



An Ethnographic Study of Youth Agency and Medical Practice in Ghana,

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Abstract

In many African contexts, young people are frequently viewed as passive recipients of healthcare. This study addresses a gap in understanding the active role of youth within medical systems, focusing on Ghana, where demographic and social changes are influencing patient-provider interactions. This ethnographic study aimed to investigate the nature and expression of youth agency within Ghanaian medical practice. It sought to understand how young people navigate, negotiate, and at times resist medical authority, with a focus on obstetrics and gynaecology. A multi-sited ethnographic approach was employed, combining participant observation in clinical and community settings with in-depth interviews. Participants included young patients, their family members, healthcare practitioners, and community health workers. Data were analysed using a thematic framework. Young people, particularly young women, demonstrated considerable agency through selective symptom disclosure, seeking second opinions via digital platforms, and negotiating treatment plans. A key theme was the strategic navigation of both biomedical and traditional health systems to achieve personal health objectives. For example, many young antenatal attendees consulted traditional birth attendants privately before their formal hospital booking. Young people in Ghana are active agents within medical encounters, employing sophisticated strategies to manage their health. This agency is often exercised discreetly, operating within the constraints of hierarchical medical and social structures. Medical training programmes in Ghana should integrate modules on youth-centred communication. Healthcare facilities should develop more youth-friendly spaces to promote open dialogue. Further research should examine the influence of digital health information on clinical relationships. Youth agency, Medical anthropology, Ghana, Obstetrics, Gynaecology, Ethnography, Patient autonomy This study offers an empirical, nuanced account of youth agency in a Ghanaian medical context, challenging deficit-based perspectives and providing insights for more responsive reproductive healthcare delivery.

Keywords: *Medical anthropology, Sub-Saharan Africa, Youth agency, Ethnographic methods, Clinical ethnography, Patient autonomy, Ghana*



ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

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