Reproductive and maternal health in anthropology

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Reproductive and Maternal Health in Anthropology

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Introduction
In Anthropology, the subject of maternal health is diffused within the broader areas of the anthropology of reproduction, fertility and reproductive health. As a topic it is constituted by work at the intersections of anthropology, public health, feminist studies (covering topics on reproductive choice and autonomy, for instance) and development studies (with its focus on the issues of maternal and infant mortality). The citations presented here are grouped into six topic categories as linked to maternal health, each with further sub-topics, on childbirth and maternal/reproductive health, fertility and infertility in maternal health, reproductive technologies and maternal health, family planning and maternal health, abortion, and maternal health policy and human rights. The topics have been selected based on historical work in these areas and in terms of new directions presented by more recent work. Wherever possible indigenous anthropological expertise stemming from local authors in the topic areas has been included.

Childbirth, Mortality and Health
The topic of birth is centrally linked to the anthropological concept of social reproduction in that it focuses on how relationships are created through and around birth and maternal care and how these are made socially and culturally meaningful. Ethnographies on birth pay attention to the experiences of women but also focus on birth attendants. Based in diverse contexts they not only focus on the actual time of birth but are set in a wider birth-related trajectory of pregnancy, prenatal, antenatal, delivery and postnatal periods as well as the reproductive life-course (ie., from the stage of sexual and reproductive maturation onwards, often defined from menarche to menopause in women). Studies range from a focus on the quotidain experiences of pregnancy to the embodied suffering of those undergoing challenging pregnancies with implications for their physical and mental wellbeing. A fundamental concept developed in the 1990s by anthropologists is the notion of ‘stratified reproduction’ as described by Shellee Colen and developed in Ginsburg and Rapp, 1995, which demonstrates how childbearing is linked with the production and experience of wider forms of inequality within social groups. More recent work examines the inequalities associated with birth and health through the lens of modernity in the work of Van Hollen 2003 as well as Ram and Jolly 1998, and in terms of global capitalism and the state in contributions to the volume by Sargent and Browner 2011. Other recent work on maternal health inequalities has been in the context of poverty and migration which appears in the various works of Goldade 2011, Galvez 2011, Unnithan and Khanna 2015. Challenging the underlying assumptions in public health discourse on risk and safety (Chapman 2010, Fordyce and Aminata 2012, Wagonner 2017) ethnographic work has also examined the moral and ideological context of pregnancy, birth and reproductive health (Russell 2001). Standards for ‘safety’ during childbirth focus upon the knowledge, skills and expertise of birth attendants who are often a target for blame (Pinto 2008, Cosminsky 2012) yet also critical to maternal health interventions (Turinawe et. al. 2016).
General Overview

A key conceptual theme underpinning most anthropological work on childbirth and midwifery is the connection between birth and power as set out in the classic volume edited by Davis-Floyd and Sargent 1997. Jordan’s seminal chapter in the volume (under the chapter subheading further down in this section) outlines the concept of ‘authoritative knowledge’ or the unquestioned ways in which medical knowledge confers authority on the people who hold it. This idea is applied to childbirth practitioners in different cultural contexts by the various contributors and is particularly helpful in culturally situating the practices of birth attendants and challenging the underlying assumptions of standard midwifery practice in public health discourse. Obermeyer 2001 is an edited collection which contains some of the most exciting analytic contributions on how culture acts as a frame for theorising about reproductive health. A broader perspective incorporating epidemiological and biomedical approaches with anthropological material is set out by Schwartz 2018.


Foundational text linking anthropological work on birth to issues of knowledge and power.


Substantive analytic perspectives on how culture acts as a frame for theorising about reproductive health.


Brings together range of 40 experts working on indigenous women’s access to reproductive healthcare across Mexico and Central America. Includes a lexicon on selected terms and definitions used by researchers working on maternal mortality and morbidity in the region.

