

School experiences and young women's pregnancy and parenthood decisions: a systematic review and synthesis of qualitative research

Abstract

Schools are considered high-potential environments for promoting adolescent sexual and reproductive health outcomes among young women. Qualitative studies provide context and meaning to how school experiences and systems contribute to pregnancy and parenthood decisions from the perspectives of youth. This systematic review screened 24,711 references from 8 databases, yielding 28 qualitative studies. Included studies were assessed for quality and synthesised using meta-ethnographic approaches. Reciprocal translation revealed that young women's life trajectories were at least partially shaped by a commitment to school values and expectations for academic achievement, influenced by structural and relational factors within the school. These findings resonate with Markham and Aveyard's theory of human functioning and school organisation. Future policy and practices might seek to improve teacher-student interactions, leverage young women's developing autonomy, and ensure physically and psychologically safe spaces for students.

Keywords

Schools, adolescent health, sexual behaviour, systematic review, qualitative

Highlights

- Systematic review and synthesis of 28 qualitative studies revealed that young women's life trajectories were at least partially shaped by a commitment to school values and expectations for academic achievement.
- Young women's life and educational aspirations fit into their perceptions of how education or parenthood would help them achieve adulthood status.
- Young women indicated the ways that schools shaped their commitment to school and education, including whether school values were representative of their cultural identities and how teachers' explicit or implicit messages affected their expectations for future education or career.

Funding

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.