

Improving the mental health of young mothers (aged under 25)

“It’s hard enough being a mum, then being judged for being a younger mum as well.”



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Overview of presentation

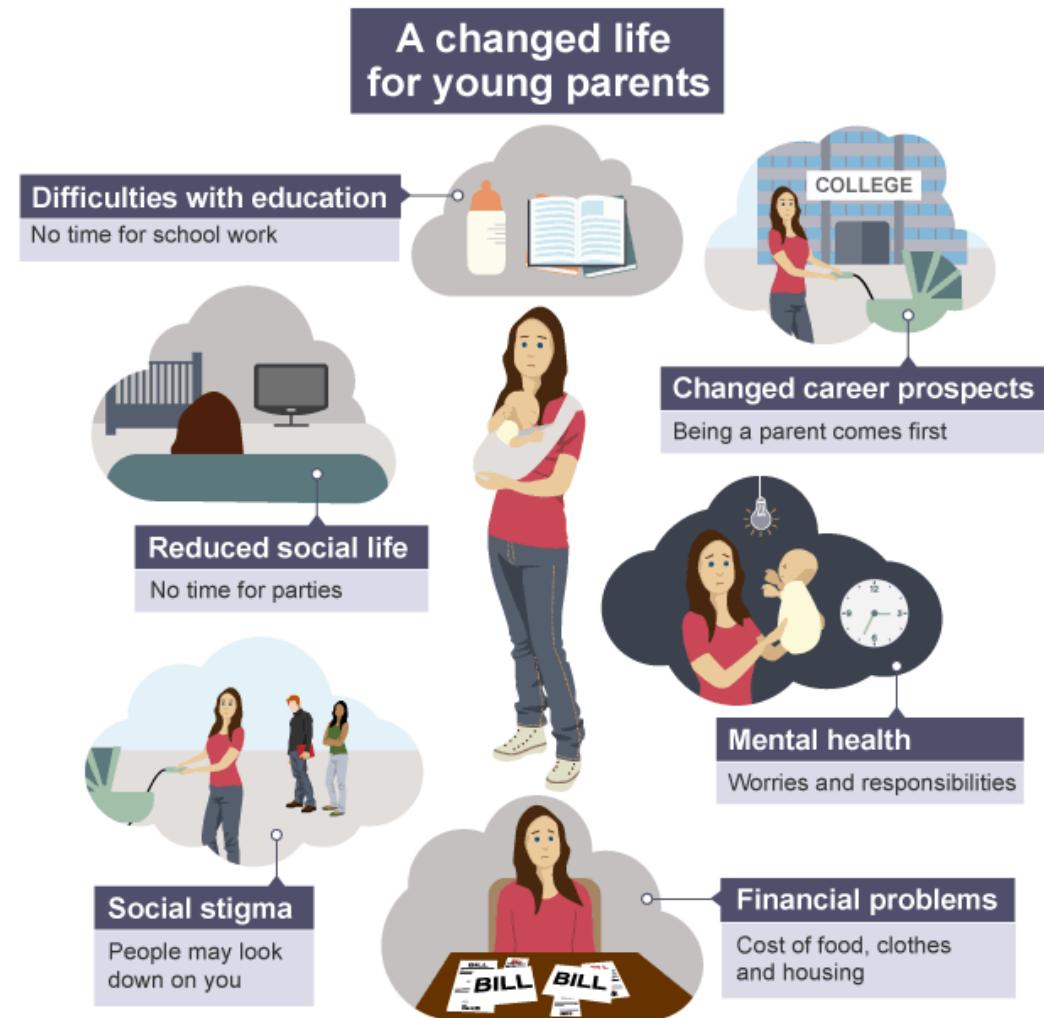
- Why do we need to better support young mothers?
- How can we do this – moving from a deficit model to a strengths-based model.
- What can professionals do?
- What can policy makers do?

