

Directed by Yannick Jaffré

Choosing One's Life and Building One's Family

Thinking together to improve maternal health



Introduction

This booklet is a result of an inquiry conducted amongst adults and children of West Africa by a team of CNRS researchers from the Mixed International Unit 3189 and WHEP (Inter-academic group for development of the Institute of France), in the framework of a programme « Practices of actors in the field of family planning », financed by UNFPA.

The research was carried out in :

- Burkina Faso by Marie Thèrèse Arcens Somé, Andrinette Tavi & Kibspoko Kuila
- Ghana, by Albert Awedoba & Deborah Atobrah
- Mali, by Abdourahmane Coulibaly and Aissata Haïdara
- Senegal, by Fatoumata Hane & Malick Sy Camara

The editing was done by the Resurgences Association (Marseille), by Sarah Champion (writing, conception and selection of drawings), as well as Saloua Taghouti for the editing of childrens' drawings and Magali Daniel for the cover. The translation was done by Arundhati Virmani, EHESS, Centre Norbert Elias.

We thank both doctor Alain Prual and doctor Luc de Bernis for the feedback on the first version of this work. This makes them exempt from any responsibility for the revisions in the final version.

This booklet was conceived as a tool of reflection on maternity and paternity. It is destined to children and adolescents. It can also serve as a pedagogical tool for Education and Health professionals.

All the texts found here are declarations made or written by children or adults of Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali and Senegal and correspond to their life experiences.

There is undoubtedly no recipe for "succeeding one's life". And this book has no intention of giving lessons. It simply intends to show children the choices available to them and link these choices with their consequences as experienced by some adults.

We hope that this dialogue between man and woman and between generations will enable everyone to conduct his or her own reflection in complete freedom.

Nom :

Prénom :

Age :

Sexe :

Classe :

Ecole :

This book is yours. It should help you to make the best choices for your family life.

Each theme will allow you to think, to answer questions and build your own opinion.

This is a book you can read several times, whenever you need it.

Draw the family you would like to have later when you are an adult.

What will my family be like?

Family is about protection of parents. It is a life force that allows you to overcome difficulties. Parents protect children who will in turn take over their parents' responsibilities.

Everyone wants to be happy and the family is one of the ways to build one's happiness.

Getting married? At what age? With whom? Is the decision to be your own or is the choice to be left to parents? Having children? How many? Within marriage or outside marriage? Everyone is confronted with these questions and we all have an ideal of the family we would like to have.

Yet, having children involves serious risks for health and young girls and women must not die or suffer because of happy events like pregnancy or birth.



While one can have children for love, there are many

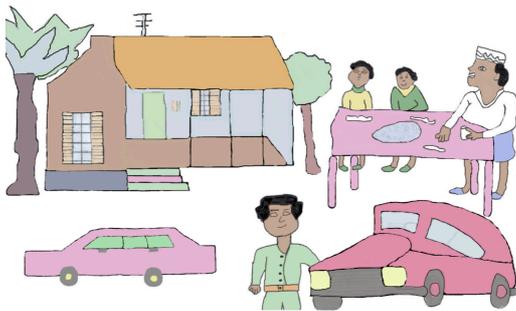
A pair of arms



A child is of great interest: if God gives you many children and if they are children who are lucky, they'll take you out of misery. Girls will take over in the kitchen, look after the dishes, wash clothes, pound millet. And when the work in the fields begins, it's the boys who can do it. That is the real advantage of children.

Diouma – 43 years

A social status



For us, being a bachelor, not having a child, is not a good thing. It's the family that gives you dignity and respect. The family is like a protective net.

Yacouba – 32 years

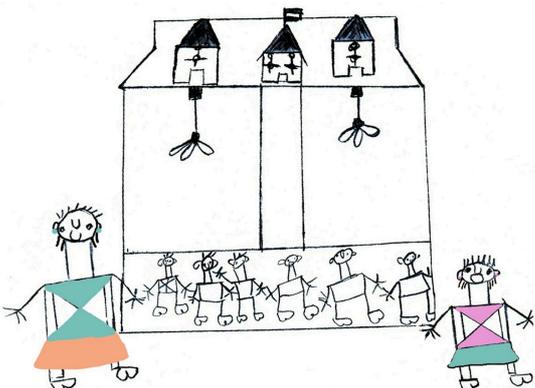
A retirement safety net



Children are something that ensures that someone will take over. You protect your children and God willing, they will relieve you in their turn. The more children you have the more your chances of ending your days in wealth.

