

Minutes

'North-South Reproductive Health Research Network'

Time: December 14, 2009

Venue: ISIM, University of Copenhagen

The first meeting of 'North-South Reproductive Health Research Network' (hereafter the RH Network) gathered 13 participants counting research project administrators as well as PhD and Master students and external resource persons. Enreca Health has supported the Network with seed money and hosted the kick-off meeting. The objectives of the meeting were introduced by Vibeke Rasch as to (i) exchange experiences on on-going research projects; (ii) to hear presentations from two PhD projects; and (iii) to discuss how the RH Network could be most relevant to the participants.

Overview of on-going research projects and areas of interest

Birgitte Bruun Nielsen, senior consultant, Aarhus University Hospital Skejby, has conducted research in high risk pregnancies and deliveries as well as ante natal care over a number of years including training of staff. Her geographical focus has been on Denmark, South India, Nepal, Guinea Bissau and Tanzania (Zanzibar). She is in the process of seeking for money to do a follow up study, female infanticide research in rural parts of South India.

Bjarke Lund Sørensen, MD, PhD student at ISIM, is conducting a study on 'Maternal Health Care in Kagera Region, Tanzania' with Vibeke Rasch as his supervisor.

Britt Tersbøl, PhD in anthropology has worked intensively with questions on sexual and reproductive health and rights with UNFPA and has conducted research on gender and sexualities in Namibia as a part of her PhD study. She has over the past years worked increasingly with child health and Integrated management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) in Tanzania and is currently exploring the possibilities of a joint proposal to be submitted to EU with, among others, Bjarke Lund Sørensen.

Crispin Kahesa, MD, PhD student is working on a research project titled 'Prevention of cervical cancer in Tanzania (PROTECT)' with Vibeke Rasch as supervisor on cervical cancer among women in Tanzania, including a focus on their socio-economic background. Bjarke, maternal mort (Vibeke Birgitte)

Henrik Friis, MD, PhD, and professor at the Department of Human Nutrition at University of Copenhagen is supervising and otherwise involved in a number of projects at LIFE including the PRegnancy Outcome and Micronutrient Supplementation in Ethiopia (PROMISE) and 'The effect of perinatal micronutrient supplementation: A randomized study' project'. He has studied the linkages between HIV and TB and supervised numerous projects on nutrition and reproductive health, infant health and growth as well as on prevention and treatment of acute and severe malnutrition, diabetes and pregnancy.

Read more at: <http://www.enrecahealth.dk/archive/dokument2/>

Ib Bygbjerg, Professor, ISIM, University of Copenhagen, Consultant, Rigshospitalet, has a long time specialization in infectious diseases (malaria, HIV) as well as in chronic diseases (diabetes) as well as in

health systems research. He has conducted research in malaria and pregnancy and is currently involved in a cohort study in Tanzania on malaria and diabetes with Dirk Lund Christensen (Steno / ISIM) as well as in an India based PhD project. In the future, Ib is wishing for a cohort of pregnant women in Tanzania to analyse the links between gestation diabetes, pre eclampsia and malaria.

Ida Boas, is public health master student at the University of Copenhagen, doing her thesis on the 'Wired Mothers' project in Zanzibar.

Lise Rosendal Østergaard, MA, MIH, has worked with issues of reproductive health and rights (in particularly adolescent reproductive health and advocacy) during her three years of assignment with UNFPA in Benin and Senegal. Based in Denmark she has worked with HIV and AIDS and how to promote synergizing of HIV and AIDS with sexual and reproductive health and rights as a network coordinator of AIDSNET –The Danish NGO Network on AIDS and Development.

Myassa Dartell, MSc. (KU); Lic. Med (Lund); PhD student at ISIM, based at the Danish Cancer Society, is conducting a study on the prevalence and type distribution of Human Papilloma Virus among women in Tanzania with Vibeke Rasch as her supervisor.

Sarah Fredsted Villadsen, PhD student, is working with Henrik Friis as supervisor on the Maternity Study in Jimmi, Etiopia, as a joint project between Jimma University and the Department of Human Nutrition at University of Copenhagen. The objective of the study is to develop a strategy for improved antenatal care and service delivery in low income settings using a participatory approach to the involvement of urban stakeholders.

Siri Tellier, has a Masters' from Harvard School of Public Health, 1970, with specialization in public health demography; 38 years of experience in international health, including Director of International Department of Danish Red Cross 1992-2001, long term field postings in Afghanistan, China, DPR of Korea (UNFPA and UNDP); retired since 1 March 2009 and external lecturer at ISIM, University of Copenhagen.

