

PHD STUDENT, AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES, GHANA

During my study in Ghana the summer of _____ I met with various personnel within government offices including the Family Planning Unit. One issue that became apparent to me was that there are gender and cultural issues which impinge upon the implementation of family planning programs. Upon reviewing the family planning literature, I observed that most studies done in Africa focus upon women who are married and have at least one child. Ghana is one of the African countries that has begun to target men in its Family Planning campaigns. One unique aspect of my proposed study is its focus upon adolescents and inclusion of male subjects. The Ministry of Health has agreed to assist me in my study (see support letters enclosed). I plan to take my comprehensive exams in January or May of _____ and my advisor _____ has approved this outline as my dissertation topic if funded. The proposed beginning date for this study is _____.

The proposed project is a multi-method examination (focus group and individual interviews, journal content analysis and participant-observation) of the influences of familial, cultural, community, economic, and gender related factors upon attitudes about family planning amongst five groups of Ghanaians:

- Group A forty never married, childless 14-21 year old males (n=20) and female (n=20) adolescents
- Group B five married childless couples ages 19-26
- Group C five married couples ages 19-26 with at least one child
- Group D five single childless women ages 19-26
- Group E five single women ages 19-26 with at least one child

Groups B through E will be composed of subjects who are five years older than Group A members, and therefore may allow for a longitudinal perspective on the factors that may be expected to affect the younger group. The first phase of the study will entail conducting audiotaped and videotaped in-depth focus group interviews with four subjects of Group A (ages 14-15, 16-17, 18-19, 20-21). Each same sex 5 person focus group will meet at least once per month over an eight month period in a comfortable, mutually agreed upon setting. The formal interview document items will assess the role played by the following variables in shaping respondents' attitudes towards family planning; a) culturally based traditions and protocols (such as courting rituals and marriage), (b) belief systems (e.g., childbearing as a symbol of social status and of masculinity/ femininity, and perpetuation of ancestral memory), (c) popular culture (e.g., media messages about sexual mores, culturally and appropriate vs. inappropriate gender roles in relationships, etc.), (d) availability of family planning information from formal institutions (e.g., from schools, churches, and family planning campaigns). In addition respondents will be asked about their intent towards family planning and specific suggestions as to what role if any they would like government agencies to play in assisting them with planning their family.

Because cultural traditions may forbid open discussion of certain issues, Group A respondents will be asked to keep a journal over eight months of our affiliation regarding specified topics that we discuss. The content of these journals will be analyzed for themes about family planning attitudes and intent. As a reliability check each person from the group will later be interviewed individually to give them opportunities to discuss concerns and issues that they may have chosen not to discuss within the group format. In the second phase of the study, the relevant issues posed to Group A will be posed to Groups B through E in one time interviews. Again, groups b through e may allow for a longitudinal perspective on the factors that may be expected to impinge upon the younger group.

In addition to conducting interviews, throughout my fellowship period, I will also engage in participant-observation of various segments (religious, social, familial, aesthetic) of Ghanaian culture to enhance my analysis. At least three formal documents will result from my study: a resource guide for helping the Ministry of Health in developing educational interventions for use with male and female adolescents; a report to the Fulbright committee; and my dissertation. Ideally after this study I will return to Ghana to follow-up with Group A.