Idrissa – 28 years

Doing more than your co-wife



My spouse has 4 children and so do I. My husband wants to achieve the number of 12 children. The more children I have the more he will respect me and treat me well. That's why it's more interesting for me to have a large number of children and overtake my co-wife.

Safi – 26 years

other reasons for doing so.

Not knowing how to avoid having too many children

I used traditional methods taught by the elders to avoid pregnancy, but it didn't work. I've already had five pregnancies and I want to stop there but I don't know how I can do it. I know that there are women who take the pill and are happy. But others say that it brings about diseases. I don't know what to do.

Youssouf – 24 years

Leave it to luck

The number of children you'll have doesn't depend on you. That's why I don't want to go in for family planning. For me, it's fate. If fate wills that I have two children, I'll have two, if it decides I'll have twenty, I'll have twenty!

Aïda – 29 years

Thinking that having a lot of children is a sign of male virility

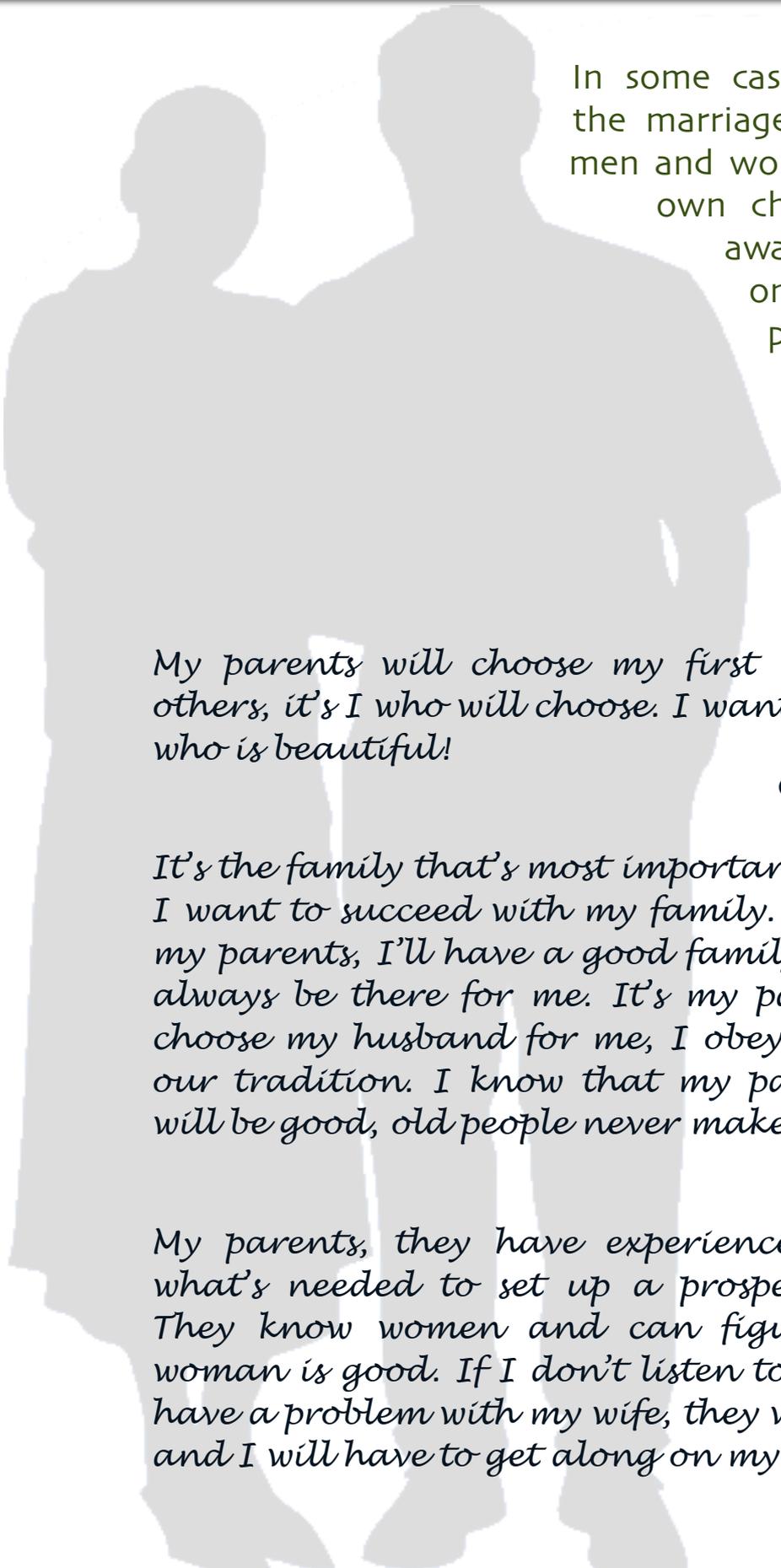
Yes, I wanted his birth. If I say this, it's because a lot of things were being said about me. Because the woman I had didn't succeed in having a child, a lot of people were thinking that I'm impotent, I heard 'rumours' myself. So having a new wife and a child, really it was something desired, it pleased me

