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SOCIOCULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT (2)

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

This issue of the Research Review contains papers from the seminar on Socio-Cultural Dimensions of Reproductive Health and Human Development held in Legon in 2002. These papers centre on the theme of Sexual Behaviour and its Consequences for Health and Reproduction. Another set was published as Vol.18 No.1. Additional papers will be published as Supplements to the Research Review.

Delali Badasu's paper examines the policy implications of the variations in the fertility transition in Ghana. It discusses the determinants of the disparities observed and the socio-economic development policy implications. It also considers the implications of the disparities in the patterns and trends of fertility change for research/studies on the subject and for family planning/reproductive health programmes. It recommends adoption of more equitable socio-economic development policies in the country as a major strategy to remove the disparities in socio-economic development which underlie the observed variations in this demographic process.

In his paper, Chuks Mba reviews available literature and studies on sexual behaviour and the risks of HIV/AIDS and other STDs among young people in some Sub-Saharan African countries. The paper discusses the evidence of premarital sex and other sources of vulnerability and risk-taking among young people. It stresses the greater risk of girls. It suggests that governments should play a leading role in addressing the problem, by putting the reality of youth sexuality on the political agenda.

John K. Anarfi discusses the obstacles and resistance to sexual behavioural change among the youth in Ghana in the era of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. He considers the cultural inhibitions, high illiteracy levels, poverty, misconceptions about sex and HIV/AIDS, Western influences, among others. The study is based on field work conducted in five administrative regions of Ghana, representing each of the three ecological zones in the country. It recommends that government must step up its efforts at controlling the disease, which is affecting mostly the youth, by expanding both content and scope of programmes addressing the problem.

The subject of Clara Opare-Obisaw's paper is the relationship between nutrition and health. It discusses the role of nutrition in human development from conception to reproductive age. Focusing on the importance of maternal nutrition for development, she recommends measures that could be taken to meet dietary requirements of women so that the cycle of poor health and nutrition that passes on from one generation to another could be broken. She discusses some findings on the nutritional status of mothers and children in Ghana and other countries.

Kodjo Senah examines the "non-medical" issues that affect maternal mortality in Ghana. These are the socio-cultural factors such as taboos about eating during pregnancy, delays in arriving at health facilities for delivery due to transportation problems, delays on the part of medical staff in attending to women in labour, among others. The paper also examines the contribution of abortion to maternal deaths. He points out that though the socio-cultural components of maternal mortality are not ignored by governments, the tragedy of maternal mortality is gendered because of the political voicelessness and financial powerlessness of women.
In their paper, Richard Yeboah and Monica Kom examine some aspects of abortion cases admitted to the Chenard Ward of the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital during the years 2000 and 2001. They consider the reasons given by the patients for aborting their pregnancies and the social effects of the abortions. They also make policy recommendations that can be adopted to address the problems of abortion – health, social, and psychological – experienced by the patients.

In her paper Laetitia Hevi-Yiboé examines how Tugbewowo, the puberty rites of the people of Dodome in the Ho District, could be repackaged and used as a family resource to address problems of early childbearing in that area. She suggests that families must be empowered financially to be able to use this resource and also stresses the need to research into the practice to understand it so that it could be modernized.

Delali Badasu