

## Introduction to the Special Issue

**Akim J. Mturi**

School of Research and Postgraduate Studies, Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, North-West University (Mafikeng Campus)

### Abstract

This special issue of African Population Studies is produced under the theme 'Sexual and reproductive health challenges in sub-Saharan Africa'. It was coordinated by the Research Focus Area 'Population and Health' (RFA\_PH) of the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences, North-West University (Mafikeng Campus). The RFA\_PH has identified sexual and reproductive health (SRH) as one of the research priority areas. The special issue is a single publication that collates what individual RFA\_PH researchers have been doing recently in this area and also identifies gaps for further research. In addition, selected researchers outside the RFA\_PH have participated in this special issue to broaden the understanding of SRH in Africa. The special issue comprises of 13 articles that cover research done in nine sub-Saharan African countries namely Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

### Résumé

Ce numéro spécial d'études sur les populations Africaines est produit sous le thème «défis santé sexuelle et dela reproductive en Afrique sub-Saharienne». Il a été coordonné par l Research Focus Area 'Population and Health' (RFA\_PH) de la Faculté des Sciences Humaines et Sociales, Université du Nord-Ouest (Mafikeng Campus). Le PH RFA a identifié la santé sexuelle et reproductive (SSR) comme l'un des domaines prioritaires de recherche. Le numéro spécial est une publication unique qui met ensemble ce que individuellement, les chercheurs de RFA\_PH ont fait récemment accomplie dans ce domaine et identifié des lacunes pour les recherches futures. En outre, les d autres chercheurs sélectionnés en dehors de la RFA\_PH ont participé à ce numéro spécial afin d'élargir la compréhension de la SSR en Afrique.Ce numéro spécial est composé de 13 articles qui couvrent la recherche effectuée dans neuf pays sub-Sahariens en Afrique à savoir le Ghana, le Kenya, le Malawi, le Nigeria, l'Afrique du Sud, Swaziland, Tanzanie, Ouganda et Zimbabwe.

This special issue on 'sexual and reproductive health challenges in sub-Saharan Africa' is an initiative of the Research Focus Area 'Population and Health' (RFA\_PH). The idea was discussed in June / July 2015 and *African Population Studies* (APS) was identified as the best positioned vehicle. A formal motivation was submitted to the Editor-in-Chief of APS on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2015. The agreement between North-West University and APS was signed on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2015. The process of submission of papers, reviewing and revising the accepted papers began immediately thereafter. It should be noted that the two blind reviews normally practiced by APS were also applicable in this special issue under the supervision of the Editor-in-Chief. Various manuscripts were declined in this process because they did not meet the APS minimum standards. We sincerely wish to thank all reviewers who assisted in the review process, Brenda Lombard who edited all the manuscripts and Dr Mulunda Mwanza who translated abstracts from English to French.

The 13 articles included in this special issue used different approaches and data to answer the research questions. As expected, data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) programme dominated. Six articles used DHS data, most of which investigated the time trend of events. Of the six articles, only one was a comparative of two countries (i.e. Ghana and Nigeria). Two additional articles analysed quantitative data collected from surveys which are not DHS. The countries involved are Tanzania and Zimbabwe. The special

issue also includes one article which is an evaluation study conducted in Kenya. There are three articles that used qualitative information, two were conducted in South Africa and the third was conducted in Malawi. One article (South Africa) used a mixed methods approach by utilizing quantitative data from a special survey and different types of qualitative information.

This section summarises each article in the special issue. The first was written by Muthengi, Ferede and Erulkar entitled "Parent-Child communication and reproductive health behaviours: A survey of adolescent girls in rural Tanzania". The study, which conducted a special survey in Tabora, Tanzania, found out that it is not only communication between parent and his/her children that matters, but also the content of parental sexuality communication. The authors recommend that interventions should engage parents and also provide guidance to them on how to communicate clearly and comprehensively about sexuality, contraceptive use and HIV and AIDS. Fuseini presented an article with the title "Risky sexual behavior among sexually active never married Ghanaian women: A Latent Class Analysis". The study used the 2008 Ghana DHS to show that older women, among never married sexually active, were more likely to be classified in risk takers and high risk takers.

In his paper "Explaining trends of premarital childbearing among young women in Uganda", Ayiga used three sets of Uganda DHS (2001, 2006 and 2011) to examine trends of premarital childbearing among sexually active unmarried women. He found that premarital childbearing

remained high and stable in Uganda. He recommended that there is a need to increase and maintain access to programmes that increase age at sexual debut, level of education and reduce number of lifetime sex partners. Njue, Voeten, Ehuma, Looman, Habbema and Askew have presented findings of an evaluation study on the impact of the interventions with regard to knowledge, attitude and practices of adolescent reproductive health and HIV prevention programmes in rural Kenya. The article is entitled "Findings of an evaluation of community and school-based reproductive health and HIV prevention programs in Kenya". They concluded that the community-based intervention had a significant impact on knowledge and sexual behaviour.