Mamadou – 31 years

What do you think of these different reasons?

And you, why did you want children?

Arranged marriage or love marriage...



In some cases the elders decide the marriage, in other cases, it's men and women who make their own choice. One can't get away from choice. Either one chooses to let the parents do what they want, or one decides on one's own.

My parents will choose my first wife, for the others, it's I who will choose. I want at least one who is beautiful!

Ousmane – 12 years

It's the family that's most important. That's why I want to succeed with my family. If I listen to my parents, I'll have a good family and they'll always be there for me. It's my parents who'll choose my husband for me, I obey them, that's our tradition. I know that my parents choice will be good, old people never make mistakes.

Awa – 12 years

My parents, they have experience and know what's needed to set up a prosperous family. They know women and can figure out if a woman is good. If I don't listen to them and I have a problem with my wife, they won't help me and I will have to get along on my own.

Drissa – 11 years

what is your choice ?

Letting the parents do what they think is right...

I respect my parents, but I don't want to be like them. I will decide myself what I want for my life and for my family. No one can know better than me what I want. They're not in my head, nor in my heart.

Lamine – 11 years

I'll choose my husband myself. A kind husband, whom I like. My parents won't force me to marry a man I don't love.

Fatoumata – 12 years

I know that the girl my parents will choose for me won't be the one I like. They'll get me a woman I don't love, they don't know my tastes. If my wife isn't to my taste, I'll go see other women and mine won't be happy. That's why I want to choose her myself.

Seydou – 13 years



Arranged marriage or love marriage..

What adults say...



Earlier, there were no problems, it's now that there are problems because you're married off to someone you like, you love. Now, youngsters get to know each other most often in the street without it being a decision of the father and the mother. It's not a "guaranteed" marriage. Marriage decided by the parents, that's the one that lasts. Marriage desired by oneself doesn't last.

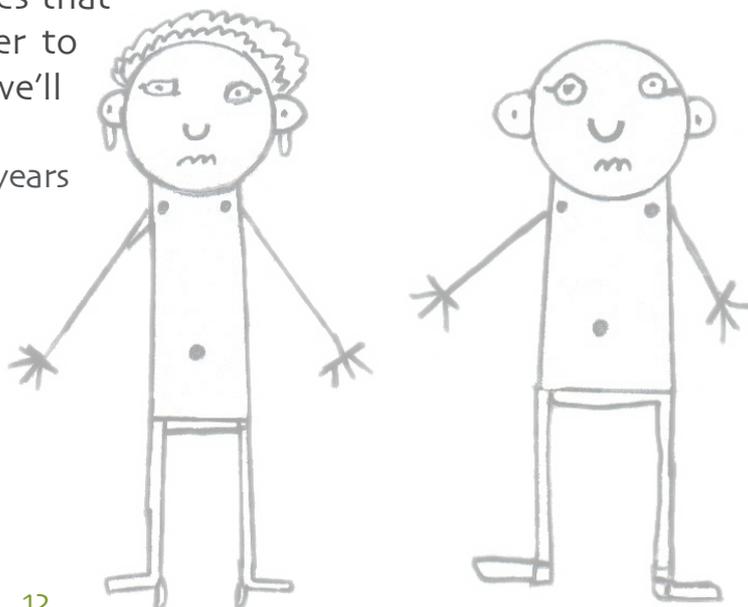
Sanata – 47 years

I'm engaged to my uncle's son. I didn't want this marriage because it's a marriage between kin and my sister told me that this involves a lot of risks for children and their health. This relationship didn't please me but I couldn't stop it. That's why it ended by pleasing me.

