I was going to be an ASTRONAUT and then I became a PARENT

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INTRODUCTION

In early adulthood, young people face a number of developmental tasks related to both intra- and interpersonal development. Havighust (1981) points to, among other things, choosing an occupation, selecting a life partner and learning to live with them, starting a family and rearing children, managing home, undertaking civic responsibility, and finding a congenial social group. As Liberska and Malina (2011) claimed, this period is a time of accumulated tasks, full of expectations created by the social environment as well as young people themselves.

Literature indicates that the multitude of tasks and the need to meet the above-mentioned expectations is particularly burdensome for young women. When they become mothers, their professional career slows down significantly, and their perception by their colleagues changes (Torres et al., 2024). They often have to give up their own aspirations to meet social expectations (McIntosh et al., 2012; Toyibah, 2019). This is also visible in the academic environment, where pregnancy is sometimes perceived as a significant obstacle to a career, or even preventing its progression (Treude & Matzke, 2010). Adding to that, study by Thanintranon et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of timing in pregnancy when making decisions about career development. Individuals who were students before becoming pregnant were twice as likely to resume their education after childbirth compared to those who were not students. Working or studying mothers draw attention to the need to reorganize their lives, develop the ability to plan and organize time, and strengthen assertiveness, but they also emphasize the importance of support from family and employers (Krause, 2019), as well as a friendly attitude from universities (Ruszkiewicz, 2012)
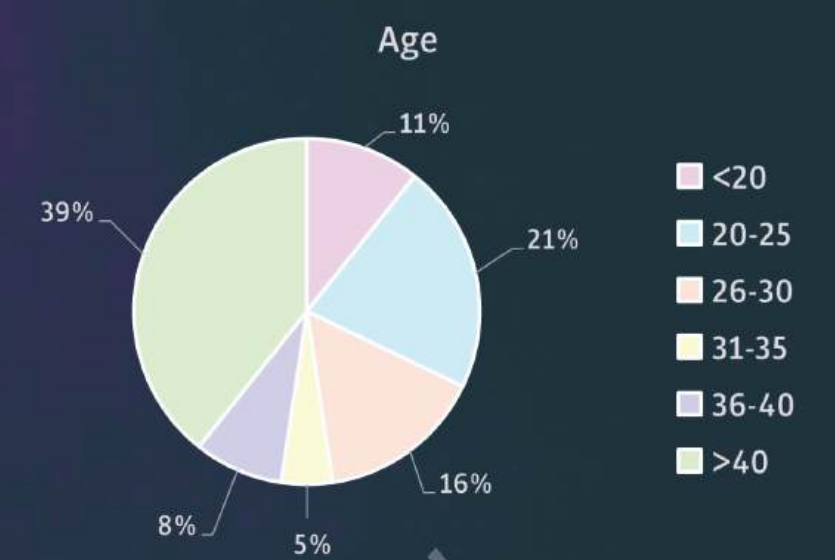
The study aims to find out about the experience of family planning and parenthood and its impact on studies. The study aims to analyze the causes of discrimination and diagnose the needs of students who take on parenthood.
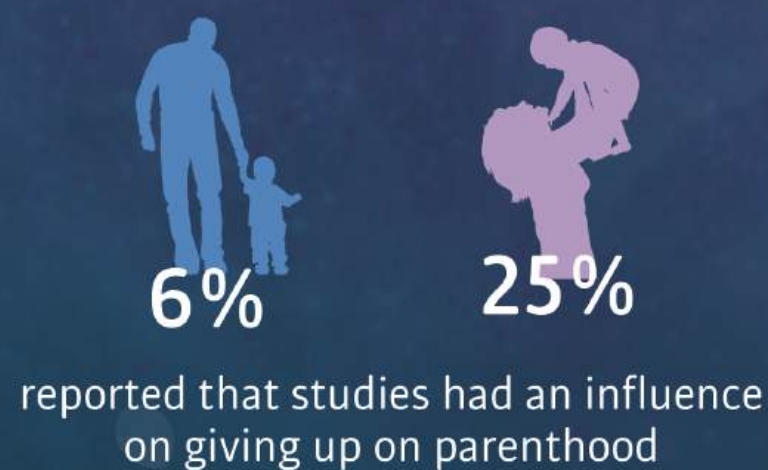
METHODS

Sociodemographic survey - prreliminary study

Participants
- N=85 (69 women, 15 men, 1 not declared)
- 44% being pregnant or having children
- and 44% considering having them in the future
- For people who do have children, 35 % were both raising children and studying at the same time.

