



Gender, Healthcare Access, and Medical Authority: An Ethnographic Study of Gynaecological Practice in Senegal

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Published: 11 September 2000 | **Received:** 29 May 2000 | **Accepted:** 08 August 2000

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DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.18531135](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18531135)

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Abstract

In Senegal, gynaecological care is situated within a complex interplay of gender norms, medical authority, and structural barriers, which shape women's health experiences and outcomes. This study aimed to ethnographically explore the lived experiences of patients and practitioners in Senegalese gynaecological settings. It sought to analyse how gender and power relations influence healthcare access, clinical interactions, and the negotiation of medical authority. A multi-sited ethnographic study was conducted in urban and peri-urban healthcare facilities. Data collection included extensive participant observation in clinics, in-depth interviews with 27 women patients and 15 healthcare providers, and analysis of institutional documents. A central finding was the theme of 'silenced symptoms,' where women, particularly younger and unmarried patients, often felt unable to fully disclose gynaecological concerns due to fear of moral judgement. Consultations were characterised by a pronounced hierarchical dynamic, where biomedical authority frequently overrode patient narratives. A significant proportion of patients described prioritising familial responsibilities over seeking timely care. Gynaecological practice in this context is profoundly shaped by gendered social hierarchies, which can impede open communication and timely healthcare-seeking. The clinical encounter often reinforces, rather than challenges, existing social inequities. Recommendations include developing communication training for providers focused on patient-centred, non-judgemental care. Community-based health education programmes are also needed to destigmatise gynaecological health and empower women to seek care. Gender, Healthcare Access, Medical Authority, Ethnography, Gynaecology, Senegal, North Africa This research provides a nuanced, empirically grounded analysis of the gendered power dynamics within clinical encounters in a Senegalese context.

Keywords: *Gynaecology, Gender, Medical Anthropology, Healthcare Access, Francophone Africa, Ethnography, Senegal*



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