Awa – 23 years

Personally, I was married against my wishes, I don't want the same thing for my daughters. I would give no daughter to a man with whom she hasn't come to a prior agreement. If she claims she loves that one, let him come, we'll give her to him. If she doesn't love him, we'll drop him.

Aminata – 28 years



what would you choose?

And you, what do you want?

To choose your husband or your wife or let your parents decide?

What are the advantages of these choices?

In your opinion, what are the qualities of a good husband?

In your opinion, what are the qualities of a good wife?

Polygamy or monogamy ?

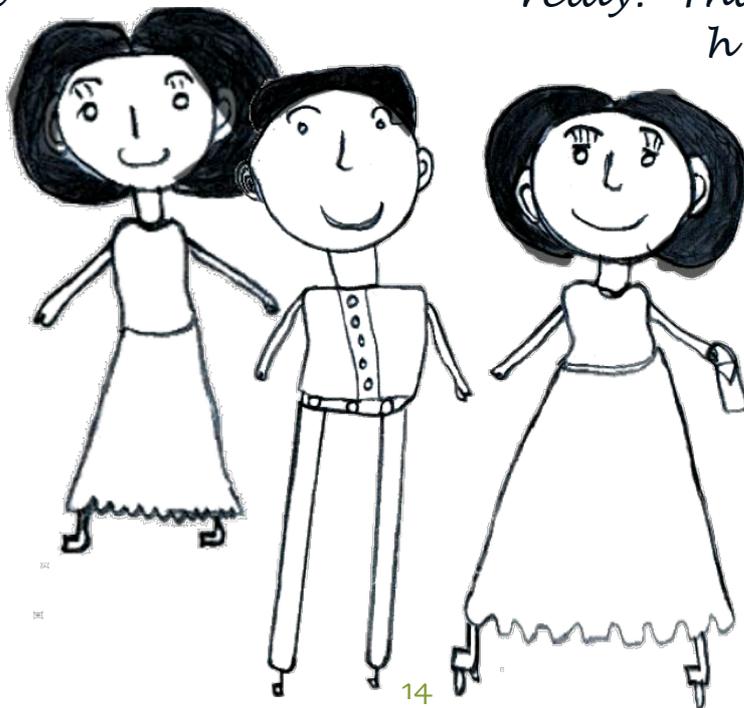
Monogamy

If my husband takes several women, then I will take several husbands. Then we'll see if he isn't jealous, if he can share his wife, his home and his children with other men.

Fatoumata – 13 years

I want to marry one woman; households with several families always have problems. Several women means jealousies and with children too it's a mess because you can never treat them all in the same way. With polygamy, a family will never be united.

Moctare – 12 years



Polygamy

I want my husband to have several wives: I won't get bored if he isn't there. I want him to marry three women so that I don't feel lonely.

Maria – 11 years

I will have four women because I want many children, at least twenty! If you don't have a lot of children, you are poor; wealth comes with children. My father told me that two or three children isn't good, you need labour! You need children to take over the relay. That's the way you

have good

e c o n o m i c management. If you have several wives and lots of children, you spend a lot but you will earn even more!

Adama – 12 years

What is your choice ?

What adults say...

I didn't choose my husband, I'm the second wife. The first wife wasn't happy about my arrival, she was jealous and there were a lot of quarrels. She is jealous because I have more children than her.

Mariam – 34 years

In our country, some have three women. If you have to look after them, how will you do it? Perhaps you can take care of them with what you earn? If you can't look after them, don't do it! Amongst our people, those who are incapable of looking after their families are more numerous than those who are capable.

Bakary – 39 years

A single woman can't satisfy men. Say, you're always with the same woman, slowly, slowly, she will displease you. You get bored. That happens when you are together all the time and that's how you think of taking a second wife.

Ibrahim – 22 years

I'm a second wife, which gives me more freedom. I don't have my husband on my back every night. I need time for my activities in politics, that's why I don't want a child at present. And since my co-wife already has children, my husband doesn't bother me with it. For me, being a second wife has many advantages.

Aïssatou – 27 years

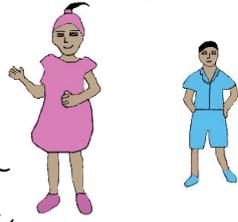
Polygamy or monogamy? What would you choose ?

Polygamy

Monogamy

How many children would you like ?

Few children



I'd like to have two children, ideally, a boy and a girl, but it's fate that will decide! My husband and I, both will work and my husband will help me in the housework and in the children's education. We'll both be equal, in any case, both of us should find it convenient.

