the subjective benefits of a parenting programme for both adolescent mothers and fathers. This research aims to help Maltese adolescent parents to raise their children together and to seek to provide a support service to teenage mothers as well as young fathers. The parenting programme which is going to be used in this research project is 'Nifhmu 'l Uliedna' which was adapted to a Maltese population by the Guidance & Counselling services which are part of the National Schools Support Services in the Directorate for Educational Services of Malta from Michael Popkin's book 'Active Parenting Today'. This parenting programme will be conducted as a pilot project at Servizz Ghozza with attending students and their partners. The programme's aim is to provide teenagers with parenting skills which will assist them in being more successful, responsible and nurturing parents. The objective of a parenting programme offered to both adolescent mothers and fathers is to support them in using various strategies that promote the wellbeing and healthy development of their child, such as positive parenting approaches which reduce the practice of punishment, acquiring emotional communication skills, interacting positively and frequently with their children and creating a supportive home environment. This research project intends to focus on the personal experiences of adolescent parents after taking part in the parenting programme and identify its effect on them. Thus, the ultimate goal of this study is to identify what will help

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IFT-Malta ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

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these adolescents to improve their parenting skills and their interactions with their children while working together and supporting each other as parents.

2. Do you intend to collect *primary data* from human subjects or data that are identifiable with individuals? (This includes, for example, questionnaires and interviews.)

YES

/ NO (please circle)

If you do not intend to collect such primary data then please go to question 14.

If you do intend to collect such primary data then please respond to ALL the questions 3 through 13. If you feel a question does not apply then please respond with N/A (for not applicable).

3. What is the *purpose* of the primary data in the dissertation / research project?

For the purpose of this research, I am going to deliver a pilot six week parenting programme created by the Guidance & Counselling services which are part of the National Schools Support Services in the Directorate for Educational Services of Malta. The programme would be offered to an approximate number of 10 adolescent parents. It would consist of six 2 hours each group-based sessions in the first term of the scholastic year 2018 -2019 at Servizz Ghozza.

Since most of the role-plays, case studies and examples in the parenting programme 'Nifhmu 'l Uliedna' are about school-aged children, these will be changed to real life situations which are generally experienced by parents of babies and toddlers as most adolescent parents attending Servizz Ghozza have children under the age of three years.

To identify the benefits of the parenting programme, I am going to conduct semi-structured interviews with the adolescent parents which are then going to be analyzed through an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The purpose of semi-structured interviews in this study is to give an opportunity to adolescent parents to share detailed explanations of their personal experience of taking part in a parenting programme, in a non-judgemental atmosphere through the use of open-ended and non-directive questions. The findings would contribute to a richer understanding of the benefits of a parenting programme for both adolescent mothers and fathers.

I have decided to conduct the interviews myself since after conducting a six week parenting programme with these young parents, I would have developed a relationship with them, and

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thus, since in this research I am going to identify their subjective benefits of taking part in the programme, instead of creating a bias, this would facilitate their expression of the experience they would have just been through. On the other hand, if I had to measure the efficacy of the parenting programme, I would have asked a fellow student to conduct the interviews him/herself.

**4. Who is the *survey population(s)*?**

Participants would be adolescent mothers who attend Servizz Ghozza, and the fathers of their children, irrespective whether they are still in a relationship or not. Servizz Ghozza forms part of the National Schools Support Services in the Directorate for Educational Services of Malta and is the only government agency which offers psychological services and guidance to pregnant teenagers and their families until their child is 3 years of age.

**5. How big is the *sample* for each of the survey populations and how was this sample arrived at?**

The sample size would be round 10 participants, that is, 5 sets of parents, which is considered to be sufficient for IPA because it aims to achieve a detailed account of individual experience (Smith et al. 2009).

**6. How will respondents be *selected and recruited*?**

Participants would be selected on a voluntary basis. For the purpose of the study, only parents who at least one of them is between the ages of 13 and 20 years, whose children are not older than 3 years of age and whose female member attends Servizz Ghozza would be eligible. The upper age limit of 20 for at least one parent is going to be used because this is consistent with the WHO definition of adolescent parents, thereby enabling the inclusion of international studies. The officer in charge of Servizz Ghozza would be calling all students who already gave birth and whose children are not older than 3 years of age to ask them whether they would be willing to participate in a pilot parenting programme for both parents as a part of a research project. The partners/fathers of the children of the students who would be willing to participate

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would also be called by the officer in charge to ask them whether they would be willing to take part in the programme. Parents who would accept to take part would be invited to come over to Servizz Ghozza to be given the participant information sheet to sign and be given more information about the research project.

