



NEDERLANDS EXPERTISE EN INNOVATIECENTRUM  
MAATSCHAPPELIJKE EFFECTEN DEMOGRAFISCHE KRIMP

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Radboud  
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# Young mothers showing their resilience

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# This is me



Cultural anthropologist

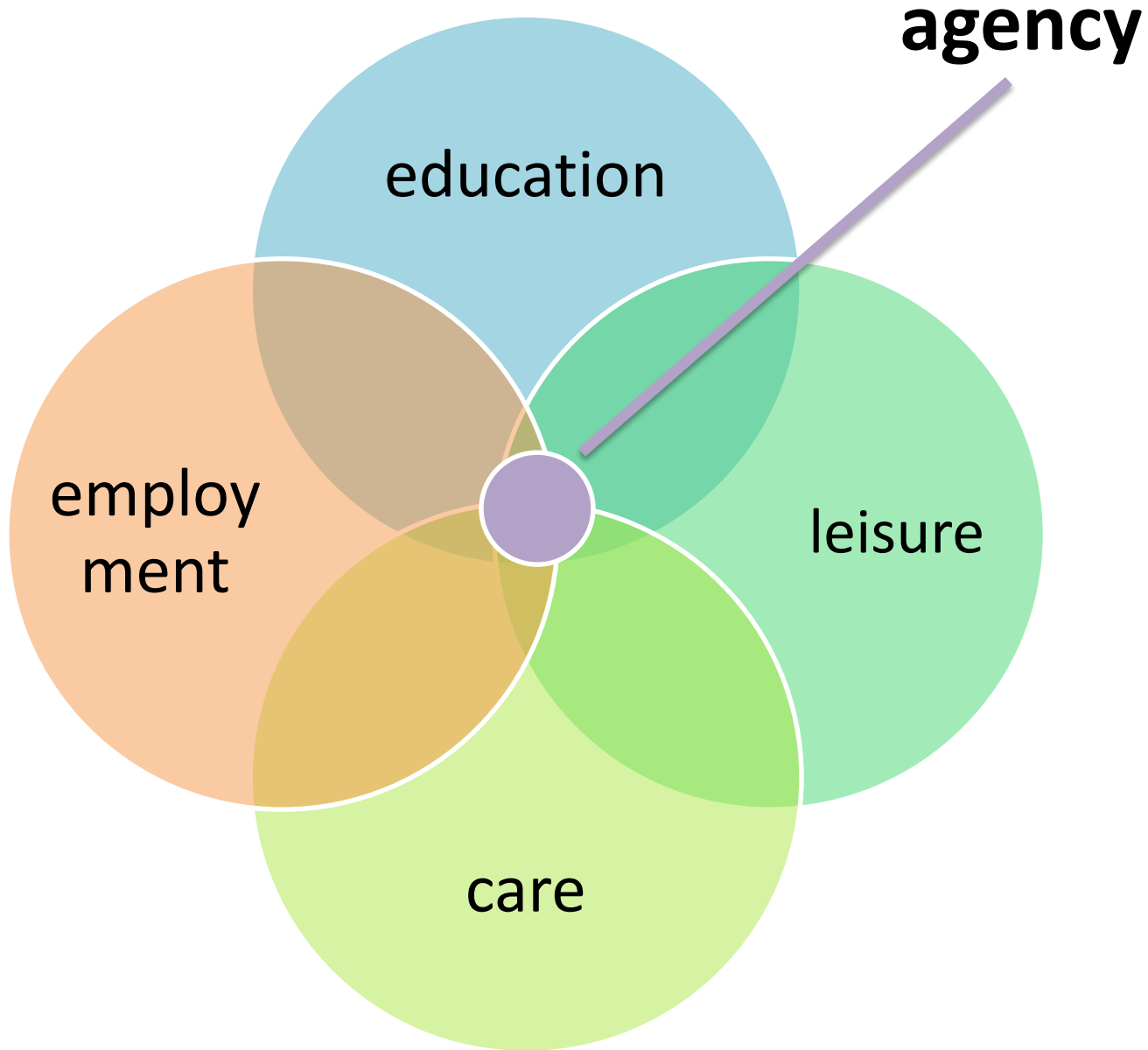
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Mother of 2 children

