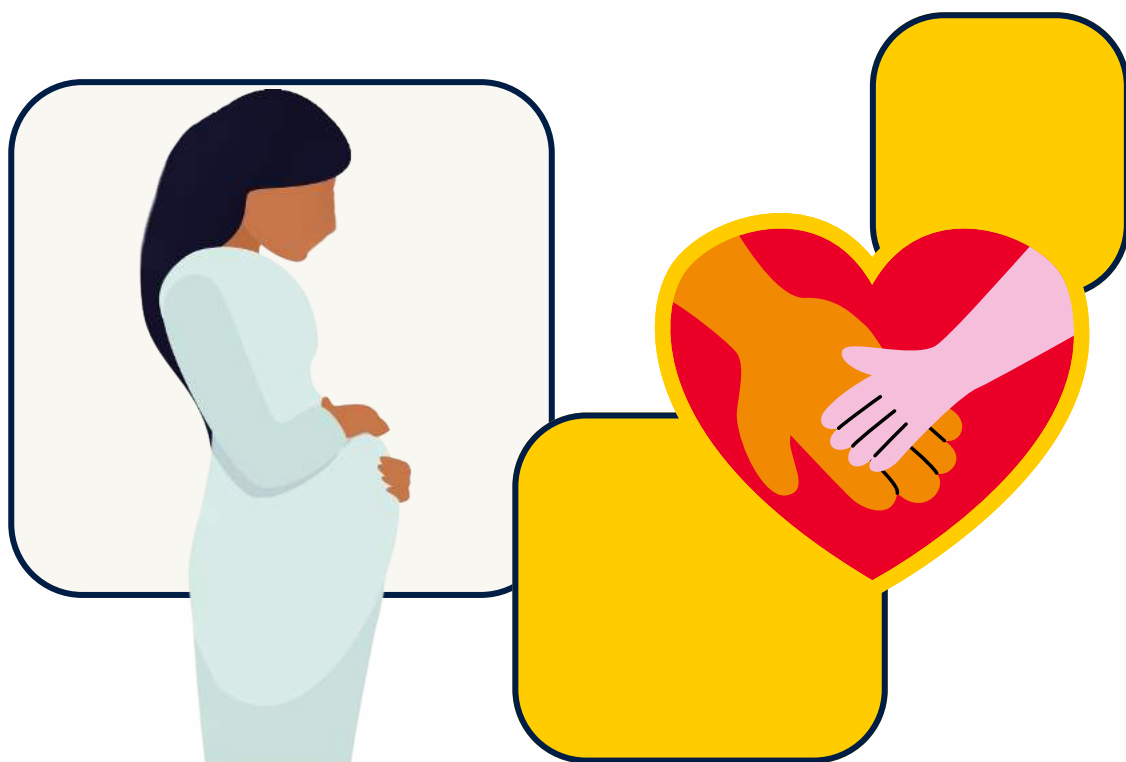


Supporting School-Aged Parents in Education

Perspectives from Educational
Psychology - Executive Summary



Beth Anderson

Laura Baugh

Fionnuala Donald

Nicola Gillen

Veronica McKeever

Niamh O'Kane

Hannah Ward

Executive summary

Introduction

The current briefing paper addresses the impact that becoming a school-aged parent (SAP) has on young people, their children, and their educational outcomes. Historical statistics of SAPs within the United Kingdom (UK), and the governmental approach to reducing prevalence have been reviewed. The importance of the geo-socio-political context of Northern Ireland (NI) as a devolved nation within the UK is explored, and how this intersectionality impacts the outcomes for SAPs. International literature is reviewed throughout the paper, with implications, recommendations for best practice, and the role that educational psychologists (EPs) can play in supporting schools and SAPs highlighted.

Background & Historical Pregnancy Rates

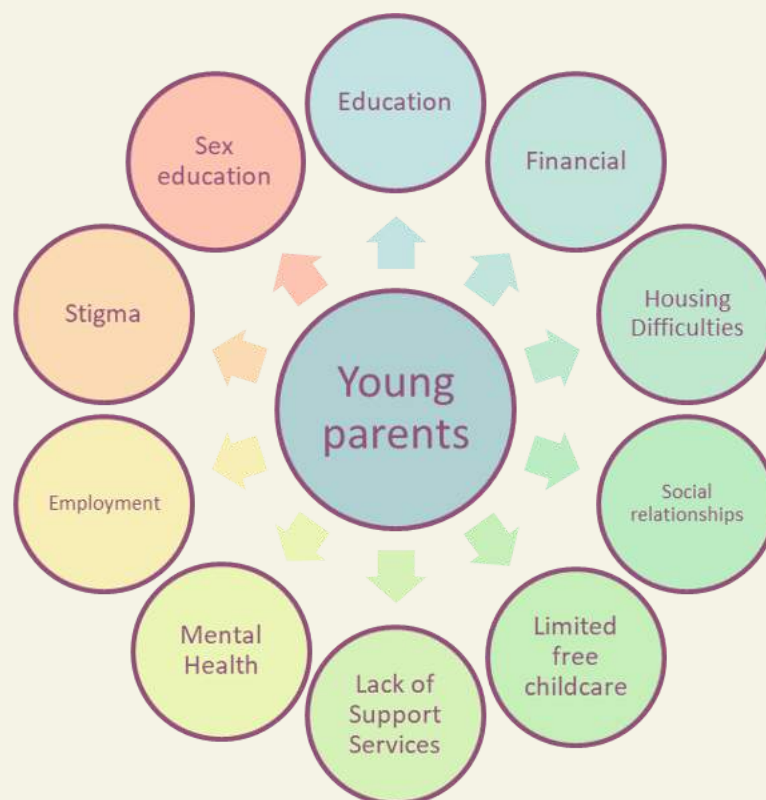
The paper explores the context of teenage pregnancy rates in the UK and outlines the governmental response to reduce the rates of teenage pregnancy through the 'Teenage Pregnancy Strategy'. This strategy aimed to reduce teenage pregnancies through improved contraception access and increased sex education in schools. The strategy was deemed successful, with a significant decrease in under-18 pregnancies in England and Wales. However, despite inclusion within the UK this strategy was not introduced in NI due to the resulting religious, social, and political controversy in the country.

