

RESEARCH BASED TEMPLATE

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WOMEN'S WORK: HOW ARE REPRODUCTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES SHARED BETWEEN HETEROSEXUAL PARTNERS?

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Background:

Managing reproduction across the life course is associated with burdens disproportionately experienced by women. These burdens extend beyond the physical side-effects of contraception or pregnancy and can include the financial cost of contraception, the emotional burdens of planning conception, or stigma when accessing abortion services. Although many of these burdens can be shared, how they are negotiated within heterosexual partnerships is not well understood. This study aimed to examine how reproductive responsibilities were shared between heterosexual couples.

Methods:

A scoping review of academic journal articles was conducted. Key terms relating to reproductive responsibilities and burdens were entered into three databases; Medline (Ovid), CINAHL and Scopus. Articles were included if they were original research set in a high-income country, published from 2015, that explored reproductive burdens and responsibilities between partners during any reproductive life event.

Results:

A total of 17 journal articles were included in the final review including 15 qualitative studies, two surveys and one scoping review. Articles described reproductive burdens across many life events including maintaining sexual health, planning conception, abortion, childbirth, and sterilization, although most focused on pregnancy prevention. How responsibilities were defined and conceptualized varied and were shaped by cultural norms and traditional gender roles. Some men limited their involvement for their own benefit, while others reported wanting to respect their partner's bodily autonomy. Managing reproduction without partner support further amplifies burdens experienced by women. Structural barriers such as financial constraints, poor sexual health literacy and family planning services targeted only to women further constrained the ability of partners to equally engage in reproductive work.

Conclusion:

Reproductive responsibilities occur across the life course and are often framed as women's work. Most studies centered around pregnancy and/or STI prevention. Reducing burdens experienced by women should be a central component of future research exploring reproductive work and responsibilities.

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