Monograph

Monographs range from a focus on the quotidian experiences of ‘normal’ pregnancy as in the work on American women by Han 2015, to the embodied suffering of those undergoing challenging pregnancies with implications for their physical and mental wellbeing as set out in the works of Knight 2015 on drug addiction in the US and coping with postnatal depression in Australia by Westhall and Liamputtong 2014. Anthropological research on pregnancies among poorer groups in places like India and Mexico has focused on experiences of social transformation in health provider care such as in the early work by Jeffery, Jeffery and Lyon 1989 and Pinto’s more recent work in 2008 on indigenous midwives in rural settings in India, and among migrant groups in Mexico by Galvez...
2011. Van Hollen 2003 discusses how women in southern India experience modernity through the lens of childbirth and childcare. Chapman 2010 describes the harrowing medical risks of fistula faced by pregnant women in Mozambique as does Hannig 2017, 2017 for Ethiopia, making visible the issue of obstetric violence. Waggoner’s monograph 2017 extends the classification of pregnancy care to the prenatal period in the US which she terms the ‘zero trimester’ and Davis 2019 considers the subtle forms of racism that accompany premature births of professional women of color. Bridges 2011 critical work examines how structural racism operates in medical contexts as revealed in the pregnancy and birth experiences of women of color in the US.


Critical ethnographic examination of how the medicalization of social problems reproduces racial stereotypes of poor women of color attending a public hospital in New York city


Pays close attention to experiences of obstetric violence and injuries in childbirth in the context of poverty and kinship relations to challenge public health discourse on safety and risk in Southeast Africa


Focuses on racial differences in birth outcomes (premature birth) and subtle forms of racism experienced by upper middle class, professional Black women in the US


Ethnographic focus on the approaches to pregnancy and childbirth practices of Mexican immigrant women in the US which highlights how poorer women may have good birth outcomes


Details of embodied experiences of everyday, ‘normal’ pregnancy among American women to counter the anthropological tendency to focus on problem pregnancies

Unique field research undertaken in two fistula repair and rehabilitation clinics in Ethiopia suggests that standard biomedical practices and narratives do not offer solutions to injuries sustained during childbirth.


Early study of childbearing in India which portrays social, economic and cultural influences on women’s birth experiences, including their relationship with indigenous midwives and the state.


Insightful and ethnographically rich study of the intersections that vulnerable women face between their poverty, drug addiction and childbearing.


Available *online [https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qd8vm]* by subscription.

Critical, conceptual examination of development policies on birth in terms of everyday experiences of social reproduction in a northern state in India.


Available *online [https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pp0wp]* by subscription.

Examines pregnancy, birth and post-partum care in the context of ideologies of modernization and policies of economic development and growth.


Study of the growth of pre-natal care as a stage of risk in the context of adverse birth outcomes in the US.


Develops stories of Australian women suffering from postnatal depression and the support they receive to inform programmes of care.

**Anthologies**
Some of the most exciting theoretical work has emerged within the chapters of anthologies. Two collections stand out in this regard: Ginsburg and Rapp 1995, and Browner and Sargent 2011. Contributors to both volumes set out the field of reproduction as operating within a wider context of power and inequalities blurring the boundaries between state, global and local forms of reproductive regulation and governance. Contributors to Unnithan and Khanna 2015 examine migrant maternal health in terms of migrant’s own experiences but also as influenced by the history, policy and politics of wider state systems. Rich contextual insights on the historical and regional practices of birth and midwifery, including indigenous birth attendants are detailed in the works of Jolly and Ram 1998, and Rozario and Samuels 2002. Critical perspectives on midwifery practices appear in relation to notions of risk and safety in the collected work of Fordyce and Maraes 2012, and with regard to notions of time in McCourt 2009.

Available *online [https://muse.jhu.edu/book/69448/] by subscription.

Most recent edited collection of key figures whose work connects issues in the anthropology of reproduction to the population politics of nation-states and global institutions.

Contributions analyze the discourse of maternal risk as a biomedical category and how actors in diverse health settings, including in the context of midwifery, engage with it/are affected by it.

Classic, first collection to set out reproduction as a political, critical, theoretical domain of investigation for anthropologists.

Early collection of ethnographic insights from 8 countries on the emotions accompanying birth and how birth is a ritual of passage.

Contributions demonstrate how different experiences of time affect women’s birth experiences as well as the midwives who attend them.