Running & volleyball



# Agency (rather than resilience)



- ❖ Determining one's own pathway in life: navigating between personal experiences, institutional structures and sociocultural norms, to shape one's life.
- ❖ Personal strengths together with rules and norms in the environment, and how people engage with these.
- ❖ Everyday, bounded agency.

(Sniekers, 2017; Sniekers, 2018; Sniekers & Van den Brink, 2018)

# Qualitative research

- In their own living environment
- Inside perspective
- Interviews
  - 41 mothers, 18 social professionals
- Participant observation
  - 1.5 years





## Young mothers as portrayed by media:

Promiscuous, drop-outs, unemployed, welfare dependent



Photo "06Senyal" by Ariadna (www.morguefile.com)



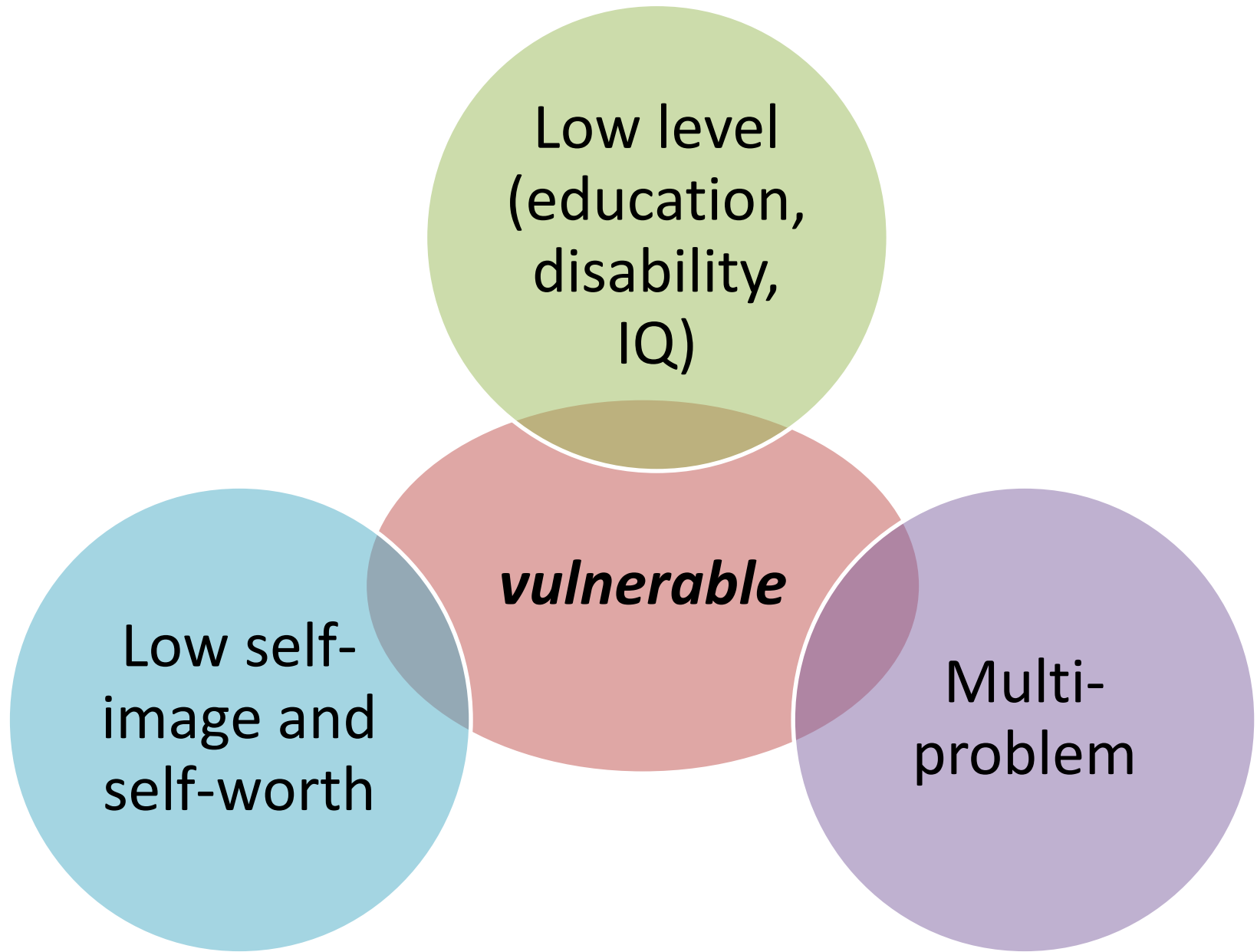
Photo "Sign" by Clarita (www.morguefile.com)

