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Polygyny and Family Planning Programs in sub-Saharan Africa: Representation and Reality

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Significance

- Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has the highest regional prevalence of polygynous unions and unmet need for contraception.
- A majority of women in West Africa, where unmet need is high and Family Planning (FP) use low, will spend some portion of their married life as a co-wife.
- The role played by polygyny in the design and consumption of Family Planning Programs (FPP) in sub-Saharan Africa has been ignored.

Research Questions

- 1) Do FP experiences differ significantly between monogamous and polygynous marriages?
- 2) How is polygyny represented in FP messaging?
- 3) What might be the consequences of excluding polygyny from FPP design and implementation?

Methods and Data

- Systematic mapping of research relating to polygyny and FP in sub-Saharan Africa
- Review of FP visual communication materials from:
 - 1) JHU Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Communication Programs Media/Materials Clearinghouse
 - Electronic versions of posters from West Africa
 - 2) International Planned Parenthood Federation Head Office Archive (London)
 - Original print posters from sub-Saharan Africa

Results

- Traditional models of husband-wife communication are complicated in polygynous unions and there is no model for spousal communication in polygynous unions.
- Polygynous women are less likely to use FP than their monogamous counterparts but more likely to use it clandestinely.
- Declines in official or “public” polygyny may lead to a shift to unofficial polygyny; the need for FPP messaging that is relevant to men and women in polygynous unions is thus not decreasing.

Main Findings from Family Planning Poster Survey:

- 1) Of the 190 FP posters surveyed from sub-Saharan Africa, **not a single poster includes polygynous unions.**
- 2) Many posters emphasize spousal communication, but they are **implicitly or explicitly monogamous in their messaging.**

Why study posters?

- Posters are often first step in FP messaging, especially where literacy is low.
- High costs are invested in poster design and distribution.
- Durability and aesthetics means posters may outlast other forms of FP communication.

Conclusions

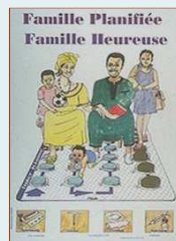
- Polygyny is not included in FP posters. This is at odds with the realities of persistently high levels of polygyny (official and unofficial).
- The role played by polygyny in the design and consumption of FP programs has been ignored.
- Conventional models of couples’ analysis (i.e. studying monogamous couples) may be inappropriate for researching polygynous unions.
- Polygynous unions should be specifically segmented and targeted by IEC materials.
- Ignoring the reality of polygyny in FP communication may impact the effectiveness of family planning campaigns in parts of sub-Saharan Africa with high rates of official and/or unofficial polygyny.



Ghana (1992)



Senegal (1998)



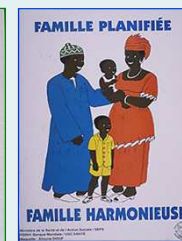
Guinea (1999)



Senegal (1998)



Nigeria (no date)



Ghana (1994)



Burkina Faso (1992)



Nigeria (1992)



Burkina Faso (1994)



Senegal (1998)



Liberia (no date)

Poster References:

All posters shown obtained from the Johns Hopkins University Centre for Communications Programs – Media/Materials Clearinghouse Database: www.m-mc.org/mms_search.php