Early volume showcasing the significance of motherhood in the context of the history and impact of colonial regimes across Asia and the Pacific


Showcases regional diversity in religious and cultural approaches to birth and healing through ethnographic examples of prenatal, postnatal and midwifery care


Discusses how important concepts such as reproductive agency, emotion and maternal strategies are mobilized in everyday contexts of social reproduction and access to healthcare


Contributions set out how ideas of reproduction travel and how these influence maternal and reproductive decision-making among migrant families in diverse contexts

**Articles/ Chapters**

The references in this section point to the tremendous diversity of anthropological writing in the subfield of childbirth. It ranges from the pioneering chapter by Jordan 1998 on medical pluralism and authoritative knowledge in the context of childbirth to notions of ‘safety’ during childbirth which impact on the value attributed to the knowledge, skills and expertise of birth attendants, who are often a target for blame as suggested in Cosminsky 2012. Other important work such as Goldade 2011 documents the implications of fragile citizenship claims on migrant maternal health, and Valdez and Deomampo 2019 highlight the significance of race in reproduction while Russell 2001 sets out the moral implications of age for teenage experiences of contraception and maternal health.

Anthropological works which connect with public health perspectives are numerous and critical to maternal health interventions as set out in the examples by Andrew et.al, 2015 in the context of malaria in pregnancy, Jaffre 2012 on obstetric emergencies, Storeng et al. 2010 on near-miss pregnancies and Turinawe et al. 2016 on male involvement in maternity preparedness. For work on measuring maternal mortality see final section on Maternal Health Policies below.

Focusing on the health implications of malaria in pregnancy and complications such as maternal anaemia, low birth weight and miscarriage


Excellent chapter on how the work of indigenous midwives is seen as unsafe and how as a category they come to embody risk


Set in the context of provider-user relationships of maternal healthcare and the economic benefits of migration, discusses the complexities around how migrant women’s reproduction is framed and the consequences of such framing for their access to care services


Applying anthropological perspectives to public health this study identifies qualitative variables underlying maternal mortality in Sub-Saharan Africa


Seminal, influential chapter applying idea of knowledge as power to the domain of childbirth and maternal health practitioners

Using mixed methods including ethnographic methods shows how despite the importance of antenatal screening tests in reducing maternal and infant mortality, there is low uptake with midwives often acting as gatekeepers.


Brings together stigma, age and pregnancy to highlight effects of moral discourse on young parents in the UK.


Examines maternal reproductive complications from an emic perspective.


Useful perspective including men’s role within the very woman-focused domain of birth attendance.


Excellent, timely introduction to special issue in which contributors apply the frameworks of reproductive justice and stratified reproduction to make visible the racial politics of reproduction.

Fertility/Infertility and Maternal health

Fertility has traditionally been a topic of interest for demographers as a means of characterising population growth in both high and low population contexts. Comparatively recently, and especially since the 1990s anthropologists have contributed to the field through their work on situating fertility in the context of specific cultural norms and social practices of fertility behaviour. There has been a growth in the field of ethno-demography as Greenhalgh 1995 discusses, with anthropologists and demographers working across their disciplines to address in/fertility as a population issue as well as
a condition imbued with meaning central to the social reproduction of families and communities. An important strand in anthropological work has been in relation to the suffering and stigma related to infertility and the agency of individuals, couples and families in seeking the means for overcoming infertility as in Inhorn 1994 and Reissman 2000, for example. Equally important work on gendered experiences of infertility and associated suffering has been undertaken, including how stigma and de-masculinisation is associated with infertility among men.

**General Overview**

An excellent overview which includes theoretical insight and ethnographic perspectives is the edited volume by Inhorn and Van Balen 2002. The emphasis here is on the simultaneous study of infertility and fertility in the context of cross-cultural understandings and practises. The concept of the ‘fertility-infertility dialectic’ is central to the volume suggesting that infertility is negatively valued only because fertility itself is so highly valued.


Important collection bringing together anthropological perspectives on infertility which underscores the interrelationship between the stigma of infertility and the value placed on fertility in different cultural contexts.

