

Transcript: Video Case study on Child Fosterage

From Research Ethics Online Training course

Child fosterage is a long-established practice in parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Traditionally, it involves a reciprocal relationship, between a girl child from an impoverished family who receives foster care from richer relatives. The child provides domestic help in return for care, assistance, and familial affection.

There is concern that this traditional system is being undermined by child traffickers placing girl children in homes under the pretence of traditional fosterage. These girls become domestic labourers, who are vulnerable to exploitation and sexual abuse from their 'foster parents'. This can result in their health being seriously compromised. The extent of the problem is not known, but we are concerned about pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. We do not know if there are specific factors that make some girls more vulnerable than others.

This research will use a questionnaire to gather information on reproductive health problems and challenges among 13 to 17 year-old girls in child fosterage.

Participants will be recruited by trained interviewers who will approach homes to ask if they have a house helper under the age of 17, or a foster child who helps with chores. If the response is positive, the interviewer will explain that they are doing a study on *the general health needs* of fostered children. They will ask permission to allow the house helper to participate, and will request privacy to conduct the interview.

If the answer is yes, they will ask the child for signed informed consent to participate in the questionnaire survey. The interviewer will inform the child that they will be asked a number of questions, some of which are related to her reproductive and sexual experiences. This will all be done in privacy prior to the interview, freeing the child to consent or not.

Likewise, the interview will occur in a private place in the house. This will be done to ensure that the 'employer' does not guess the true objective of the study, and to minimize risk to the children, including the risk of harassment or abuse.

Each interviewer will have a separate "safe" questionnaire to revert to should the child's 'employer' enter the room unexpectedly. The child will have been prepared for this possibility.

The interviewers will give the children their phone number and the phone number of the study psychologist. This will be done in case the child wishes to seek help, or has some questions. Both the employers and the house helpers will be given a small amount of money to compensate for time lost due to the interview.

I am looking forward to your very positive response to this straightforward study.