- 7. What steps are proposed to ensure that the requirements of *informed consent* will be met for those taking part in the research? If an Information Sheet for participants is to be used, please attach it to this form. If not, please explain how you will be able to demonstrate that informed consent has been gained from participants.**

For the purpose of this research, the participants' age would be from 13 till 20 years and thus, to be ethically correct, the parenting programme will be held under the remits of Servizz Ghozza, a place where the students, especially the ones under 18 years of age, would be quite familiar with and can request sessions with the guidance teachers and counsellor anytime they would feel the need to. If the participants would be under 18 years of age, their parents would need to sign a consent form giving them permission to take part in the research. All participants, even those who are 18 years and over, would also need to sign a participants' information sheet to obtain their informed consent. The explanation of the research would also be given by word of mouth. Permission to conduct this research would be obtained both from the officer in charge of Servizz Ghozza and from the Director of the Department of Educational Services.

Participants would be informed that participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Their names and other identifying information would be anonymised in the presentation of findings and they would also be assured that the narratives they share would be treated in strictest confidence.

Attached kindly find the Participant Information sheet which needs to be signed by each participant and by the participants' parents if the participant is under 18 years of age.

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IFT-Malta ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

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**8. How will *data* be collected from each of the sample groups?**

Semi-structured interviews with the parenting couples taking part in the parenting programme, would be conducted by myself at the end of the six week programme. To bring together the personal experiences of the participants, I would develop research questions along these lines, created from the information acquired in the literature review:

- What was your overall experience of the parenting programme?
- Were there aspects of the programme that were helpful?
- Were there aspects of the programme that didn't make sense or you didn't like?
- What have you noticed, if anything, about your relationship with your child since taking part in the programme?
- Have your difficulties with your child changed since attending the programme?
- Do you have suggestions for how the programme could be improved?
- Would you recommend this programme to other young parents? Why?

**9. How will *data* be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the research?**

Interviews will be audio recorded with the participants' consent, stored on a password protected laptop which can only be accessed by myself and deleted after the research project is completed.

**10. How will *confidentiality* be assured for respondents?**

Each participant would be given a number so they would be referred to by that number throughout the research write-up. The participants' identity will be protected from public exposure at all times. Signed participants' information sheets will be kept under lock and key in the office of the officer in charge of Servizz Ghozza.

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IFT-Malta ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

11. What steps are proposed to safeguard the *anonymity* of the respondents?

Participants' names and other identifying information would be anonymised in the presentation of findings. If by any chance, particular incidents of the participants' lives would easily lead the readers of the research write-up to recognize them, then I would need to amend the information given so as to prevent such identification.

12. Are there any *risks* (physical or other, including reputational) to respondents that may result from taking part in this research? YES /  NO (please circle).

If YES, please specify and state what measures are proposed to deal with these risks.

13. Are there any *risks* (physical or other, including reputational) to the researcher or to the Institute that may result from conducting this research? YES /  NO (please circle).

If YES, please specify and state what measures are proposed to manage these risks.

14. Will any *data* be obtained from a company or other organisation?  YES

NO (please circle) For example, information provided by an employer or its employees.

If NO, then please go to question 18.

15. What steps are proposed to ensure that the requirements of *informed consent* will be met for that organisation? How will *confidentiality* be assured for the organisation?

The officer in charge of Servizz Ghozza will be the gatekeeper of the participants' personal information. Only statistics used in parliamentary questions and published in the media from Servizz Ghozza (National Schools Support Services, Directorate for Educational Services, Malta) will be obtained.

16. Does the organisation have its own ethics procedure relating to the research you intend to carry out?  YES / NO (please circle).

YES

IFT-Malta ETHICS APPROVAL FORM

If YES, the Institute will require written evidence from the organisation that they have approved the research.

17. Will the proposed research involve any of the following (please put a  $\checkmark$  next to 'yes' or 'no'; consult your supervisor if you are unsure):

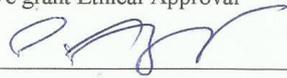
- |  |     |                                     |    |                                     |
|--|-----|-------------------------------------|----|-------------------------------------|
| • Vulnerable groups (e.g. children)?       | YES | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| • Particularly sensitive topics?           | YES | <input type="checkbox"/>            | NO | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Access to respondents via 'gatekeepers'? | YES | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | NO | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| • Use of deception?                        | YES | <input type="checkbox"/>            | NO | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Access to confidential personal data?    | YES | <input type="checkbox"/>            | NO | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Psychological stress, anxiety etc.?      | YES | <input type="checkbox"/>            | NO | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| • Intrusive interventions?                 | YES | <input type="checkbox"/>            | NO | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

18. Are there any other ethical issues that may arise from the proposed research?

N/A

Please print the name of:

I/We grant Ethical Approval

student Yana Gatt Hampton supervisor 

Signed:

(student)  (supervisor) DR. CH. AZZOPTARDI

Date 24<sup>th</sup> July 2018 Date 24/7/18

AMENDMENTS

If you need to make changes please ensure you have permission before the primary data collection. If there are major changes, fill in a new form. For minor changes then fill in the amendments (next page) and get them signed before the primary data collection begins.