Age

<20	11%
20-25	21%
26-30	16%
31-35	5%
36-40	8%
>40	39%

RESULTS

6%   **25%**

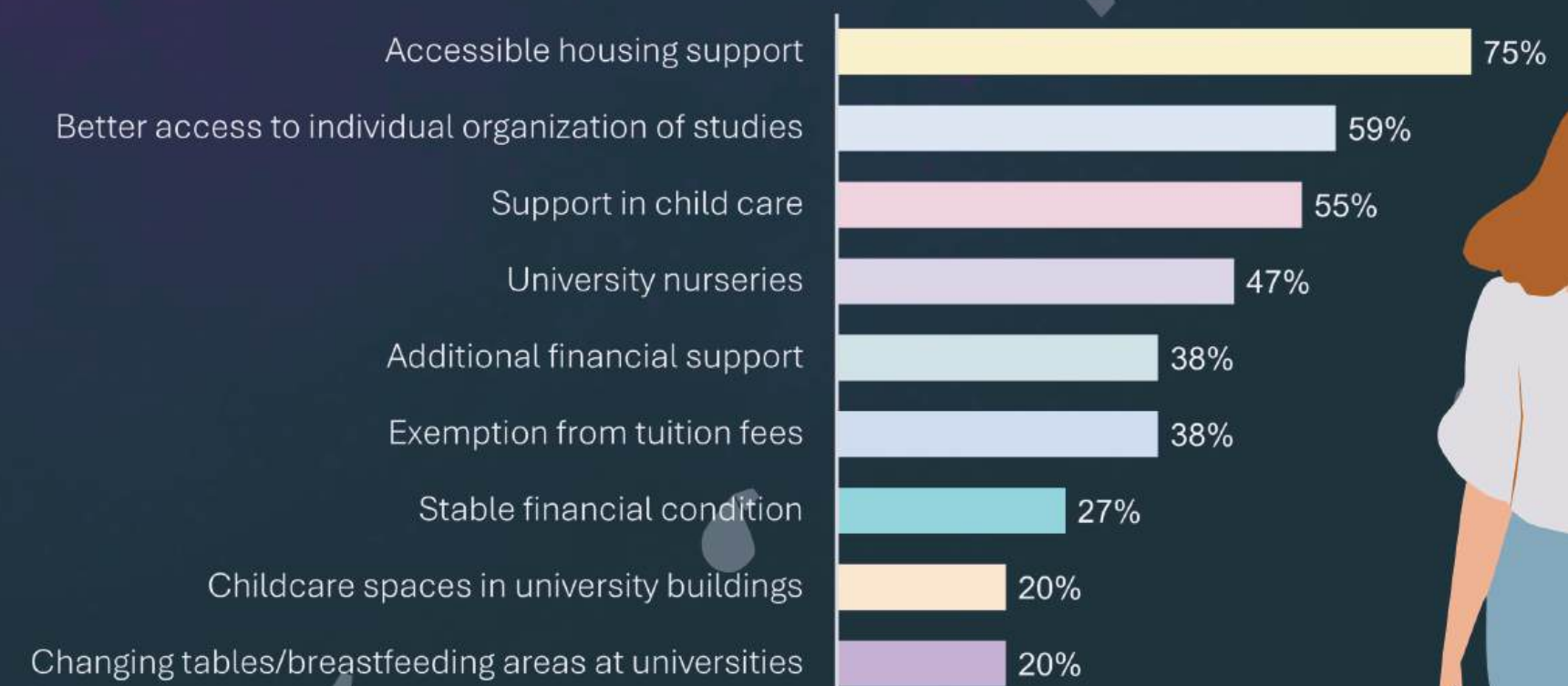reported that studies had an influence on giving up on parenthood

The analysis of parents' functioning during the studies showed that they did not feel excluded (9 out of 12 participants, who had children during studying). However, some people indicated that they were subjected to higher requirements, e.g. in terms of time management or meeting deadlines.

Thirteen respondents were studying during pregnancy or while taking care of a child, two of them did not complete their studies. Among those who continued studying and graduated the factors influencing the decision to stay at university included: a stable financial situation (27%), support in childcare (27%), the possibility of resting from everyday duties, and an individual desire to gain knowledge and a dream job (9%), and from an institutional perspective, a possibility to flexibly organize classes and exams (9%).

Ten out of twelve people think that their university does not offer support for pregnant students/parents. At the same time, support in this situation comes mainly from family, friends or other sources.

What kind of institutional support do you think would best improve the situation of young parents and pregnant people at universities?

Accessible housing support	75%
Better access to individual organization of studies	59%
Support in child care	55%
University nurseries	47%
Additional financial support	38%
Exemption from tuition fees	38%
Stable financial condition	27%
Childcare spaces in university buildings	20%
Changing tables/breastfeeding areas at universities	20%

38% of people think studies might have had a negative impact on their parenthood.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Previous research indicated that the need to combine studies with parenthood was often a challenge for young people in many areas of functioning i.e., professional, student, domestic, or family (Moghadam et al., 2017). Schreiber et al. (2019) revealed systemic loneliness of parents at academic level and some discriminative behaviors and comments towards students expecting or having children. Although in our analyses the respondents did not reveal a sense of exclusion, it seems that this issue requires in-depth analysis due to its importance for the physical and mental condition of parents. Early adulthood is a period of heightened social engagement, therefore isolation—along with other factors associated with a diminished subjective sense of personal and academic resources—may contribute to the decision to forgo parenthood, as evidenced above.

In the context of supporting young parents, it is crucial to foster a culture of empathy, safety and care, while simultaneously offering flexible opportunities for structuring the academic process (Najjuma & Kyarugahe, 2007). Findings from our survey underscore an important point about expectations and needs of studying parents, e.g. regarding better access to individual organization of studies or the possibility of using university nurseries and kindergartens. Such approach ensures that young parents can effectively balance their educational pursuits with parental responsibilities, promoting both personal well-being and academic success.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although the present research contributes to the literature on integrating different spheres of life, it is not without limitations. Firstly, the study sample is the relatively small and mostly feminine. It seems crucial to verify the analyses on a wider and gender diverse group, with particular consideration of people who became parents during their studies. Additionally, since the study is preliminary in nature, in the next stage it would be worth enriching it with psychological factors, e.g. psychological safety or subjective sense of support or level of parental stress.

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