

The meaning of a young woman's sexual and reproductive health rights in modern day SA

In a monograph supported by the CoE-HUMAN, adolescent girls' and young women's sexual risk is explored in a post-slavery, post-colonial and post-apartheid era. Thus, interventions to support girls and young women should address patriarchy, decolonisation, and most importantly promote diversity of choices.

While educational and employment opportunities have increased for young women, sexual risk and vulnerability to exploitation and abuse are still significant problems for them. But interventions, including comprehensive sexuality education, are mainly aimed at changing adolescent girls' and young women's behaviour: prevention of pregnancy, HIV, sexually-transmitted illnesses, and gender-based violence.

These interventions need to be scrutinised as they rely on assumptions, such as a young adolescent girl and woman having agency, and that all women want to attain betterment through education and employment.

Personal agency is important in terms of enabling adolescent girls and young women to make choices, but women in societies with a high prevalence of gender-based violence are unable to exercise such agency. This monograph suggests that socially constructed shame regarding rape, teenage pregnancy and HIV infection needs to be addressed to ensure effective responses. As long as interventions designed for young women operate under conditions of continuing social stigma regarding these issues, the efficacy of the interventions will be limited.

Society prefers "sequential" model interventions (those that emphasise good behaviour and education), because it is seen as more likely to produce women who are self-sufficient. But interventions should look at the diversity of feelings and lived experiences of sexual and reproductive health. The monograph makes the case for the recognition of "multiple modernities". These "encapsulate the complex ways in which 'modern' societies across the globe have emerged" (Wielenga, 2018a). Families are an integral component of human social organisation and should not be delinked from SRHR interventions. SRHR interventions need to demystify pregnancy and reproduction: regardless of whether a girl or a young woman starts a family whilst she is still at school, when she has finished her school education, or many years after completing it, her decision should be supported.



This research was produced by Mzikazi Nduna. She is a researcher at the Department of Psychology, University of the Witwatersrand and has a particular interest in Father (dis)connections and gender-based violence and femicide.

Nduna, Mzikazi. 2020. **A magnifying glass and a fine-tooth comb: understanding girls' and young women's sexual vulnerability.** Pretoria: CSA&G Press, Centre for Sexualities, AIDS and Gender, University of Pretoria.

Link to podcast: <https://bit.ly/35WFFFE>

Link to monograph: <https://bit.ly/3kCe8gB>