Young Motherhood in West Africa

Faculty of Wellbeing Education and Language Studies (WELS)

Call for doctoral projects starting in October 2027

The Open University

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Project description

Project Type

This is a PhD project

Please note that a research proposal aligned with this research project will be required from applicants in addition to an application form.

School

Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

Unit

Institute of Educational Technology

Members

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Aim

The overall aim of the project to explore the experiences of young motherhood in West Africa, with particular attention to how stigma, discrimination, social norms, and institutional practices shape the lives of young mothers. We welcome

proposals focused on a West African country of the applicant's choosing, and on any aspect of young motherhood that speaks to this aim. Applicants are encouraged to define their own focus, setting, participant group(s) and research questions. Alternatively, proposals may be developed around one of the themes below:

- Exploring how young mothers experience, negotiate, and cope with stigma and discrimination in their everyday lives, and the individual, familial, and community resources that support resilience and wellbeing.
- Examining how social norms, stigma, and institutional practices shape young mothers' access to, experiences of, and engagement with healthcare services.
- Exploring how healthcare workers, educators or community members perceive young motherhood, including how stigma is understood, reinforced or challenged within healthcare, educational or community contexts.

The themes outlined above are intended to prompt thinking, not to be adopted as research proposal titles. Applicants may draw on one or more of these themes, adapt them, or develop their own research focus related to young motherhood in West Africa.

We are particularly interested in work that engages with experiences or contexts that have received less attention in the literature on young/early/adolescent motherhood in West Africa.

Methodology

In line with the overall research project, the doctoral project will adopt a participatory approach, using qualitative creative methods. The specific choice of creative method is flexible and should be informed by the applicants' proposed

project research questions, participant group(s) and cultural context. Examples of methods that could considered, but are not limited to, are photovoice, body mapping, zine making, storytelling, reflexive vignettes and participatory co-design workshops.

Contribution

The PhD study will contribute to a broader Open Societal Challenge Project aimed at improving the mental wellbeing of young mothers in West African countries. In West Africa, policy and research discourse predominantly takes a deficit-based perspectives of young motherhood. Moving beyond narratives that focus only on risk and disadvantage, there is a need to better understand the lived experiences, agency, resilience, and support needs of young mothers within their social, cultural, and institutional contexts. The doctoral project will complement the OSC project by generating evidence to inform culturally relevant interventions and support for young mothers in a West African country.

Prospective applicants are encouraged to explore the OSC project website to learn more about the broader OSC project. In particular, the *Media and Supporting Content* section provides examples of the work undertaken and the outputs produced so far.


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