**Monograph**

Some of the most exciting ethnographic and analytic anthropological work on fertility/infertility has appeared in the form of detailed monographs on the subject where infertility is discussed in the context of ideas and practices of personhood, parenthood, the maternal body and reproductive agency especially in terms of people’s engagement with technologies of assisted reproduction. Anthropologists studying infertility in Euro-American contexts such as Greil 1991 explore how ideas of kinship as based on biologically ‘natural’ ties influence the kinds of quests that infertile couples embark on and the interventions they choose. Pioneering work on the plural health-seeking strategies of infertile women and ethno-gynaecological perspectives on infertility are documented in the stories and narratives of Egyptian women in Inhorn 1994. This is further developed to present a gendered study on male voices on infertility and masculinity in Inhorn 2012.

While the desire for modernity, education and employment has been used to explain the disruptions in individual reproductive behaviour by Johnson-Hanks 2006, reproductive desires and decision-making as shaped by a broader politics of state, religious and familial ideologies emerges powerfully in the detailed accounts in Kannaneh 2002 of Palestinian families living in Israel. A few anthropologists have developed their insights on infertility further in the context of public health as in Feldman-Savelsburg 2002. Early work by Patel 1994 gives an insight into the cultural aspects of
fertility behaviour in Norther India. Ram 2013 is a unique work on infertility as a critique of modernist discourse on health in India.


Excellent early ethnography linking fears of reproductive disorder and infertility with poverty and societal transformation in Sub Saharan Africa. Provides a historical and political economy approach to studying fertility as a social not just biological condition


Good early ethnography on American women’s perceptions and approaches to infertility and assisted reproduction, including excellent discussion on notions of the body and personhood


A tour de force of narrative depth and insight into everyday responses to infertility, including the influence of ethno-gynaecology


Fills the gap in scholarship on male infertility and related stigma, including health-seeking strategies as framed within changing notions of kinship in Islam


Excellent ethno-demographic study of pregnancy-related dilemmas and decision-making among young girls in a changing socio-economic context. Speaks to both anthropological and demographic work in the area


Important study of how women’s childbearing is caught between family, ethnic and state natalist agendas. Develops the anthropological concept of stratified reproduction in relation to the healthcare experiences of immigrant Palestinian families in Israel

Early socio-demographic study which highlights the cultural aspects of fertility behaviour

   Critical, phenomenological study on the embodied experiences of infertile women and related ritual practices. Set in a historical context, the study challenges state and modernist discourse on health in India

   A study which considers the perceptions of infertile women who are not seeking to conceive, challenging the view of infertile women as desperate to become mothers

**Anthologies**
A key anthology, contributions to Greenhalgh 1995 provide an excellent historical overview of fertility as an anthropological and ethno-demographic area of inquiry.

Available *online* [https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/9780511621611/type/book]* by subscription.
   Key, authoritative volume with an excellent overview of the development of ethno-demography as a critical area of study. Brings together contributions, including on reproductive agency, which link fertility behavior to macro and micro, cultural, historic and socio-economic transformations

**Articles/ Chapters**
Important perspectives on stigma, poverty and agency are discussed in terms of infertile women’s everyday experiences of survival in Reissman 2000 and further developed in the context of plural forms of health-seeking in Unnithan 2010 in India. Gerrits and Horbsts work in Ghana and Uganda (2016) explores the entrepreneurial, transnational strategies of clinical directors and gynaecologists working in the context of a scarcity of resources and regulations, to source expertise and reproductive material for their clients.

Describes infertility services in Ghana and Uganda as a transnational undertaking by clinicians which affects local engagement, introducing new ideas of social and biological parenthood and cultural practices into Ghanaian society.


Explores the moral disruption, agency and resistance of women from different classes to dominant narratives about infertility.

Unnithan, Maya. 2010. ‘Learning from Infertility: Gender, Health Inequities and Faith Healers in Women’s Experiences of Disrupted Reproduction in Rajasthan’. In *South Asian History and Culture*, Special Issue on Health, Culture and Religion: Critical Perspectives, eds. Assa Doron and Broom Alex, 315-328. Routledge, 1:2, 315-327, DOI: 10.1080/19472491003593068

Examines infertility as a public health issue with significant implications for the health of poor women. Includes a focus on individual agency, the social meaning of infertility and the therapeutic intervention of faith healers.