## Appendix 2: Permission to Conduct Research in State Schools

DIPARTIMENT GHALL-KURRIKULU, TAGHLIM  
TUL IL-HAJJA U IMPJEGABILITA`  
FLORIANA FRN 1810



DEPARTMENT FOR THE CURRICULUM, LIFELONG  
LEARNING AND EMPLOYABILITY (DCLE)  
FLORIANA FRN 1810

### Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability

**Tel: 25982265**  
**researchandinnovation@ilearn.edu.mt**

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY

**Date:** 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2018

**Ref:** RI2018/134

**To: Head of School**  
**From: Assistant Director (Research and Innovation)**

**Title of Research Study: The Benefits of a Parenting Programme for Adolescent Mothers and Fathers.**

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The Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability would like to inform that approval is granted to **Yana Gatt Hampton** to conduct the research in State Schools according to the official rules and regulations, subject to approval from the Ethics Committee of the respective Higher Educational Institution.

The researcher is committed to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and will ensure that these requirements are followed in the conduct of this research. The researcher will be sending letters with clear information about the research, as well as consent forms to all data subjects and their parents/guardians when minors are involved. Consent forms should be signed in all cases particularly for the participation of minors in research.

For further details about our policy for research in schools, kindly visit [www.research.gov.mt](http://www.research.gov.mt).

Thank you for your attention and cooperation.

**Grazio Grixti**

Assistant Director (Research and Innovation)  
Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability  
Great Siege Road | Floriana | VLT 2000

### **Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet (Maltese version)**

#### **Programm għal ġenituri adolexxenti**

Bħala missier/omm żagħżuġ/a li tuża s-servizzi ta' Servizz Għożża, int ġejt magħżul/a biex tiegħu sehem f'din ir-riċerka. Tista' tagħżel li tiegħu sehem jew le b'mod volontarju u għandek dritt li tiegħaf tipparteċipa meta trid anki jekk tkun bdejt tipparteċipa fil-programm.

*Qabel tiegħu sehem f'dan l-istudju, huwa importanti li tifhem għaliex qed issir din ir-riċerka u x'ser tkun qed tinvolvi. Jekk jogħġbok, hu f'tit hin biex taqra sew din l-informazzjoni u tistaqsi fejn thoss il-bżonn li tiċċara xi affarijiet jew tikseb iktar informazzjoni. Hu l-hin meħtieġ biex tiddeċiedi jekk tridx tipparteċipa jew le.*

Din ir-riċerka qed issir bħala parti mill-istudju tiegħi, Yana Gatt Hampton, għal Masters fit-terapija tal-familji mal-Institute of Family Therapy, Malta. Din ir-riċerka ser issir matul is-sena skolastika 2018-2019 u l-iskop tagħha hu biex nifhem l-esperjenza ta' ommijiet u missirijiet adolexxenti wara li jattendu programm fuq trobbija tal-ulied. Dan il-programm jista' jgħin lil ġenituri adolexxenti jitgħallmu fuq l-iżvilupp u t-trobbija ta' uliedhom u jaqsmu xi diffikultajiet li jkunu għaddejnin minnhom ma' ġenituri adolexxenti oħrajn. Dan il-programm jista' jgħin ukoll lil ġenituri jitkellmu bejniethom kif jistgħu jgħinu lil xulxin u jaħdmu flimkien għal trobbija tajba għat-tarbija.

Jekk int tagħżel li tiegħu sehem, dan il-programm se jinvolvi 6 laqgħat fi grupp ta' ġenituri adolexxenti ta' siegħa il-waħda. Fl-aħħar tal-programm se ssir intervista ta' madwar siegħa ma' kull ġenitur. Dawn il-laqgħat se jsiru kollha ġewwa Servizz Għożża, Qormi.

L-intervisti **biss** ser jiġu rrekordjati u se jintużaw biss għall-iskop tar-riċerka. Ir-registrazzjoni se tiġi mħassra fl-aħħar tar-riċerka. L-ismijiet tal-parteċipanti se jingħataw isem fittizju u d-dettalji personali se jinżammu biss fuq kompjuter li se jkollha aċċess għalih ir-riċerkatrici **biss**.

Ir-rizultati ta' dan l-istudju ser jiġu ppreżentati u ppublikati. Informazzjoni personali ser tkun kompletament anonima u li bl-ebda mod ma tkun tista' tiġi identifikata l-identità tal-parteċipanti.

