

## Love, sex and a mother aged 15

### How a 15-year-old girl, and the world around her, coped with an unexpected pregnancy.

Mya Elmelem was 15 when she became pregnant with Jake and has been surviving on benefits ever since. Now 19, she lives with her three-year-old son in Kentish Town.

Mya recently gave evidence to the Government's Social Exclusion Unit, which has just published its report into teenage pregnancy. Here she describes what being a teenage mother was like for her.

"I went out with Jake's dad for a long time. We were childhood sweethearts. Sex education never covers anything about the emotional side of relationships - the fact that you're dealing with young people in love."

Mya, who lives in Grafton Road, was already pregnant when somebody from the Brook Advisory Service came into school.

She said: "They shouldn't have one-off lessons. Sex education should happen over the whole school learning period. But I can't say that I didn't have any knowledge. When I was 12, me and my mum were really close and she was very liberal. I could always talk to her about sex."

Mya complained that information supplied with the Pill seemed complicated.

"They should print little cards with step-by-step information for young people instead of big leaflets that you have to hunt through. Some kind of plastic card with basic steps, one to 10, would work. Then if you did miss a pill and were panicking, you'd know exactly what to do."

She believes for the most part that contraception is still a woman's issue.

"It's nerve-racking for a young girl to stop in the middle of sex and say to a boy, 'can you put on a condom, please?' I've got older friends who still don't like doing it because they say it 'ruins the moment'. They don't even think about what can happen afterwards."

When Mya suspected she was pregnant, she encountered "this really horrible doctor" who refused to see her without her mother.

"It's hard because you associate your family doctor with your parents and you're scared to tell them anything. I remember my mum taking me to the doctor with her years before. People should know, through a flyer or something, that what you tell the doctor is confidential."

"I said to the doctor, 'Look, I'm nearly 16 anyway, so I can do this on my own', and she said, 'oh, I don't think you should. Have you thought about an abortion?'"

"She went on, 'look at you, you're getting annoyed with me now. How do you think you'll handle being a mum?' This was my first appointment to find out if I was really pregnant and I got all that. She had a really negative attitude, yet it was none of her business."

"From the beginning I wanted to keep my child. I had been taking the Pill, but I didn't take it properly and fell pregnant. I considered a termination and I had the appointment booked, but I didn't go because I knew I'd regret it. My teachers were really good. They fought to find me a home tutor and helped me take some of my exams while Jake was a new-born baby."

"People look at you and think, 'young mum, boyfriend in prison'. It's just stereotyping. At first, when I'd walk down the street with Jake, I found people would say to me, 'Oh, what did your mum say?' That annoyed me. People were thinking, 'Oh, she only did it to get a council flat'. I actually had to wait ages for my flat. I cried when I saw it because it was so disgusting and dismal. It was utterly horrible. I felt like I was fighting the whole world when Jake was first born, but now it's the real life issues which make it hard to be a young mum."

"I don't have as much of a life in terms of going out, because I don't see my friends every day like I used to. The money I get to live on isn't enough. It literally puts the food in my mouth and it pays my electricity bill."

"Teenage fathers should definitely make a financial contribution because they helped make that child. Jake's dad has only recently come out of prison, but I'd rather have the money off him than the Government. It's the principle really."

"I've always wanted to go back to work. I used to try to go to college but I couldn't find a nursery place; I went to my MP, who wrote a letter to my local nursery to get a place for me. I wasn't accepted. I've always done a lot more than most young mums to get work, but it's still out of reach."

"Sometimes I wish I'd waited to have Jake, but I can still have everything in life. I just have to try a little bit harder."

### About the team

This article was produced by editors Rachel Bulford, 18, Daniel Blackwood and Darrell Philip, 17, Oliver Robertson and Karen Loughrey, 16, Anna Chandwani, Steven Boyle, Lindsay Marchant and Amy Wood, 15, Ruth Sewell, 14, and reporter Kierra Box, 13. It was published in the Hampstead and Highgate Express.

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#### Stereotyping Teenage Mothers

I fell pregnant when I was only just fifteen, and although I know many people will judge me for this, but I actually wanted to be a mother. I had been with Sam for over two years when I fell pregnant, but we had been best mates from the age of ten. Me and Sam were, and still are, very close and chose this option carefully. I didn't do it because it was cool or anything, I didn't have a lot going for me, wasn't very clever and motherhood was the only thing I had ever wanted in life. Madison has just turned one, and I was lucky enough to get child care easily to enable me to go to the local college and study hair and beauty. Although I still live with my parents, Sam comes to ours, or we go to his parents daily and often spend nights together. He loves Madison with all his heart and contributes everything he can, and even gave up his chance of a college education to go to work to pay for the things we need. My parents, although disapproving in the beginning, have been constantly understanding. They have always helped us when we were in need yet taught us that we chose to have Madison and we need to pay for our consequences. I don't want a council flat, or benefits. I don't need help from people I don't know and nor do I sap off my parents or family. Sam and Me have decided as soon as we are stable with money and when I have finished college etc we will get married and know that we won't be one of many young

couples that divorce soon after. Just because we are younger than other families it doesnt mean we cant be a proper functioning family. I know I would survive alone with Madison but I am glad for Sams support and we are a proper family, despite societies prejudices. I would like to show all people in todays world that the stereotyping label of 'young mum who doesnt know how a condom works and father in jail' isnt correct, there are many of us who can cope with motherhood and although I understand there are many immature stupid young girls out there getting pregnant for ridiculous reasons, that is not all of us and many of us can cope perfectly well without anybody to baby-sit us aswell as our children. I would like to be seen as a role model for many teenage girls growing up with children and although help is greatly appriechiated and I understand why many are forced to take the option of benefits etc, not all of us need that option so please do not stereotype every young mother you meet.

Amie (age 16) from Sheffield, 30 December 2007 22:30

03

In regards to "mother aged 15" I myself was a teenage mother.... And yes doctors do play god... !!! I went as a responsible 16 year old to ask for contraception as legally able, and was not only given a lecture about the errors of my ways, but a leaflet on GOD!!! .....low and behold I became pregnant!... so maybe irresponsibility is a two way process!!! How responsible is the state? As the writer quite rightly suggests sex education is a way of life maybe it needs to be taught as such and not hidden away only to appear once during our school life. As for teenage mothers... we grow with our children and learn with them. I am now the proud mother of a paratrooper ready to defend our country. For myself I have been in education or work since day one. Don't listen to the cynics they will only bring you down. Life is a challenge and so it should be.... As for absent fathers look at what they are missing. Yes the state is too lenient. we now have DNA testing. Compulsory testing & make deductions out of their wages. Maybe then the girls wouldn't have to ask for the condom. : )

mother of two sons from London, 30 December 1899 00:00

18

All doctors think they know best just because they went to uni. and stuff like that well its your choice girls not anyone else if you haev a family to support you and u know in your own mind youll be a great mother. than go for it. none of my family regrets it and neither does my boyfriend of 1 year. we love our daughter ella-shaye she is the sweetest baby in the world :)

Jaydon Mariie (age 15) from australia, 30 December 1899 00:00

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