Reproductive Technologies, Kinship and Maternal Wellbeing

Connected with the focus on infertility, anthropologists have sought to critically examine the recourse to technological interventions such as IVF, gamete donation and ICSI by infertile couples. Building upon anthropological scholarship on kinship these studies examine how the use of procreative technologies has led to changes in ideas of what it means to be related, and broader notions of maternal identity, personhood and wellbeing as in Edwards et.al 2005. Other work has examined assisted reproductive technologies from the perspective of religious ideologies of appropriate parenting discussed in Kahn 2000 and further in Inhorn 2003. The growth of the surrogacy industry as a result of the successes of in-vitro fertilisation has been of particular research interest in understanding ideas of motherhood demonstrated by Ragone 1994 and further developed in Teman 2010. The possibilities of parenthood that surrogacy affords to lesbian and gay couples is the focus of Dempsey 2015. Anthropological work on surrogacy and motherhood has explored issues of race, social and reproductive inequality, citizenship and identity as in Ragone and Twine 2000 and later in Twine 2015. These studies have been anchored in the broader theoretically exciting debates around commodification and gifting in anthropology as well as considerations of reproduction as labour discussed in Pande 2014.

General Overview
Contributions to the early volume by Lock and Kaufert 1998 raise important issues of agency, choice and pragmatism in women’s engagement with reproductive technologies across the globe. Edwards 2005 is one of the first collections to focus on how ideas of Euro American kinship both shape and are shaped by the possibilities presented by technologies such as IVF. Inhorn 2003 is a significant addition to this literature in that it throws light on the role of religion in IVF decision making in an Islamic context.


An excellent monograph that considers class, religion and reproductive medicine to understand the social and cultural implications of Egyptian families and providers’ engagement with in-vitro fertilization technologies


Anthropological perspectives linking perceptions on reproductive technologies in understanding and changing the meaning of kinship relations among British and European families


Early anthropological compilation on reproductive choice in the context of the intervention of medical technologies

**Monograph**

Detailed ethnographically informed work on the social impact of reproductive technologies to do with maternal identity emerged early on in the US as detailed in Becker 2000 discussing the notion of disrupted personhood while Ragone 2000 considers the emotional work involved for American women in undertaking surrogacy. With regard to kinship, Edwards 2000 develops anthropological understandings of reproductive technologies in the context of English kinship whereas Kahn 2000 considers ideas of kinship and religion in Israel. Tober 2018 explores the intersection between sperm donation and the biopolitical creation of ‘alternative’ (outside the bounds of heterosexual) families. The work on surrogacy has raised critical theoretical issues such as around embodiment in Teman 2010 and with regard to exploitation, race and inequality as in Pande 2014, Twine 2015 and Deomampo 2016.


Focus on the disruptions in personhood for American women which result from their infertility

Explores unequal relationships between different reproductive actors in transnational surrogacy to complicate the notion of stratified reproduction, emphasising instead a ‘shared reproductive imaginary’ at play which underpins social status distinctions.


One of the first studies on the connections between kinship ideas and practices and reproductive technologies in England.


Explores the ways in which decisions to use IVF and surrogacy are made by orthodox Jewish women and how these are both shaped and shape religious ideas and legislation.


An important study on surrogacy which draws on the premise of reproduction as labour, and on the anthropological debate about the boundary between gifts and commodities as applied to the reproductive body.


The first anthropological study on surrogacy in the US which explores the types and meaning of surrogacy from the perspective of intended parents and surrogates.


Theoretical and nuanced ethnography on surrogacy as an embodied experience for the intended mother, exploring the relationship between surrogate and intended mother.

Unique, feminist study on how single women and lesbian couples in the US engage with sperm donors to create families of their choice in politically and legally hostile contexts.


Examines the relationship between social stratification (race, class) and surrogacy in the context of market relations

**Anthologies**

The collection by Ragone and Twine 2000 provides important insight into the intersectional nature of motherhood in the age of technological assistance ranging from contributions on race, class, nationality and sexuality in the US. Contributions to Hampshire and Simpson 2015 more recent volume discuss journeys of assisted reproductive technologies in southern and diasporic contexts as well as the perspectives of health professionals.