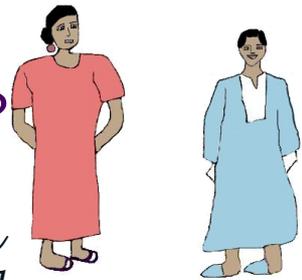
Ndeye – 11 years

Many children

My ideal family is 8 children, four boys and four girls. We'll live in a nice bungalow, well constructed with lots of rooms and bathrooms. There'll also be a garden and flowers and a pool. My wife and I, we'll be happy in this house and love each other for ever.

Elimane – 10 years

Who decides?



I'd like to remain in my village and have good relations with my family and my husband's family. I'll do what my husband tells me to do and also his parents because that's how we'll be happy. If he wants a lot of children we'll have a lot and if he wants only two or three, I'll do as he wants.

Salimata – 11 years



What the adults say...

If you are lucky enough to have a lot of children thanks to God, the neighbours describe you as being blessed by happiness. But at the same time, having a lot of children makes life difficult because it's a heavy responsibility. The more children there are, the heavier the responsibility. The fewer you have, the easier it is.

Adama – 23 years

The children you have, that depends on God, but if you can control the number of children, I think that's not a bad thing. If the children multiply, while you don't have the means, it will be difficult for you. There are a lot of things to take care of, health, food, clothes or education. If you can't satisfy their needs you will struggle all your life.

Bakary – 39 years

One, two, three or ten children, does one have the choice to decide the number?

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Must men and women together decide on the number of children?

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Who decides the number of children?

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What can be done to only have the number of children one wishes?

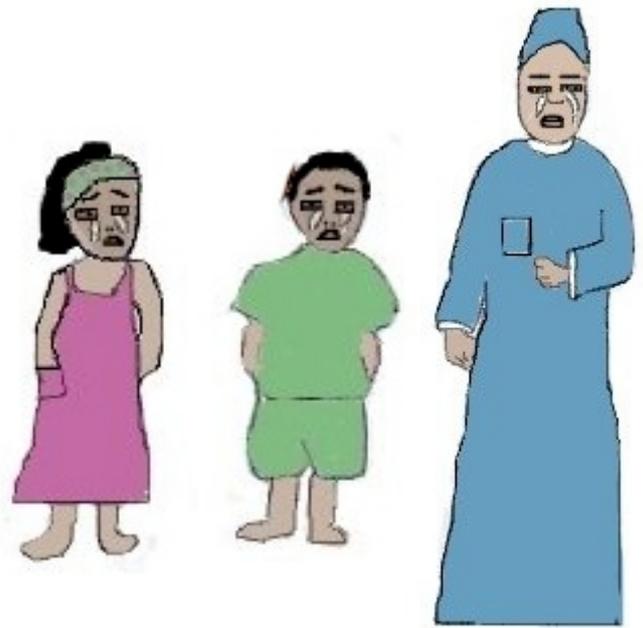
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Consequences of short birth

Losing life to give it

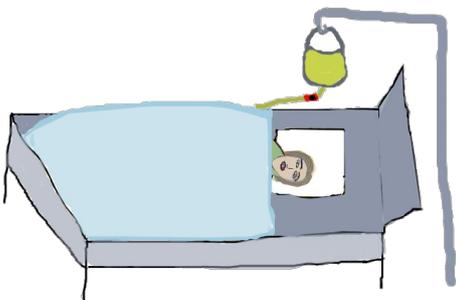
We were four sisters and my parents wanted a boy. When my mother delivered, she died, she was 25 and I was 8. I had my brother, but I thought a lot about my mummy. Things are difficult in the home, my father isn't there often. My aunts look after us.

Bintou – 12 years



In the beginning, my wife had very close births, less than one year between each birth. There were two births where delivery required an operation. It was difficult for me to meet the expenses. And also on account of the suffering, the woman too suffered a lot. I felt a lot of pity for her, so I decided to space out the births. I suggested she taking planning since that was better than having an 'operation' each year.

Issa – 37 years



My wife had two very close births and after the second delivery, her body began "running", she began growing thin. She and the children suffered a lot. I suggested she go to the health centre to plan the births and I bought her the "injection". The advantage we had, if you see the child born later...if he stood by his elder brother before you, you'd think they were the same age. He grew faster than the other. The mother was relieved. I saw the importance of that.

