



CALL FOR DOCTORAL CANDIDATES IN SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH COMMUNICATION

DATE

4 February 2019

PROJECT TITLE

Let's talk about sex. Improving parent-adolescent communication on sexuality in conservative settings. Comparative case-studies in Uganda and Ecuador

INSTITUTION

International Centre for Reproductive Health- WHO Collaborating Centre on Sexual and Reproductive Health Research

DEPARTMENT

Department of Public Health and Primary Care

UNIVERSITY

Ghent University, Belgium (main), Mbarara University for Science and Technology, Uganda (partner) and Cuenca University, Ecuador (partner)

PERIOD OF ENGAGEMENT

Part-time in February 2019 to develop the PhD funding proposal (non-remunerated). If the proposal is successful, this would be a 4-year, full-time, funded PhD position.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Young adolescence (ages 10-14) is a critical developmental period, yet sorely neglected in research and policy. Young adolescents are at the beginning of major physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that will set the course for a lifetime of health behaviors, and yet they have been largely an invisible group in global health research (Fatusi & Hindin 2010). Several United Nations (UN) groups, including UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNFPA, and the Population Council have joined forces to call the academic community to action to develop a body of research on the reproductive health needs of young adolescents, highlighting the neglect of research on this age group and the dire need to expand our understanding of how to prevent health risks like HIV and teen pregnancy that often occur in middle adolescence, ages 15-17. This prevention effort needs to start in early adolescence while young people are amenable to learning new behaviors and before risky behaviors are initiated and established (Chongo et al 2006). Uganda and Ecuador have young and rapidly growing populations, presenting both an opportunity and challenge in engaging young people to foster economic and societal development for the country.

In both countries, many of the leading adolescent health problems are related to sexual and reproductive health (SRH), such as HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), early pregnancy, pregnancy-related conditions (obstetric fistula, maternal death), and sexual exploitation and abuse.

It remains an undisputed fact that receiving accurate information about SRH is key for improving health outcomes among adolescents. In traditional societies, the family played a cardinal role in communicating sexuality issues to adolescents. For example in Uganda, this was done mostly through paternal aunts and uncles, called Senga or Kojja in central Buganda and western Uganda Shwenkazi. Girls and sometimes boys between the ages of 10 to 14 years were sent to their respective aunt or uncle for coaching on gender roles and marriage preparation. However, in modern times, the family structure is changing from extended to nuclear family, girls' education and delaying marriage are being embraced, a change that requires parents to take up this role. Unfortunately, parents feel uncomfortable and shy discussing sex and reproductive health with their children because of ingrained cultural restrictions and taboos, they often feel that they have inadequate knowledge about such sensitive issues and limited skills to address them (Bastien, Kajula, & Muhwezi 2011; Wooden & Anderson, 2012, Kamangu and Nyakoki 2017).

Through a community based participatory research design, we will investigate the role of parents in providing children with accurate and comprehensive SRH information and identify positive communication practices within a family setting. This project will provide a basis for establishing culturally sensitive guidelines for SRH communication between parents and young adolescents in conservative settings.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

This PhD project will be based in Belgium and be conducted as part of a VLIR-UOS funded research project with Mbarara University for Science and Technology (Uganda) and a long-standing collaboration with Cuenca University (Ecuador).

The central objective of this PhD project is to compare the development, implementation and effectiveness of a parent-adolescent communication intervention in two distinct conservative settings in order to develop generalized recommendations to improve intra-familial communication on sexuality. This project will be supervised by Prof. Kristien Michiels.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

You have attained all of the following:

- A Masters degree in health sciences, sociology, medicine or other relevant field (master after bachelor, NOT master after master)
 - that was awarded from a university in the European Economic Area or Switzerland, and
 - that was awarded not earlier than 1 March 2016, and
 - that was awarded with distinction or great distinction (cum laude).
- Acquired no more than 18 months of scientific work experience by 1 March 2019 (excluding internships and thesis that were part of your graduate education)
- Have at least one peer-reviewed A1 journal publication in the field you wish to continue researching
- Never applied or not applied more than once to the FWO PhD Fellowship programme
- Not previously received an FWO PhD Fellowship (not even in part)
- Good oral and written communication in English. Fluency in Spanish and/or Portuguese is not required but is an added value.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Please contact Prof. Kristien Michielsen (Kristien.Michielsen@ugent.be) for more information about this project.

To apply to this Call for Expressions of Interest, please send your motivation letter and cv to Kristien.Michielsen@ugent.be, as soon as possible and at the latest by **15 February 2019**. Please clearly indicate in your letter of motivation how you meet each of the eligibility criteria. Ineligible applicants will not be considered.

Short-listed applicant(s) will be invited to meet the research team (in person or remotely). After being selected, applicants should be prepared to contribute to writing a proposal for an FWO PhD Fellowship and submit it by the 1 March, 2019 deadline. The results of the competition will be announced in October 2019.

If awarded, an FWO PhD Fellowship grants recipients a maximum 4 year scholarship to undertake the proposed PhD research at the International Centre for Reproductive Health in Ghent, Belgium. The start date is 1 November 2019. More information: <https://www.fwo.be/en/fellowships-funding/phd-fellowships/phd-fellowship-fundamental-research/>