Stine Lund, MD, PhD student, is working on the project 'Wired mothers - use of mobile phones to improve maternal and neonatal health in Zanzibar' with Vibeke Rasch and Birgitte Bruun Nielsen as supervisors. The study aims to examine the beneficial impact of use of mobile phones for health care on maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality, and to seek innovative ways to ensure access to skilled attendance at delivery. Read more at: <http://www.enrecahealth.dk/archive/wiredmothers/>

Vibeke Rasch, external lecturer, University of Copenhagen, MD currently based at Svendborg Hospital where she is finalizing her specialization in gynecology and obstetrics has conducted research in abortion seeking patterns in Denmark as well as in unsafe abortion, post abortion, HPV in Tanzania. She has been project manager of a long term research capacity building project in Vietnam on reproductive health and HIV and AIDS. Recently she has been considering the opportunities for getting involved in reproductive health capacity development in Afghanistan. Read more at: <http://www.inthehealth.ku.dk/reach>

Project presentation 'Maternal Health Care in Kagera Region, Tanzania'

Bjarke Lund Sørensen gave a short presentation of his research project "Quality of maternal and neonatal health care in Kagera Region, Tanzania". The focus is on Facility delays in emergency obstetric care but the

point of departure was a qualitative study on why women show up late for obstetric care. The point of departure for this study was the striking difference between maternal mortality in developed countries such as Denmark (1:17,000) compared to sub-Saharan Africa of 1:16. Although there recently has been a growing focus on the need for better performance on fulfilling the targets on the fifth Millennium Development Goal which is to reduce maternal mortality with 75% from 1990 to 2015 the international community is still far behind fulfilling this commitment. Results from this initial study, showed that in spite of the initial hypothesis late show up was less important than hospital delays at Kagera Regional Hospital.

It was found that individual women were blamed by health care staff of constituting a barrier to timely maternal care, however a number of institutional barriers were obvious such as the inability of the staff to perform specific procedures correctly.

The women as well as their families complained about corruption, attitude of health care providers as well as distance to facilities. To women, their families and the staff a good delivery could be summarized into a safe delivery where mother and child survived without further complications.

Further research into hospital register showed that the mothers came to hospital in time but died for number of reasons of complications that staff would have had time to look into. This led to a second study in 2008 focusing on how to introduce training in Advanced Life Support in Obstetrics (ALSO) which are the basic skills to handle pregnancy and childbirth complications, in Kagera. So far, the participants have been positive and a number of positive outcomes on post partum hemorrhage and immediate neonatal mortality have been demonstrated. The overall conclusion of the preliminary results is that the focus should be health system rather than community delays.

In addition to that, it would be interesting to explore the consequences on child health and child mortality of the hospital delays. It would also be of interest to achieve a better definition of concepts such as 'skilled birth attendants' or 'enabling environment', concepts that are widely circulated but less well defined, thus of little operational value.

Read more: http://www.enrecahealth.dk/news/maternal_health_care_in_tanzania/

Project presentation 'Human Papilloma Virus among women in Tanzania'

Myassa Dartell gave a short presentation of a cross sectional study on human papilloma virus (HPV). It is the most common STI among women and it is constituted of 100 different subtypes which can be divided into high risk and low risk groups. High risk can lead to cervical cancer depending on (i) HPV related factors, (ii) host related factors and (iii) exogenous factors. HPV is the second leading cause of cancer related death among women worldwide with approximately 500.000 new cases per year. 80% occur in low-income countries. In Tanzania, HPV is the leading cause of cancer death among women.

The objectives of the study are to determine prevalence and types of HPV in Tanzania and evaluate potential additional risk factors in Tanzania (such as HIV or female genital circumcision). The preliminary results indicate that 21% of all women included in the study were HPV positive. The prevalence decreases with age but rises steeply after menopause which invites to a number of speculations on the underlying explanations such as perhaps the carriers were not detected earlier on. The study also tested women for HIV status and found that the HPV prevalence were higher among HIV positive women. In the future, it will

be interesting to further analyze the effect of a potential HPV vaccine on HIV positive women. The highest risks were found among women younger than 29 and over 60, women who were either single or co-habiting, women with high numbers of partners. Women of high parity were also proportionally at increased risk for HPV infection.

The discussion on this project were focused on the shadow group of women older than 60 who seemed to be exposed to a high risk but who were under the radar of the health system.

The future of this network

During the discussion on the future of this it network it was agreed that it would:

- Meet regularly three to four times per year;
- Explore the possibilities for joint proposals, especially on management issues? Possibly at Mother's Days meeting;
- Use the planned scientific meeting on Mother's Day for an kick off activity and possibly invite Wilma Dodens, UNFPA for a technical meeting on refugee RH in conjunction with her teaching in Copenhagen in April 2010;
- Ask Enreca Health to set up a thematic website at www.enrecahealth.dk;
- Invite openly to the next meeting in order to systematically include relevant researchers in this network.

List of Participants

1. Vibeke Rasch, External Lecturer, ISIM, University of Copenhagen, vira@sund.ku.dk
2. Birgitte Bruun Nielsen, senior consultant, Aarhus University Hospital (Skejby) birgitte.bruun.nielsen@dadlnet.dk
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5. Britt Tersbøl, Associate Professor, ISIM, University of Copenhagen, briter@sund.ku.dk
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7. Stine Lund, PhD student, ISIM, University of Copenhagen, stlu@sund.ku.dk
8. Myassa Arkam Dartell, PhD student, ISIM, University of Copenhagen, myda@sund.ku.dk
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10. Crispin Kahesa, PhD student, ISIM, University of Copenhagen, crispinkahesa@yahoo.co.uk
11. Siri Tellier, External Lecturer, ISIM, University of Copenhagen, siri.tellier@gmail.com
12. Ida Boas, Master student, FSV, University of Copenhagen,
13. Lise Rosendal Østergaard, Research Coordinator, Enreca Health –Danish Research Network for International Health, liron@sund.ku.dk .