The Northern Ireland Context

According to census data, the prevalence of SAPs in NI has decreased in recent years. The context of the school systems in NI is discussed in relation to its impact on school-aged pregnancy rates. The paper mentions the recent legalisation of abortion in NI and its impact, as well as the absence of free childcare schemes in NI compared to other parts of the UK. Despite progress, challenges remain for SAPs returning to education. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the challenges SAPs face and their implications, and to explore ways to better support SAPs through EP practice.

Experiences of School Aged Parents

Existing literature on the experiences of SAPs, focusing on the challenges they face and the support available to them is explored. Intersectionality issues are addressed, emphasising the barriers faced by SAPs, including socio-economic, health, practical, and educational challenges. The impact of stigma on SAPs' mental health and engagement with essential services is discussed.



In terms of practical barriers, access to childcare, suitable housing, and family support systems are identified as significant challenges for SAPs. The review underlines educational barriers, such as school policies that may hinder SAPs' reintegration into education post-pregnancy, attainment difficulties, and the impact of previous negative school experiences.

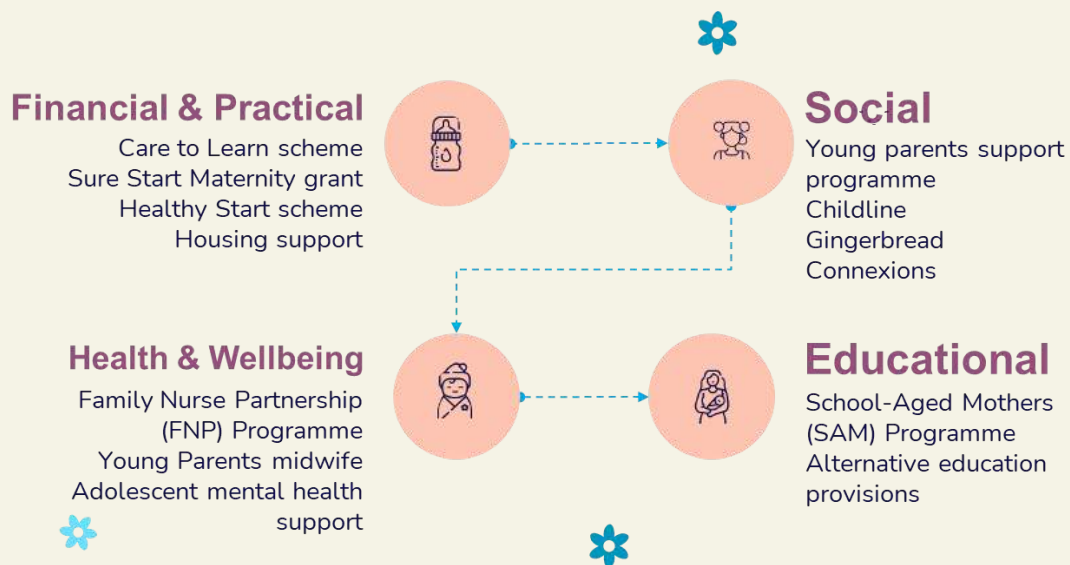
Educational attainment among SAPs compared to their non-parent peers is examined, with research indicating lower educational attainment among SAPs even when controlling for socio-economic factors. The review also discusses the effectiveness of various support programmes for SAPs, highlighting the importance of flexibility, collaboration between education and health sectors, and staff training in delivering successful interventions.

While the review acknowledges a lack of research specifically focused on school-aged fathers (SAFs), it underscores the growing recognition of the importance of including fathers in support services. The paper then outlines the implications of school-aged parenthood, available support in NI and the UK, and the role of EPs in supporting SAPs.

Support for School-Aged Parents

The support available for SAPs is crucial in addressing the challenges associated with teenage pregnancies and promoting the well-being of both parents and children. Financial and practical support, including childcare assistance and maternity grants, helps to alleviate practical barriers for SAPs returning to education. Health and well-being support programmes, such as the Family Nurse Partnership Programme, offer guidance and assistance to young mothers throughout pregnancy and early parenthood.