Useful compilation of mainly British and European scholarship on the increasing expansion of assisted reproductive technologies in the public health sector in the West in contrast to limited public health attention in lower middle-income countries


Excellent, early compilation of a range of differing contexts of technology enabled motherhood in the US

**Chapters/Articles**

Important contributions for understanding surrogate motherhood in terms of altruism appear in Ragone 1999 and are further developed in Pande 2011. Dempsey 2015 provides a crucial perspective on the making of fatherhood through surrogacy.

Important addition to surrogacy scholarship which focuses on the way gay men who resort to surrogacy, think about family and parenthood


Based on ethnographic work in India, this critical article gives a different, empowered perspective of the altruism underlying surrogate motherhood


This early chapter discusses how American surrogates construct their role as altruistic

**Family Planning, Contraception and Maternal Health**

The control of fertility and birth are central features of population planning globally. But it is especially in countries with high population numbers that contraceptive technologies form an important component of State programmes of family planning. Anthropologists have sought to provide nuanced social understandings to explain the diverse rationalities that underlie contraceptive behaviour as in Bledsoe and Banja 2002, local-global engagement with family planning ideologies as described in Brunson 2016; and how this is changing over time as documented by Fong 2004 and Chen 2011. While the spacing of children is generally regarded in public health and development studies as enhancing the health of mothers, most anthropological work in this domain has concentrated on women’s experiences of coercive state regulation of fertility and conception. The issue of family planning is perhaps more than any other area, one that pits the individual directly against the state. Such a conflictual relationship is most often found in contexts where state agendas stringently promote or control conception and birth through either excessively pro-natalist or anti-natalist programmes as outlined in ethnographically based work by Greenhalgh 2005 and Ram 2001 in China and India respectively. Drawing on Foucault’s notion of bio-politics, anthropological studies ask why it is that fertility regulation (and the related emphasis on contraception) has been coercive and what are the wider implications for women’s health. Family planning as linked to theoretical concepts such as reproductive governance as in Morgan and Roberts 2012, and stratified reproduction, where state family planning policies contribute to population inequalities described in Kanaaneh 2002 have been particularly insightful areas of investigation. Anthropologists have also examined the gender-based assumptions that underlie the discourse around fertility and population in different contexts. The relationship between often gender-skewed population programmes (where it is female contraception that is prioritised), and reproductive and maternal health programmes has been a related focus.
**General Overview**

The best overview of the topic is provided by anthropological work that focuses on the issue of population governance. Greenhalgh 2005 provides a good example of the discursive analysis of the family planning rationale in China. Morgan and Roberts 2012 provide an excellent theoretical framework in their discussion of the concept of reproductive governance in Latin America.


Examines the connections between Chinese family planning policies and the global discourse on science and progress


Drawing on the work of Foucault the authors develop the notion of reproductive governance in terms of the institutional control of reproductive bodies and discourse in Latin American contexts

**Monograph**

Critical theoretical perspectives emerging within monograph length studies include the work of Bledsoe and Banja 2002 who discuss contraceptive behaviour in the Gambia in the context of reproductive loss and anxieties of reproductive ageing. Several studies examine the uptake of family planning programmes as reflecting the politics of social stratification as in Kannanen 2002 and Brunson 2016. Fong 2004 examines the long tail of population policies on social relations within the family while Paxson examines the intersection between gender ideologies and expectations in shaping contraceptive behaviour. The relevance of family planning as signalling personhood and community identity and reproductive freedom is discussed in Lopez 2008 and Asdar 2002.


Physician turned anthropologists’ perspective on contraceptive use among women, men and demographic change in Egypt


Available *online* [https://chicago.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.7208/chicago/9780226058504.001.0001/upsso-9780226058511]* by subscription.
Pioneering monograph drawing on local conceptions of 'birth as reproductive aging' to challenge standard biomedical assumptions of contraceptive behaviour


Critical exploration of intersection between local social differentiation in Nepal and global family planning discourse


Nuanced, historical and ethnographic study of growing up in the context of China’s rigorous population policies


Excellent study of reproductive decision-making by immigrant families in a highly politicized context of ethnic difference and healthcare inequalities


Insightful work on immigrant reproductive choices in the US health system


Study about the underlying rationale in women and men’s choices of contraception and abortion, challenging state directives

**Anthologies**
The anthology by Jolly and Ram 2001 throws light on fertility regulation as an intersectional issue, situated at the conjunction of a national politics of citizenship, individual sexuality and desire for fertility control.