Ignace – 42 years

intervals on women's health

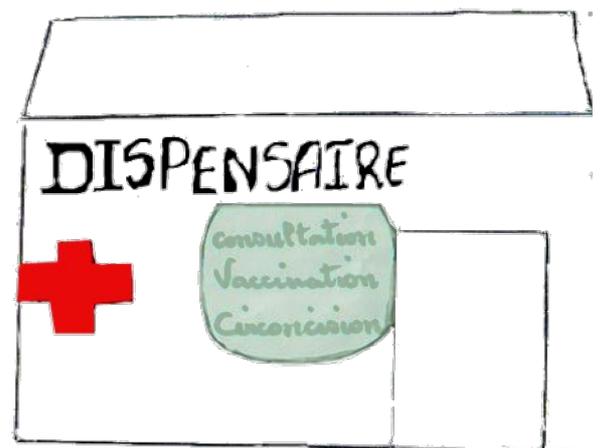
Amongst men

I was twenty and I'd already had seven deliveries. One died, and I was left with six children. All this tired me: the childbirths and the consequences for my body, it involved too much suffering. If I had the choice, I would have stopped there. But my husband decided otherwise, he said it wasn't time yet. It's he who decides, he has authority over me. I have nothing to say.

Assitan – 20 years

I'm 28 years old and I have eight children. My pregnancies were very close. The pregnancies were a surprise. I suffered a lot and my children suffered as well. They weren't well nourished. We didn't have enough money for the medicines when the children fell ill. All this meant a lot of difficulties and exhaustion for all of us.

Manjour – 28 years



Consequences of short birth

What doctors and midwives have to teach us

Life threatening risks

Having a child is perhaps a happy event but it's also always a risk for women who deliver.

In the world, around 358 000 women die each year for reasons linked to their pregnancy or delivery.

In the world, it is as if every 4 hours, 250 women died. In Africa, south of the Sahara, 204 000 women die each year because of pregnancy and delivery.

Health risks

Moreover, complications that come up during pregnancy or delivery can have serious consequences on women's health. That is how more than the 2 million women suffer from fistula (opening between the vagina and the bladder or the rectum which leads to permanent and uncontrolled loss of urine or matters)

This very serious problem arises from a difficult and lengthy delivery that occurs when the woman is very young and therefore has a very small pelvis to have a normal delivery. This can happen when young girls are married too young and have children too early. Their body isn't yet ready to give birth to a child.

These women with a fistula and incontinent women suffer physically and are very often despised and rejected because they smell due to the flow of urine or faeces. A fistula can be treated in a specialized centre.



intervals on women's health

Consequences for young ladies

In the world, around 14 and 15 million adolescents between 15 to 19 years deliver each year and these adolescents run greater risks of dying during their pregnancy and delivery.

When the child is unwanted, a number of young girls take recourse to a "clandestine" abortion. This is very dangerous for the women. They can die or subsequently become sterile. And yet, in Africa, 4 million young girls and adolescents have an abortion every year.

What do you think of these figures?

Do you know women who have had health problems or who died after their delivery?

Do you know any women or young girls who aborted?
What do you think of it?

Consequences on our family choices

On education

I wouldn't like my children to be a worker like me, that's why I don't want to have too many. I want to have the means to enrol them in school as soon as they are born. They'll have a better profession than mine and will find a place for themselves.

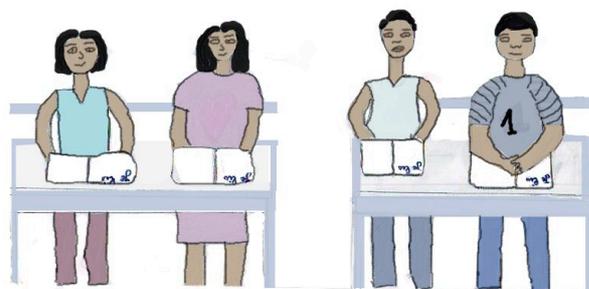
Ibrahim – 27 years

The child who works well at school can then get a good training and get an important job. That's why I encourage my two children to work hard at school and I do all I can so that they succeed.

Bakary – 39 years

To have a child and to raise him or her is to plan for the future of human relations

Issa – 31 years



On economy

I'm 32 and I have 8 children. That is a lot and leads to complications and suffering. When the children reach a high number and there isn't enough food, there's weakness. There's nothing besides millet here. Normally, other staples should be added, rice and vegetables with vitamins. But I don't have the means to procure these foods for my 8 children, it's too much responsibility.