Background

- 1 in 4 births in England and Wales were to young people aged 16-24
- Postnatal depression is up to twice as prevalent in teenage mothers compared to those over 20
- A rise in teenage maternal suicides
- Young mothers particularly effected by Covid-19 pandemic (Papworth et al, 2021)
- Young mothers less likely to engage with support

Challenges faced by young parents

- Housing and financial insecurity (poverty)
- Employment discrimination / gaps in education
- Relationship/family difficulties
- Social isolation/loneliness
- Getting to appointments (car access)
- Perinatal period has an increased risk of mental illness
- Social care involvement (stigma)
- May be care experienced
- May have adverse childhood experiences /trauma



Feeling judged and rejected by the community



Former social networks breaking down



Lack of family support

No time due to education/ work or caring responsibilities for others

Young mothers and loneliness

Limited control over where they lived and who they lived with



Limited financial resources



Fearful of support from professionals & fear of child removal

Babies born to younger mothers have a greater risk of:

- Very pre-term and pre-term delivery
- Low birthweight
- Small for gestational age
- Neonatal mortality



IF... YOUNG PARENTHOOD
IS FRAMED AS A PROBLEM



YOUNG PARENTS ARE
TREATED AS PROBLEMS



YOUNG PARENTS FEEL
PATRONISED AND JUDGED



YOUNG PARENTS FEEL NEGATIVE
ABOUT THEMSELVES AND DISENGAGE
FROM SUPPORT



Our current 'deficit' model



A strengths-based model

- What could young parents achieve with the right kind of support?
- It is our duty to protect young mothers and their babies

IF... YOUNG PARENTS ARE SUPPORTED



YOUNG PARENTS ARE GIVEN
HELP TO BE THE BEST
PARENTS THEY CAN BE



YOUNG PARENTS FEEL SAFE AND
SUPPORTED AND KNOW WHERE TO
GO FOR HELP



YOUNG PARENTS AND THEIR BABIES
ARE GIVEN THE BEST CHANCE AT
THRIVING



What can professionals do?



- Make no assumptions
- Every contact can count- provide a non-judgemental, empathetic space
- Recognise reproductive rights
- Consider social determinants (housing, finances, domestic violence, ACEs, relationships)
- Signpost to additional support if needed
- Provide breastfeeding support



What might help young women access support services

- Having detailed and accessible information
- Being accompanied by a supportive person to alleviate anxieties
- Using texts/WhatsApp
- **Consider intersectionality** – neurodiversity, religion, ethnicity, social disadvantage, sexuality



Improving mental health: what looks promising

- Family Nurse Partnerships / Specialist professional support for young parents
- Peer-to-peer support - shared-identity support
- Holistic, personalised, wrap-around support (Young MumsAid/ Home Start/ Ty Enfys Project)
- Nature-based interventions
- Enhanced social prescription services
- Online support/social media support



Priority areas for action (MMHA & CYPMHC)

1. Listen and respond to the needs of young mothers in national and local systems
2. Resource and invest in national perinatal mental health services
3. Ensure specialist mental health services
4. Research and listen to the voices of young mothers



**Children & Young People's
Mental Health Coalition**



Building a dream city of support

We asked the young mums who took part in our focus groups to firstly tell us the services they would like to access if they lived in a 'dream city' of support and secondly, the professionals they would like to receive support from. The young mothers identified a range of different services and features of services that they would like to see in place.

to be taken seriously



Flexible and accessible services

SERVICES WITHOUT STIGMA

to be listened to

GOOD PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Health visitors

Baby and toddler activities

SUPPORT FOR DADS



Breastfeeding support

Activities and spaces for mums

SUPPORT AFTER BIRTH



Open and understanding GP

support for child

Mental health services for children

COST-FREE

HOUSING SUPPORT

A young mums midwife

an advocate for young mums

Next steps for our research

- Finding out what works to engage young mothers in support
- Finding out how community-based non-clinical support can be most effective at improving their mental health
- Making recommendations for policy and practice
- Making a film about stigma



Maternal Mental Health Alliance



Children & Young People's Mental Health Coalition



Hearts & Minds

We are looking for non-clinical community-based services that support perinatal young women (aged under 25).

Our research beginning in October will find out how services can best support young women to improve their mental health.



We are looking for organisations to take part that:

- **Provide social support to perinatal young women.** This includes support from conception to one-two years post-birth and may involve support with well-being, housing, parenting, relationships, finances and social networks.
- **Want a free and high quality evaluation by the University of York.**
- **Are able to take part between October 2024-December 2026.**



You service and service users will be reimbursed for taking part.

For more information about taking part:

please email ruth.naughton-doe@york.ac.uk or visit

<https://perinatal-loneliness.com/improving-the-mental-health-of-perinatal-young-women/>

For more information & references

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