



Mental health needs among pregnant and parenting adolescent girls

The responsibilities and demands of parenting, lack of knowledge about child development and social support for pregnant and parenting adolescent girls and young women are associated with high stress, depression, and anxiety.

Adolescent pregnancy is a significant global public health problem in high, middle-and low-income countries. Adolescent pregnancies are more likely to occur in marginalized communities, with social difficulties commonly driven by a lack of education, employment opportunities, and poverty. Approximately 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 and 2 million girls under 15 give birth yearly, accounting for 11% of births worldwide. In developing countries, 12 million girls aged 15–19 years and at least 777,000 girls under 15 years give birth yearly. Adolescent mothers aged 17 years and younger in South Africa (SA) accounted for approximately 33 899 births in 2020.

It cannot be overlooked that these adolescent girls are still in the developing stage. Therefore, early pregnancy and motherhood force many adolescent girls to prematurely take on an adult role, which they are not emotionally or physically prepared for. The responsibilities and demands of parenting, lack of knowledge about child development and social support for pregnant and parenting adolescent girls and young women are associated with high stress, depression, and anxiety. In addition, the rate of depression in adolescent mothers is estimated to be between 16% and 44%, and the rate of depression among non-pregnant

adolescents and adult women ranges between 5% and 20%. Furthermore, the literature revealed a gap in mental health service use among pregnant and parenting adolescent girls and young women. Therefore, this suggests that pregnant and parenting adolescents face substantial barriers to accessing mental health services to meet their needs. Hence, this review aims to identify the gaps in addressing mental health needs among adolescent mothers in SA.

What the study found

Challenges phased by teenagers included the following: Health care facilities. There is still a lack of maternal and mental health services tailored to meet adolescents' unique needs. This has been associated with unfriendly adolescent services experienced in public health institutions, lack of confidentiality by healthcare workers and judgmental healthcare workers' attitudes.

Legislature:

Even though these are in place, the literature reveals that challenges play a role in the mental well-being of pregnant and parenting adolescents, including the lack of legal and cultural protection, the denial of fundamental human rights, and the lack of comprehensive sexuality education.

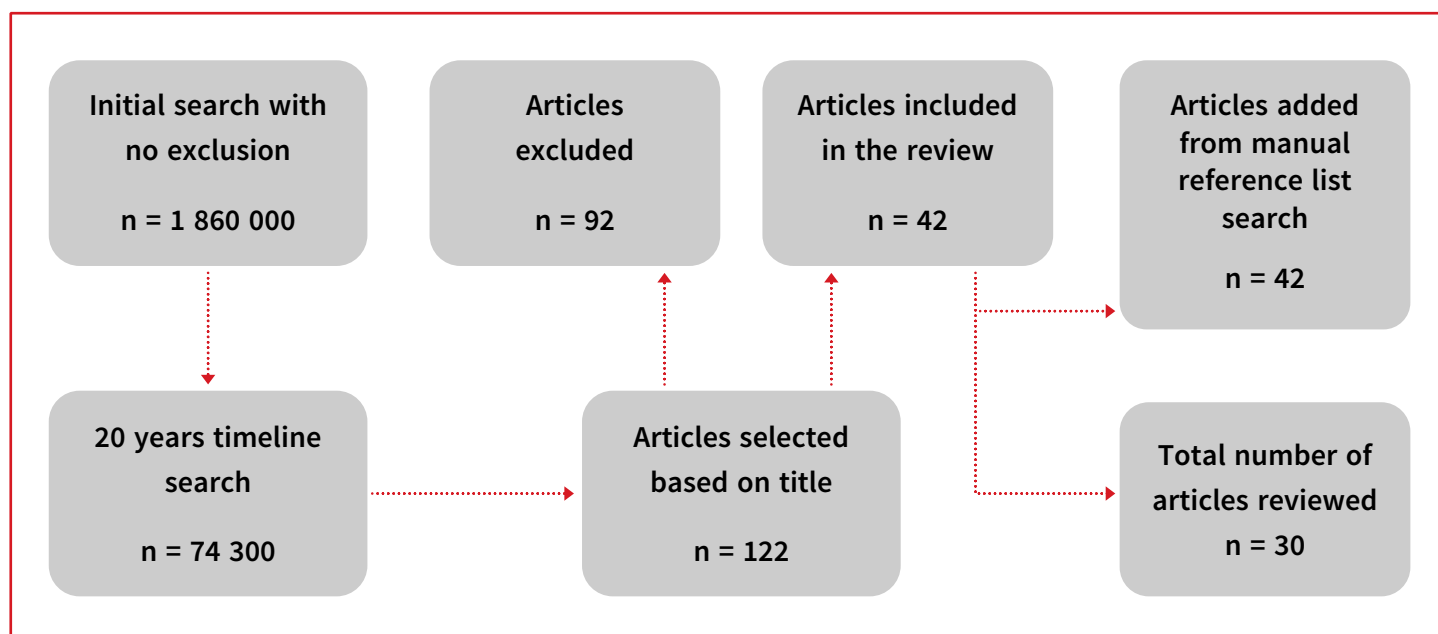


Figure 1: Study selection flow diagram

Socio-economic:

Lack of emotional support from family and partners and financial insecurities plays a role. Additionally, they often experience the absence of social support from home and the community they live in, leaving them feeling all alone and isolated. Psychosocial challenges such as denial of the pregnancy, regrets, lack of birth preparedness, unplanned pregnancies, being pregnant and HIV positive at a young age, and violence were found to contribute to poor mental health and pregnancy outcomes in adolescents. Consequently, these factors have been identified to drive pregnant and parenting adolescent girls and young women towards substance abuse as a coping mechanism, which often leads to poor parenting outcomes.

Recommendations:

The study recommended that an educational program be developed to assist in combating mental health to improve adolescents' psychosocial well-being during early motherhood. The study also showed an urgent need to adapt and design new psychosocial interventions that can be pilot-tested and scaled with pregnant and parenting adolescent girls and young women and their extended networks, particularly in LMICs. Development of digital health programs such as mom connect and integration of

mental health services amongst schools, clinics, and other relevant community development to support pregnant and parenting adolescent girls and young women are needed.

Reference:

Mental health needs among pregnant and parenting adolescent girls and young women in South Africa: A scoping review

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