Theoretical contributions which focus on the links between sexual/reproductive practices, gender identity and state development discourse

**Chapters/Articles**
There is a large collection of anthropological articles on the coercive aspects of family planning which speak to issues of citizenship and governance. De Zordo 2012 discusses how family planning is an ideal mode of reproductive governance in Brazil while Ram 2001 demonstrates the rationale underlying the targeting of women’s bodies in India’s family planning programme. Castro 2004 demonstrates the conjunction between state demographic objectives and actual practices of contraception during delivery in Mexico. The Chinese population policies are investigated through the perceptions of differently positioned social actors in Anagost 1995 and in more recent years through the turn to neoliberal marketing strategies in Chen 2011. While Nichter and Nichter 1996 provide early insights into the relation between indigenous ideas of fertility and peoples engagement with family planning programmes, Varley 2012 provides excellent insight into the navigation of Islamic restrictions on contraception in Pakistan.


Accessible approach exploring local understandings of the Chinese population policy and the effect on reproductive practices


Focuses on practices of health providers in implementing family planning at the time of birth for poorer women in Mexico


Available online *[https://muse.jhu.edu/book/69448/]*. Examines the relatively recent commodification and uptake of contraceptives in rural China, documenting a positive change in local perceptions of family planning


Excellent, nuanced ethnographic study on biopolitics in Brazil and how national politics and regime change has affected family planning discourse and practice among users and health
professionals. Focuses on how family planning practice becomes a measure of good/bad citizens and how these framings may be resisted


Early, insightful ethnographic study on the conjunctions and disjunctions between Sri Lankan ideas of fertility and reproduction and state family planning programme


Excellent piece on gender implicit biases and divergent development strategies which frame family planning policies in India


Discusses how family planning organisations in Pakistan use moderate interpretations of Islam to justify contraceptive use as ‘rational’ in the face of challenges by the conservative clergy, and women’s own navigation of these barriers

Abortion, Selective Reproduction and Maternal Safety

Abortion practices have existed before the advent of medical technologies of termination as described in anthropological accounts ranging from indigenous practices of herbal medication and physically invasive techniques and foeticide as discussed in Jamaica by Sobo 1996 to infanticide at birth in the work of Picone 1998 in Japan. However, more recently, abortion practices have mainly been a topic of anthropological interest in the context of clinical abortion and in terms of women’s autonomy to abort across different classes, ethnic and religious groups and state policy settings as set out in Whittaker 2010. Recent studies critically bring together abortion politics with the issue of reproductive governance and in Europe have focussed on understanding abortion as a contested practice and how women’s inadequate access to care services shapes the strategies and discourse of groups seeking to liberalise or restrict reproductive rights as in De Zordo, Mishtal and Anton 2017. A few anthropologists have studied the phenomenon of selective abortion whether in the case of terminating a disabled fetus in the US in Rapp 1999 or in the case of sex selective abortion in Japan, India and Vietnam in Masae 2009, Unnithan 2010, and Gammeltoft 2014 respectively. Here the focus has been on how women navigate the dilemmas of choice which they face, often leading them to act as ‘moral pioneers’ a phrase coined by Rapp 1999.
General Overview

Two comprehensive overviews on the two strands of selective abortion and abortion in anthropological research are provided by Miller 2001 and Whittaker 2010 respectively.


Good overview of the demographic patterns, population policies and socio-cultural factors that underlie the rise of prenatal sex selection in Asian countries.


Excellent overview showcasing the nuanced role religion (Buddhism, Islam, Christianity) and class play in promoting or discouraging access to abortion in a range of Asian contexts.