## Young mothers as portrayed in research and policy:

- Children raising children
- Insufficient psychosocial development
- Multiproblem
- Unemployed, drop-out
- Marginalised

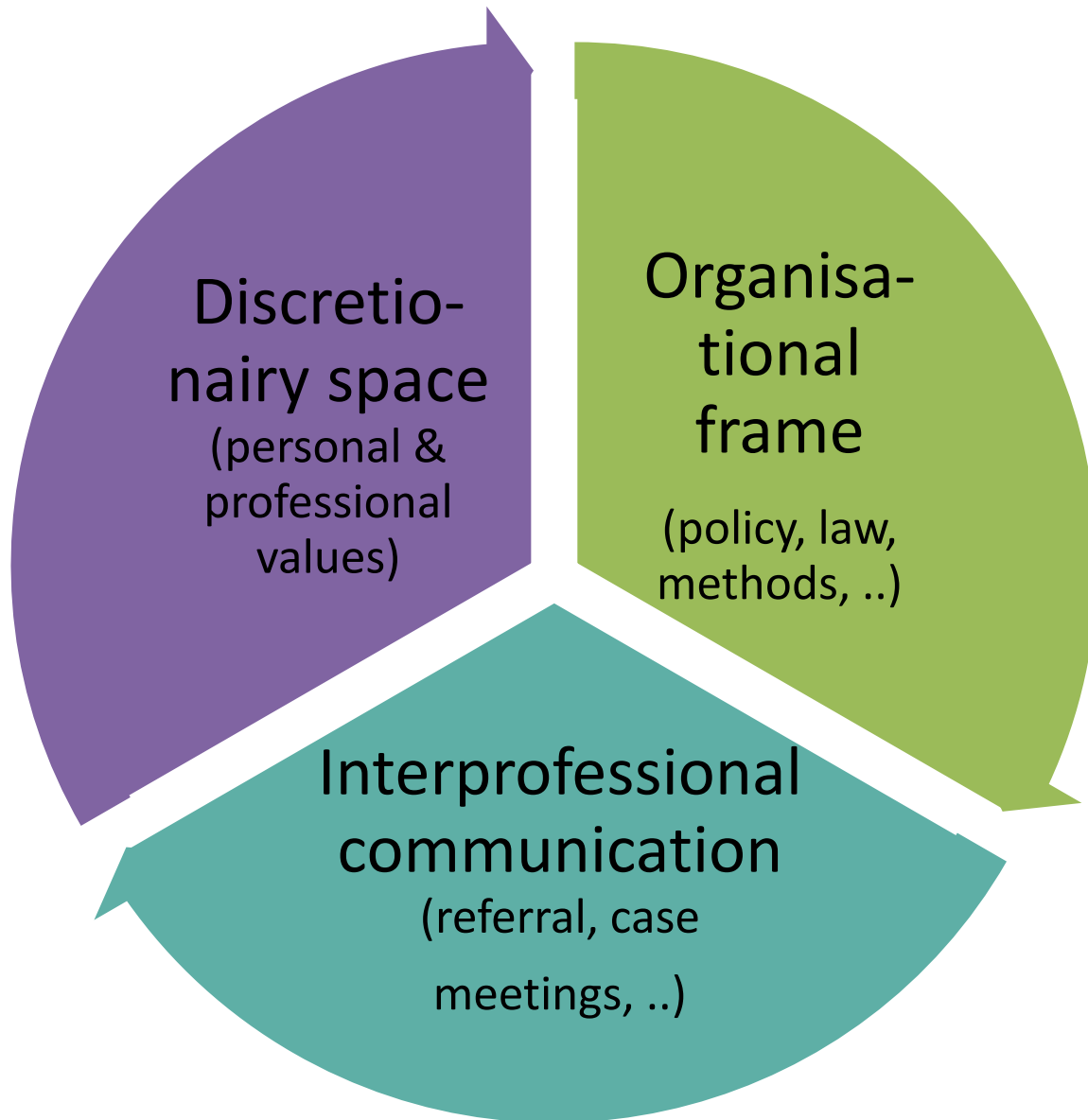
➤ **Dichotomy:**  
**young vs mother**

# Young mothers as portrayed by social professionals





# Professional perspective

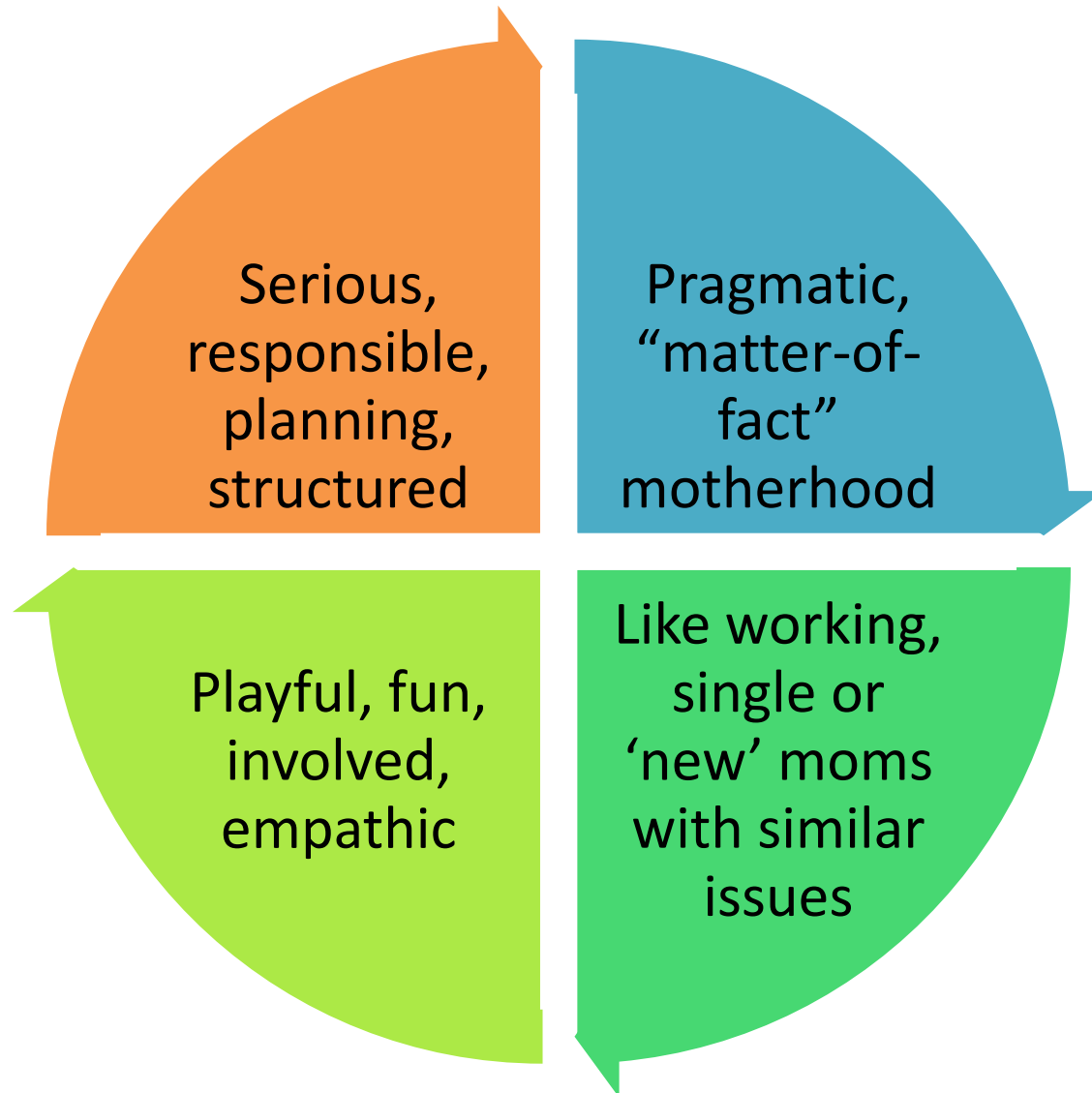


# Questions

- How do professionals in your country perceive young motherhood?
- How do you perceive young motherhood?



# Young motherhood as portrayed by young mothers



# 'Just' a mom

“It does not matter whether you are young or old, it is a whole new life, even for someone who is 30 and has her first child. It is all new and will be hard.” (Daniëlle, 18, 18-months old child)

Age or being young is not an issue. Mothering is a struggle anyhow.

“When I called work to say he was ill, or when I had to go for his vaccinations, my boss was not happy. So I called in sick. And when I was sick, I could not take leave.” (Laurie, 22, 3 year old son)

What matters is work/care balance, the child's age and flexibility at work/school.

# Question

- Which norms do you recognize in these quotes?



# Freedom vs responsibility

“When they are 16, I will be 36. When they will have children, I will be a fun and fancy grandmom. That is nice too.” (Bianca, 26, 4 and 6 year-old children)

Being young is an advantage: bonding with children, regaining freedom and still being young, vital grandmothers.

“For me much more depends on it, because I have a different responsibility. But other students do not seem interested in their study.” (Manon, 26, 5-year-old child)

In a context of peers, differences exist in going out, hanging out with friends & acting on impulses.

# Question

- Which norms do you recognize in these quotes?



# Norms on motherhood: Motherhood ideology



Photo "Momchild" by Taliesin ([www.morguefile.com](http://www.morguefile.com))

- Mothers take care of their children themselves;
- Mothers enjoy their children;
- Mothers are role models to their children.



# Norms on age: Economic independence



Photo "Family3" by Anitapeppers ([www.morguefile.com](http://www.morguefile.com))