Social support networks, including programmes run by Family Support NI and helplines like Childline, provide emotional and practical assistance to SAPs. Educational support initiatives, such as the School Age Mothers Programme, aim to facilitate the continuation of education for young mothers. Alternative education provisions like Pupil Referral Units also cater to SAPs who cannot attend mainstream school due to exceptional circumstances.



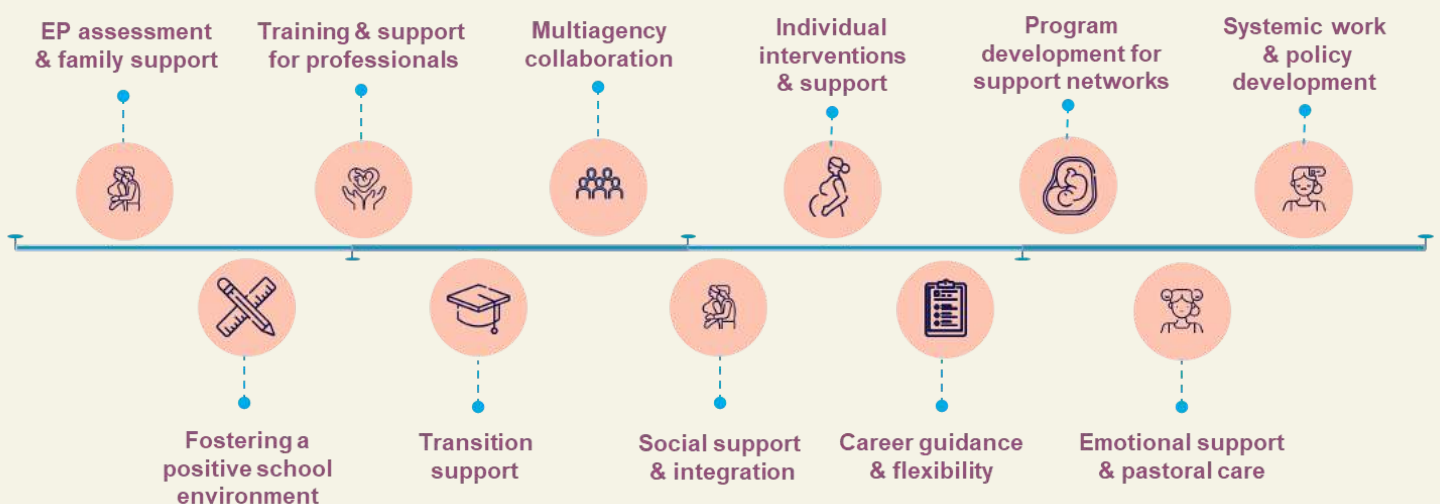
Barriers to Support

Despite the available support, SAPs face numerous barriers, including educational challenges, financial constraints, housing difficulties, and limited social support services. Mental health issues, employment difficulties, stigma, and inadequate sex education further compound their challenges. These barriers have significant implications for SAPs and their children, including lower cognitive development, attachment difficulties, and increased risk of intergenerational cycles of teenage parenthood.

Addressing intersectionality is crucial in providing effective support for SAPs, as difficulties in accessing childcare, education, and financial stability intersect and impact each other. With the right support and guidance, SAPs can overcome these barriers and build better futures for themselves and their children.

Recommendations

Recommendations are made with the aim to empower SAPs to thrive academically, emotionally, and socially within their school communities. Creating supportive school environments, including training for school staff, emotional support through pastoral care, and the development of programmes for social engagement for school-aged parents are suggested. Schools engaging in systemic work and integrating family education into their curriculum is highlighted as good practice. Recommendations are also proposed for EPs to become involved through assessment work, individual interventions, and school policy development.



The Role of the Educational Psychologist

Intervention



Mental health support/resilience interventions
VIG
Parents Interacting with Infants-Teen version (PIWI-T)
Psychoeducation on parenting skills/attachment



Advocacy

Multiagency collaboration
Seeing SAP as an additional educational need
Fostering inclusion



Influencing change

Training for schools
Change in policies and practice
Solution-focused approaches



Educational psychologists can play a crucial role in advocating for SAPs, addressing stigma, providing individual interventions, and influencing systemic changes. EPs possess the skills to implement individualised interventions and programmes to support the well-being of SAPs and their children, such as Video Interactive Guidance (VIG) and Parents Interacting with Infants-Teen version (PIWI-T). Such programmes are aimed at enhancing parenting skills and promoting positive parent-child interactions.

Given the vulnerability of SAPs, especially during the critical transition to parenthood, EPs can offer tailored mental health support to address issues like post-natal depression. Additionally, EPs can facilitate the development of alternative educational or vocational pathways for SAPs who disengage from education, focusing on strengths and opportunities for personal and professional development. Overall, EPs can contribute significantly to creating supportive environments that enable SAPs to succeed in education while fulfilling their responsibilities as caregivers.

It is hoped that this paper will demonstrate the vulnerability of SAPs and highlight the need for more targeted support, to reduce the barriers faced by SAPs and increase the future outcomes for them and their children.



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