Mama Fomba – 32 years

When my children fall sick, I have to meet all the expenses. My husband gives nothing. He earns nothing with his shop. If the number of children exceeds what you can spend, you won't be in peace. You will never attain the level you wish to have and nor will they.

Mariam – 37 years



what adults say...

On relationships between

When you have a lot of children and you don't have enough money, it spoils everything: it is difficult for you as well as for your wife and your neighbourhood. Your relations with your wife will deteriorate because she'll make you feel that all this is your fault and similarly your neighbours won't respect you.



Drissa – 33 years

I noticed that my wife was using contraceptives and that made me feel bad. The child belongs to the man and to the woman. If one does these kinds of things, first there should be an agreement about it, you decide together. But when the woman takes the decision on her own, I can't approve of that. I reproached her a lot for that, telling her she shouldn't have done that and we must decide together about the gap between the children. That's the right thing to do.

Oumar – 36 years

the couple

I think that having a lot of children is a strain and it's heavy for the woman and also for the couple. Birth spacing is one of the best things one could imagine. This allows the woman to rest and take better care of her children.

Sidy – 21 years

I have seven children and their burden weighs heavy on me. My husband doesn't even think of contraception. He forbids me to practice it. But he doesn't help me: he isn't there. It's I who suffer for everything. All the strain is on me. I'm alone with my Allah and what good people do for me.

Djénébou – 22 years



We now know :

Every pregnancy exposes the woman to a serious risk of complication, after-effects or death.

Younger women are at a higher risk for medical complications that lead to death and/or severe lasting injuries.

When births are too close to each other, it increases the health risks for women.

Therefore, let us think about the following:

At what age to have children? Knowing that for a woman to have children too early and too young increases the risk of death during delivery or pregnancy.

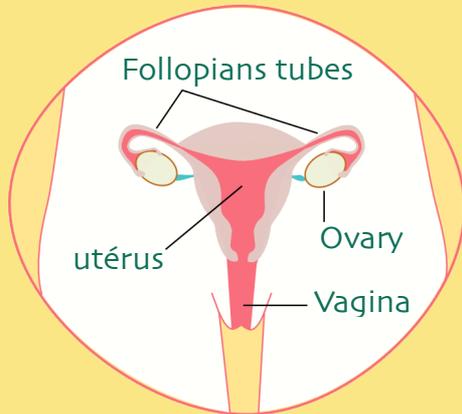
How can births be spaced so as to avoid health problems for the woman and her children?

Will I be able to guarantee the material and educational well being of all the children I wish to have.

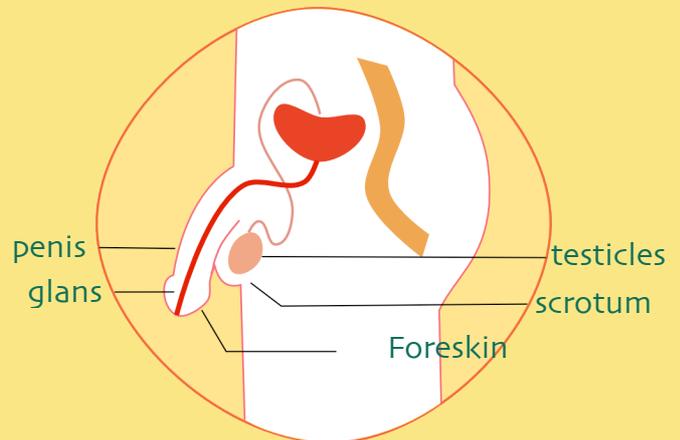
And if one only knew a little more to help inform decisions regarding one's life.

Understanding one's body

The woman's sexual organs



The man's sexual organs



The female genital apparatus consists of a visible part and an invisible part. The part seen from the exterior is the vulva (with big and small lips and the clitoris).

The internal part consists of the vagina, the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries.

What are periods?

Every month one of the two ovaries secretes an ovule; If the ovule isn't fertilized, the surface of the uterus that has become ready to receive an egg by thickening, becomes thin once more: this releases blood that flows through the vagina. These are periods. Periods recur every 28 days, during 3-4 days.

