



# Cultural Competence

- Cultural groups are heterogeneous and making it difficult and even counter-productive to perceive or `teach` a culture as a whole.
- At the same time, to learn every aspect of each culture that could influence the medical encounter is impractical, if not impossible. (Carillo et al. 1999)

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## Cultural Competence

Therefore, the findings with Cameroonian women shall be taken exemplary - together with lessons from medical anthropology - to demonstrate a more practical approach to explore the various types of problems that are likely to occur in cross-cultural medical encounters.

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## Hospital-based Study

on induced abortion and contraception

- 65 in-depth interviews with Cameroonian women who had had an induced abortion.
- Complemented by data of hospital records, interviews with key informants and participant-observation.
- Incorporating medical and anthropological aspects.

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## Background Information

- Unsafe abortion is characterized by the lack or inadequacy of skills of the provider, hazardous techniques and unsanitary facilities.
- It is estimated that worldwide almost 20 million unsafe abortions take place every year, 95% of them in the „developing“ world.
- Unsafe abortion is a leading cause of almost 600.000 maternal deaths each year.

(WHO 1998)

# Background Information

- Lack of information on all aspects of abortion.
- Besides it's illegality, abortion is in most sub-Saharan African countries highly controversial and the stigma of abortion dictates the secrecy of the procedure.
- Studying the subject of unsafe abortion requires exceptional sensitivity to the need of privacy and confidentiality.

(WHO 1996)

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# Cross-cultural Encounter

Special attention has been paid to the development of the interview questions as well as communication and interaction in the cross-cultural encounter such as:

- Formulation of questions
- Inside-knowledge
- Significance of silence
- Culture of biomedicine

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# Formulation of Questions

- Formulation with the help of Cameroonian medical personnel.
  - „Which modern method of contraception do you know?“ has been altered into:
  - „How do you do to prevent unwanted pregnancy?“
- Formulation understandable independent from educational background and with a concrete reference to women's daily lives.

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## Formulation of Questions

- Use of indirect-related questions:
  - „Which kind of methods have you *heard* of to terminate a pregnancy?“ *instead of*
  - „Which kind of methods do you *know* to terminate a pregnancy?“
- It seems less demanding for women using an indirect communication style.

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## Inside-knowledge

Using inside-knowledge of local practices:

- For example, by using the term `egussi´ I was able to show the women that I was familiar with local abortion methods and at the same time this signified my knowledge of something which is normally secret.
- This specific knowledge seemed to put women at ease and promoted an openness.

# Significance of Silence

Meaning and coping with silence:

- The woman simply didn't understand the question.
- This assumption has been confirmed when the formulation of the question has been changed and the women replied afterwards.
- Silence could have been a hint that the question is touching a delicate aspect and requires a sensitive proceeding.

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## Significance of Silence

„The student may be unwilling to talk or speak. This phenomenon is common among adolescents who are angry or worried. When such a situation arises the student should be reassured and made feel at ease. Either the student is unwilling to reveal the secret because of the lack of confidence in the counsellor or he/she is angry at your reaction about what he/she has said. In any case, never insist.“

(Cameroonian Ministry of National Education 1995)

# Culture of Biomedicine

- In the cross-cultural encounter interacts the culture of each participant and the culture of biomedicine.
- The term biomedicine refers to the predominant medical theory and practice of Euro-American societies based on human biology.

(Hahn und Kleinman 1983)

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# Culture of Biomedicine

- Self-realization of a potential biomedical bias is critical in negotiating cross-cultural interaction. (Carillo et al. 1999)
- For example, women's interpretation of side effects associated with contraceptive methods.

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## Conclusion

- Mentioned `communication styles´ and awareness of the `culture of bio-medicine´ will be of help for health care providers in cross-cultural encounters.
- This could be helpful to bridge the gap between the public health system and women´s needs.