Mturi's qualitative study aimed at describing the predisposing factors and consequences of pregnancy among young unmarried women in North West, South Africa. He found that pregnancy for most young women interviewed was unintentional but abortion was not an option. The study provides four recommendations: revisit the life orientation programme in schools; young unmarried women should be motivated to use contraception properly if they are sexually active; advocacy is needed on use of abortion services as an option; and measures should be put in place so as to improve parent-daughter communication on sexual matters. The last recommendation should take into account the findings of Muthengi et al, in this volume). Chikulo presents a study on "An exploratory study into menstrual hygiene management (MHM) amongst rural high

school for girls in the North West province, South Africa". The findings identified a knowledge deficit on MHM amongst girl learners as well as a discrepancy between the knowledge base of the girls and the information reportedly taught in schools by teachers and passed on by parents. The lack of knowledge about MHM, community support, and lack of supplies contribute to school absenteeism, unhealthy MHM practices, and feelings of discomfort among school girls.

"The psychological costs of being different and ways of coping among sexual minority students in a South African university" is an article written by Idemudia, Kolobe and Tsheole. Two major themes were extracted from the qualitative data. The principal outcome of the study was that homosexuals have a major challenge in their future work industry, have some identity crisis, poor psychological wellbeing and moderate resilience. The need to educate the public, university administrators and lecturers of sexual dynamics on campus amongst others were recommended. Mhele investigated the "Determinants of time to first birth among women in ages 15-24 in Swaziland" using the 2007 Swaziland DHS. He found out that education, age of first coitus and timing of contraception use were significantly associated with transition to first birth. The study recommended policies to retain women in school up to secondary level of education.

The article by Kaneka and Mturi is entitled "Motivations and consequences of secret contraceptive use among young married women in Malawi". The paper

used a qualitative approach to show that the motivations to use contraceptives secretly were mainly driven by external factors to the woman. These include poverty and safeguarding their marriage from instability and dissolution and not inherently for the woman to exercise her denied sexual and reproductive rights. The study concludes that involvement and inclusion of partners as target groups in the designing of family planning information and service provision is critical in increasing overt contraceptive use among young married women so that there should be no need for secret use. Mangombe, Amoateng and Kalule-Sabiti presented an article entitled “Is male circumcision an ‘invisible condom’? Men’s knowledge, attitudes, perception of risk to HIV infection and willingness to circumcise in Harare, Zimbabwe”. Their findings from a survey conducted in Harare, Zimbabwe showed that men who had favourable attitudes towards male circumcision and those who perceived themselves to be at a higher risk of HIV infection were more likely to be willing to circumcise. Contrary to expectation, knowledge of male circumcision was not significantly related to willingness to circumcise. The findings highlight the need for the promotion of health education that emphasises the health benefits of male circumcision.

Titilayo and his colleagues presented two articles, one with Palamuleni entitled “Spousal violence and unwanted fertility in Malawi” and the other with Palamuleni and Omisakin entitled “Knowledge of causes of maternal deaths and maternal seeking behavior in Nigeria”. Both articles used DHS data (Malawi 2010 DHS and

Nigeria 2013 DHS). The first paper showed that spousal violence was a significant predictor of unwanted fertility in Malawi. The study recommends that gender equality should be promoted and violence against women should be discouraged in order to accelerate fertility transition in Malawi. The second paper showed that the odds ratio of good health-seeking behaviour was significantly low among women who had poor knowledge about the causes of maternal death than those who had good knowledge. Other factors influencing maternal-health seeking behaviour are region, education and wealth status. Poor maternal health-seeking behaviour was high among women in the Northern region, the poor women and women who had low educational background. The authors conclude that emphasis should be placed on these factors in considering strategies to improve the maternal health care system in Nigeria.

Udomboso, Amoateng and Doegah article has a title “Bio-social correlates on intention to use or not to use contraception: The case of Ghana and Nigeria”. This comparative study used 2008 Ghana DHS and 2013 Nigeria DHS to examine the effect of selected bio-social factors on the intention to use contraception among never and ever married women. Educational attainment, exposure to media, and visitation to a health facility affected intention to use contraception significantly and positively in both countries. On the other hand, number of living children, infrequent sexual intercourse, postpartum amenorrhea, opposition to contraception and lack of access to contraceptives

negatively affected intention to use contraception. The study findings have underscored the rational nature of the decisions women make in using contraception or not.

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