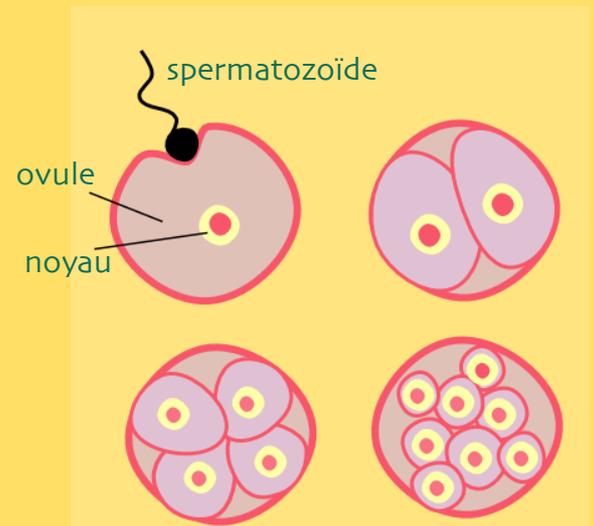
The male genital apparatus consists of the penis and the scrotum, also known as testicles; the extremity of the penis is known as the gland. It is protected by a hood called the foreskin.

Some men are circumcised, having had their foreskin cut. The testicles produce thousands of spermatozoa every second. The liquid containing the spermatozoids is called sperm..

Understanding fertility

How does one make a child?

To make a baby, the man and the woman must have a sexual relation during the woman's fertility period. During the sexual relation the man's spermatozoon will fertilize the woman's ovum and produce the egg that will nest in the woman's uterus and become the future baby.



What is the period of fertility?

The woman is fertile during her period of ovulation. Ovulation generally takes place between the twelfth and the fourteenth day after the last periods and the period of fertility lasts around six days.

At what moment does a young girl become fertile? On adolescence, the young girl's body changes and towards 12/13 years, she begins to have her periods. From this moment onwards, if she has a sexual relation, she can become pregnant.



Understanding contraception

Several means of contraception exist to avoid pregnancy. Information or prescription for a means of contraception can be acquired from the doctor and health officers.

Female condom

is a thin, flexible protection that the woman herself places in her vagina before intercourse and this retains the sperm, preventing its mobility.

Male condom

The man wears this very thin sheath of rubber on his penis. When the sperm is released, it remains within the condom. The spermatozoa are thus prevented from reaching the ovum. At the same time the condom serves as a protection against sexually transmitted diseases, especially AIDS.

Both male and female condoms not only help prevent pregnancy but also protect against sexually transmittable diseases, such as AIDS.

Implant

It's a small stick that a doctor places underneath the skin without pain that prevents a woman from getting pregnant for many years.

Pill

Prescribed by the doctor, this tablet is taken by women. It contains hormones that stop ovulation. As soon as the woman stops taking the tablet she can become pregnant again.

Spermicide

Spermicide are substances (jelly, sponge, egg) that are introduced in the vagina before intercourse in order to destroy spermatozoa.

Intra-uterine device:

This arrangement placed by the doctor or midwife in the woman's uterus prevents the implantation of the embryo.

Family planning, a question of

A friend's wife talked to me about family planning and the relief this brings to the woman. There are long gaps between her children. I observed her practices and they really convinced me, so much so that I wanted my wife to adopt it.

Bakary – 39 ans

When my third child was born in three years, we rushed to the health centre to take measures so that there would be a bigger age gap between them and I might find some relief for myself. The child also benefitted because he strengthened. We are now practicing family planning. We were convinced that it's necessary.

Samia – 28 years

Some women say family planning isn't good and it leads to diseases. Some are ashamed of practising it and going to the Planning centre. Earlier, I was also ashamed but I no longer think like that because it's a matter of practicing something that makes life easier so that you don't have too many children, which creates problems. My husband also says it's good, he encourages me to practice it and we're very happy with that.

Fatou – 31 years

Do you think that in a couple, the man and the woman both have their say in birth spacing and the number of children they should have?



confidence and dialogue

The most important aspect about making all these choices is to

dare to talk about it

dare to talk it over with health professionals

dare to talk about it between the men and women
you're going to grow into



Now that I've thought it over, discussed it and I know more, I can draw the family I'd like to have when I'm an adult.

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Choosing One's Life and Building One's Family

Thinking together to improve maternal health

This booklet has been written with the words of children and adults. It aims to promote thinking on the choices to be made before building one's family and deciding the number of children one would like to have.

This work doesn't take a position on what would be better or worse. It simply aims to favour a dialogue between boys and girls and deliver necessary information to reduce maternal mortality and improve the mother's health.

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