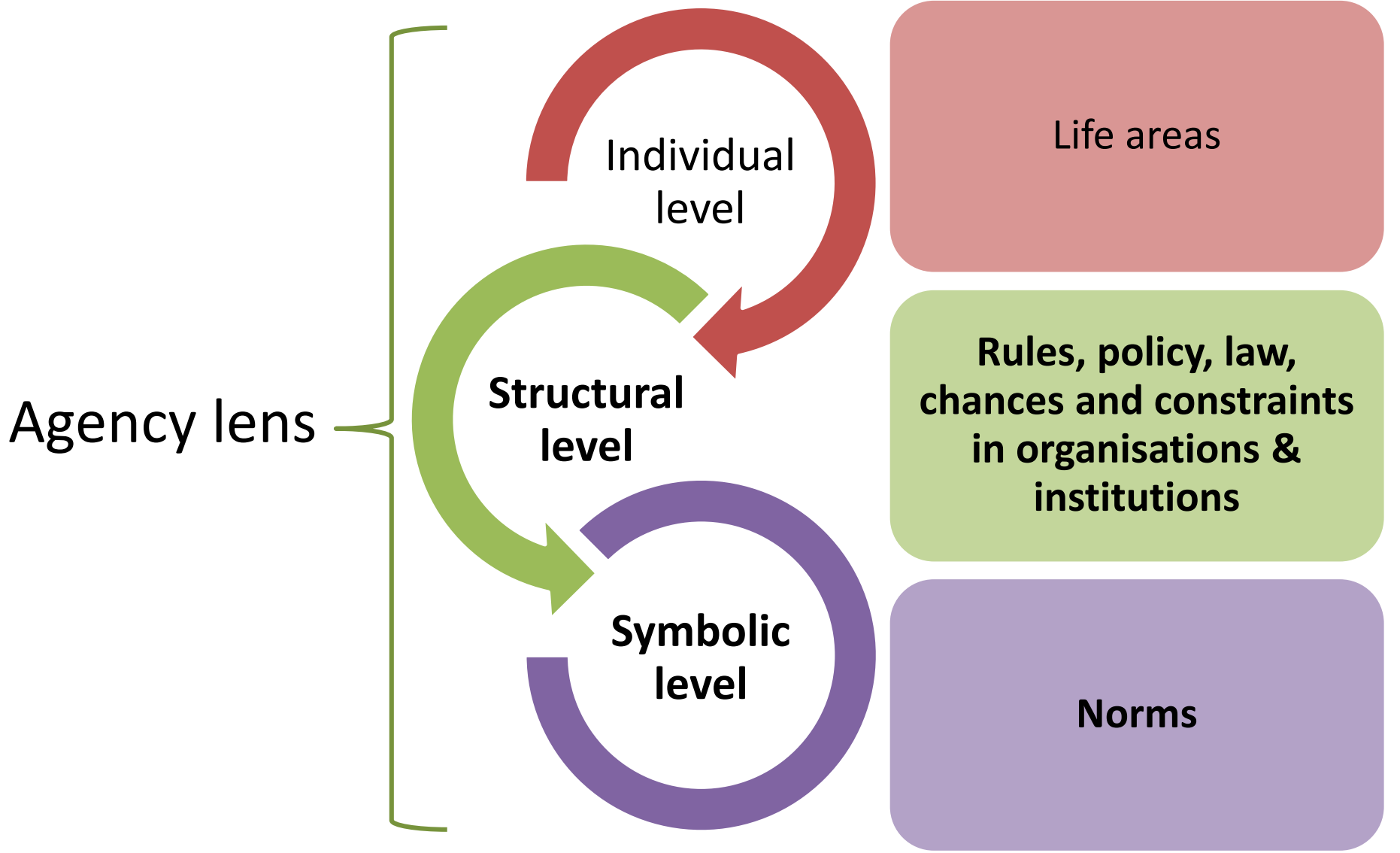
- Young people finish their education;
- Young people finish highest level of education;
- Young people find employment that matches their educational level,
- to provide for themselves,
- and then start a family.

# Question

- How do you think professionals can act and respond to young parents?
- What can professionals do to better work towards to young parents' needs experiences?



# What can we as professionals do?



# Using an agency lense reveals:

- 'Deviance' and 'disengagement' of young mothers actually is a strong connection to and bond with their children and family care, and comes from institutional lack of support for young mothers (e.g. no maternal leave at school, night shifts, student loan, push towards vocational training and health care jobs).
- Assuming that young mothers have low/few ambitions, places problems and solutions into their personal hands, but undermines and overlooks structural problems and solutions.
- Professionals focus on individual levels, but by being critical to society, policy and rules/law, they can also work on structural and symbolic level.

# References

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Thank you