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# Research Issues in Child Health and Child Care

Proceedings of a workshop  
held in Accra, Ghana,  
22–26 September 1986

Proceedings



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Editor: Fiona Mackenzie  
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## **Abstract**

This workshop brought together West African health scientists and social scientists to discuss methodological and conceptual issues in the study of infant and child health and mortality, and to identify new research needs. Health and social scientists from the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone attended the workshop. Emphasis was placed on evaluation of research design and procedures for analyzing the determinants of child health rather than on the presentation of findings. Discussions and papers focused on four central themes: conceptual frameworks more appropriate to local contexts, questions of scale and measurement, the search for indicators of child health, and directions for future interdisciplinary research. This publication is intended to serve as a record of the proceedings of the workshop and to promote further communication and interaction among researchers working in the area of infant and child mortality and health.

## **Résumé**

Cet atelier réunissait des spécialistes de la santé et des sciences sociales de l'Afrique occidentale qui ont discuté de problèmes méthodologiques et conceptuels liés à l'étude de la santé et de la mortalité du nouveau-né et de l'enfant, et qui ont cerné de nouveaux besoins en matière de recherche. Des spécialistes des sciences de la santé et des sciences sociales de la Gambie, du Ghana, du Nigéria et de la Sierra Leone y participaient. On a mis l'accent sur l'évaluation de la conception de la recherche et sur les procédures d'analyse des déterminants de la santé des enfants, plutôt que sur la présentation des conclusions de travaux de recherche. Les discussions et les communications ont porté sur quatre grands thèmes : paramètres conceptuels mieux adaptés au contexte local, questions d'envergure, la recherche d'indicateurs de la santé des enfants et les orientations futures de la recherche interdisciplinaire. Cette publication a pour objet de faire le compte rendu des délibérations et en même temps de promouvoir la communication et les interactions entre les chercheurs dans le domaine de la mortalité et de la santé des nouveau-nés et des enfants.

## **Resumen**

Este taller reunió a científicos del campo de la salud y las ciencias sociales para discutir cuestiones conceptuales y metodológicas en el estudio de la salud y mortalidad infantiles y para identificar nuevas necesidades investigativas. Asistieron al taller científicos de la salud y las ciencias sociales de Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria y Sierra Leona. Se hizo más énfasis en la evaluación del diseño y los procedimientos investigativos para analizar los determinantes de la salud infantil que en la presentación de los resultados. Las discusiones y documentos se centraron en cuatro temas: marcos de trabajo conceptuales más apropiados para los entornos locales, cuestiones de escala y medición, búsqueda de indicadores de salud infantil y pautas para la investigación interdisciplinaria futura. El propósito de esta publicación es el de registrar las sesiones del taller y promover una mayor comunicación e interacción entre los investigadores que trabajan en el campo de la salud y mortalidad infantiles.

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Issues that arose from the research included:

- Choice of fieldworker. The sex and age of the fieldworker, whether recruited from the community under research or from outside, and whether from the field of health or social work or from another field were considered critical variables in the selection process.
- Necessity of prior knowledge of a group's culture in constructing a questionnaire to obtain the answers sought from the questions asked. The local classification of disease is particularly significant here. For example, respondents in the survey area did not consider diarrhea in a child under 1 year to be an illness; it was viewed as part of the teething process.
- Reflection of cultural values in responses to the questionnaire. In this context, responses to general questions must be probed to identify more precisely the role of cultural factors. For example, in addition to questions on the duration of breastfeeding and whether it is full or partial, questions such as why mothers breastfeed, how they measure an infant's satisfaction, and how they ensure adequate nutrition for themselves, should be pursued.
- The benefit of combining different data collection methods. During the survey, in addition to questions on weaning practices, observations were made and data collected on household cooking and eating patterns, for example. In this way, a more complete picture of childhood nutrition could be obtained.
- The relationship between low acceptance and high drop-out rates from immunization to the ineffectiveness of measles vaccine.

### **Infant Mortality and Second-year Death Rates in The Gambia, 1973 and 1983, and a Vaccination Compliance Survey**

#### **M. Yamuah**

In the 1970s, the Gambia had one of the highest infant mortality rates in Africa, 217/1000 in 1973. It had dropped to 160/1000 according to the 1983 census, but remained very high. During this same period, the 2nd-year death rate dropped from 68 to 41/1000. Infant and child mortality remains an area of central concern to public health officials and the focus of attention of the Primary Health Care (PHC) program.

In this context, the present research aimed to discuss mortality differentials to identify the determinants of mortality; to illustrate some problems that hinder rapid health improvement in the Gambia; and to discuss the methodology of a Vaccination Compliance Survey as a basis for future research.

On the basis of indirect estimates from census data and longitudinal studies conducted in the Gambia, educational, regional, and religious differentials are discussed. The arguments support the view that mothers' education plays an important role in child health as it brings awareness about health hazards and preventive medicine. In 1983 in the Gambia, only 14% of females over age 10 years were literate; evidence suggests that the high degree of illiteracy explains in part the high infant and 2nd-year mortality rates.



Analysis of longitudinal studies conducted in the Gambia indicate that malaria, malnutrition, and diarrhea act synergistically to affect infant and child health and mortality. As a result, they prove to be more intractable to health-care intervention than diseases against which children may be vaccinated under the PHC program.

To assess the variables influencing the PHC vaccination program, in 1985, a Vaccination Compliance Survey was conducted in Bakau and Sukuta, two urban centres within 20 km of Banjul. Its specific objectives were to assess the relationship between maternal education and clinic attendance; to determine mothers' knowledge of the diseases against which their children were being immunized; to establish the reasons for visits to the clinics; to obtain data on fertility and mortality; and to estimate the socioeconomic status of families that visit the clinic.

Five hundred women with children aged 12-18 months were chosen for the initial survey, being differentiated according to vaccination record and regularity of visits to the clinic. A questionnaire was administered to these women. Initial results indicated that level of education is associated with knowledge of disease and that visits to the clinic were associated with illness of a child rather than a check up or weighing.

### **Infant and Child Mortality, Environmental Factors, and the Socioeconomic Status of Women in Two Rural Centres in the Western Part of Nigeria: A Research Proposal**

**Folasade Iyun**

Most of the available studies on infant and child mortality have concentrated on identifying the killer diseases (the biomedical approach) and the socioeconomic factors that influence mortality (the demographic approach). The latter's major concern has been the important role played by maternal education in giving rise to differentials in infant and child mortality.

The present research is inspired by an attempt to apply spatial dimensions - the geographical perspectives - to research in infant mortality so as to identify the contribution of environmental conditions and develop suitable interventions and strategies to solve this problem. This is particularly important as Primary Health Care (PHC) is now the focus of Nigeria's health strategy. The broad objectives are to assess the relative role of environmental conditions in the morbidity and mortality rates of children; to evaluate the influence of mothers' socioeconomic status; and to develop and test a methodology for carrying out this type of research.

The specific objectives of the research are: to estimate early childhood mortality levels for the two rural centres chosen for study; to identify the major diseases or illnesses responsible for infant and child mortality; to investigate local knowledge, attitudes, and practices concerning prevention and treatment of these illnesses; to assess the nutritional status of children and feeding behaviour of mothers; to assess the relative role of environmental factors (access to potable water, waste disposal, housing conditions); and to evaluate the influence of mothers' socioeconomic status on infant and child mortality.

The conceptual framework of the research is based on the ecological