### **Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet (English version)**

#### **Programme for adolescent parents**

As an adolescent Father/mother who makes use of the services of Servizz Għożża, you have been chosen to take part in this research. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. You can still withdraw at any time during the programme without giving a reason.

*Before you decide it is important to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.*

This research is being done as part of my studies for the Masters in Systemic Psychotherapy at the Institute of Family Therapy, Malta. This study will be held during the scholastic year 2018 -2019 and its purpose is to gain insight into the experience of adolescent mothers and fathers after attending a parenting programme. This programme can help adolescent parents learn about their children's development and share any difficulties they might have with other teenage parents. This programme can also help young parents to talk to each other and support each other to parent together.

If you choose to take part in this programme, you will need to attend 6 sessions in a group of adolescent parents. These sessions will last about 1 hour each. At the end of the programme, you will be asked to attend for an interview which will also take about 1 hour. These sessions will all be held at Servizz Għożża, Qormi.

**Only** the interviews will be recorded and these will be used only for the purpose of the research. The recordings will be deleted at the end of the research. Ir-registrazzjoni se tiġi mħassra fl-aħħar tar-riċerka. The participants' names will be given a pseudonym and all the participants' personal information will be kept on a computer which **only** the researcher will have access to.

The results of this study will be published. All the participants' personal information will be kept anonymous and no participants will be identified in the publication.

**Appendix 4: Consent Form (Maltese version)**

*Jien nikkonferma li qrajt u fhimt l-informazzjoni għall-parteċipanti.*

*Kelli l-opportunita' li nistaqsi mistoqsijiet u dawn ġew imwiegħba.*

*Nifhem li kull informazzjoni personali ser tibqa' kunfidenzjali u ser isir kull sforz meħtieġ biex ma nkunx identifikat/a.*

*Nifhem li l-informazzjoni kollha li ser nagħti ser tibqa' anonima u ser tiġi mħassra fl-aħħar tar-riċerka.*

*Nifhem li l-parteċipazzjoni tiegħi hi volontarja u jien liberu/libera li nieqaf nieħu sehem f'din ir-riċerka meta rrid mingħajr ma nagħti spjegazzjoni.*

*Jien naċċetta li nieħu sehem f'dan l-istudju.*

L-isem tal-parteċipant \_\_\_\_\_

Firma \_\_\_\_\_

Data \_\_\_\_\_

L-isem tal-ġenituri (f'każ ta' parteċipant minuri)

Omm \_\_\_\_\_

Firma \_\_\_\_\_

Missier \_\_\_\_\_

Firma \_\_\_\_\_

Data \_\_\_\_\_

L-isem tar-riċerkatriċi \_\_\_\_\_

Firma \_\_\_\_\_

Data \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 4: Consent Form (English version)**

*I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet*

*I had the opportunity to ask any questions and these were answered*

*I understand that my personal information will be kept confidential and everything possible will be done so that I won't be identified.*

*I understand that all the information given will be kept anonymous and it will be deleted at the end of the research.*

*I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason.*

*I accept to take part in this study.*

Participant's name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parents' names (in the case of minors)

Mother \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Father \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 5: Excerpt from Data Analysis**

<b>Exploratory Comments</b>	<b>Translated Transcript</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>
	Researcher: I would like to ask you how was your experience of the parenting programme.	
	Charlotte: It was very interesting. You learn new things. You ask when you don't know.	
	Researcher: So what resonated with you?	
	Charlotte: I experienced it as issues I already knew about. I knew most of the things because my children do them. But at the same time I asked you if I wasn't sure.	
<p>Hopeful</p> <p>Empathic understanding towards children</p> <p>Change in both parents – shared responsibility of parenting</p>	<p>Luke: When you showed us that video clip, there was a parent who told us what to do when the children are playing with a lot of toys and making a mess. I started to tell the eldest "Let's go play with another toy." She doesn't always obey, but 8 out of 10 times I manage to do it. That's good for children because I'm not shouting all the time like before. And when I'm cooking, I tell them to help me, and they behave really well. I tell them to mix the ingredients or to put them in a bowl.</p>	<p>Benefis of parenting programme</p> <p>Change in parental behaviour</p> <p>Continued learning</p>
<p>Becoming aware of the difference</p>	<p>Charlotte: I started to tell them "When you clean up all your toys, we will go to the playground." Instead of "If you're not going to clean up, I will punish you." And it's working. I learnt to stay calmer because before the babies were born, I used to shout more. I also started to let them have a bath on their own. I stay near them, but they do everything themselves.</p>	<p>Conditional method</p> <p>Learning adaptation</p> <p>Positive &amp; improved parenting</p>
	Researcher: How are you manging?	
<p>Being sarcastic</p> <p>Age difference</p>	<p>Luke: She's maturing</p>	<p>Gender stereotypes</p>

