

“IF [PARENTS] HAD MORE OPEN CONVERSATIONS, THEN MAYBE WE MIGHT HAVE LESS PREGNANCIES BEFORE MARRIAGE”: A YOUTH-LED AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE QUALITATIVE STUDY OF YOUNG SAMOAN MOTHERS

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Background:

Cultural taboos and social stigma often hinder conversations about sexual and reproductive health (SRH). A lack of age- and culturally appropriate practices within healthcare service settings also prevent engagement. This youth-led project explored sexual health literacy (SHL) and the experiences of accessing maternal health services with young Samoan mothers. Our aim was to identify key factors necessary for addressing SRH inequities.

Methods:

Individual interviews with eleven participants were conducted by young people of similar backgrounds. A semi-structured interview guide was codesigned by young Samoan women based on their cultural knowledge and understanding of community needs. Questions were used to explore SHL and relatable SRH topics. Interviews took place at local community spaces or online via Zoom. *Talanoa*, a culturally appropriate storytelling method that privileges Pasifika ways of knowing, was applied. Data was audio-recorded, transcribed, and manually analysed using thematic analysis.

Results:

Talanoa with young people evoked rich discussions with participants. Overall, SHL was limited, and most pregnancies were unplanned. Participants received insufficient SRH education and opportunities to discuss SRH at home, or within their communities. Three themes emerged that would enable better SRH outcomes for young Samoan people: 1) Breaking down cultural taboos and stigma through SRH education, and opportunities to discuss SRH in culturally safe spaces; 2) Relationships, peer support and rapport-building in service interactions; and 3) Access to culturally responsive, age-appropriate services that offer wraparound supports for first-time parents.

Conclusion:

This project presents novel insights relevant to health programs, clinical practice, service design and engagement with young Samoan people. Building SHL requires culturally tailored approaches that foster meaningful connections and provide safe spaces to learn and talk about SRH. Ensuring SRH policies, practices and services are age-appropriate and culturally responsive is crucial for achieving positive SRH outcomes for young Samoan people, their children, and their families.

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