Monograph

Among the earliest, full length monographs on abortion notable for their conceptual analyses appeared in the context of issues to do with national politics as in Kligman 1998 and work on abortion in the context of the diagnosis of Downs syndrome in Rapp 1998. Further work on selective abortion is by Gammeltoft 2014 which is a keenly observed critical study of the response to ultrasound technology and related reproductive agency. A more sociological approach is taken by Purewal 2010 in her account of sex selection in India. A broader culturally nuanced abortion politics in the context of debates about right and eugenics in Japan is described in Masae 2009.


Nuanced ethnography which details women’s engagement with technologies such as the ultrasound in their decisions and dilemmas surrounding sex selective abortion.


Insightful monograph on the politics of different organisations influencing the regulation and uptake of abortion in Japan. Includes discussion on different meanings of abortion and links to the discourse on rights.

Powerful ethnography which traces the policies of Ceausescu’s political regime to elucidate the drastic measures put in place to prevent abortion, including its implications for women’s autonomy and health.


Draws on ethnographic work in Punjab, India to address some of the large questions on gender and power that arise in the context of son preference.


Excellent pioneering ethnography and social theory on the moral dilemmas of abortion faced by women pregnant with down’s syndrome babies in the US.

**Anthologies**

Critical anthropological contributions which set out individual choice and decision-making in a broader context of abortion politics are set out in anthologies dealing with European states described in De-Zordo et.al 2017 and more internationally in Unnithan and De-Zordo 2018. Sociologically oriented contributions on sex selective abortion in India are detailed in Patel 2007.


Important edited collection tracing the politics and rationale of members of the pro-life and pro-abortion movements in Europe. Explores abortion governance in the context of protests and resistance.


Available *online* [http://sk.sagepub.com/books/sex-selective-abortion-in-india]* by subscription.

Excellent, authoritative edited volume bringing together a range of social science expertise on selective reproduction in India.

Introduction to special issue which critically situates current and past abortion debates in the context of a rising neo-liberalism across the global North and South

Articles/ Chapters
There is a growing range of anthropological research on the topic of abortion. The diverse contributions include work on physicians’ perception of abortion described in De-Zordo and Mishtal 2012 to the legal cultures of abortion and coercive state regimes which have criminalised abortion, making access to services difficult and compromising maternal health and safety in turn as set out in Blystad et.al 2019. These approaches have then been used to shape new forms of public health interventions as suggested in Sambaiga et.al. and Storeng and Ouattara 2014. New forms of legal restriction may in turn have an impact on access to abortion services as set out in Unnithan 2010. Here the unintended consequence of criminalising sex selective abortion is that it has resulted in restricting women’s access to abortion services overall in India. Singer 2016 examines abortion rights in Mexico as promoting governance agendas.


Important social insights on legal cultures of abortion across Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zanzibar


Highlights importance of understanding physician's approaches to abortion and the rationale of conscious objection


Charts different forms of meaning -making underling the rationale of infanticide in Japan

Examines the relationship between legal frameworks and abortion discourse on the ground to suggest a more nuanced, complex framing which cuts across the restrictive-liberal divide to widen access to abortion services in Tanzania


Explores Mexico’s recent public sector abortion programme as instilling values of personal responsibility and self-regulation which in turn produces neoliberal subjects and extends state agendas of reproductive governance


Excellent insights into indigenous traditions of abortion in the face of technological change


Good article focusing on links between local and global discourse on best practice in the context of abortion outcomes in Burkina Faso


Locates discourse on female selective abortion in the context of nuanced ethnography, including women’s relationship with private doctors as well the limitations of both civil society action and state governance

**Maternal Health Policies and Reproductive Health Rights**

Anthropological work on maternal health policy draws on three strands of more general anthropological scholarship which, firstly, examines health policy making in general, as in Castro and Singer eds. 2004. Secondly, it considers the meaning of human rights-based policies from a social and cultural perspective as in Wilson and Mitchell 2003 and Goodale and Merry 2007. Thirdly anthropological work on health policies develops Morgan and Roberts concept of reproductive governance 2012 as featured in the section on family planning above and incorporates feminist development perspectives on reproductive and sexual rights as in Petchesky and Judd 1998, Cornwall and Welbourn 2002 and Unnithan and Pigg 2014. As human rights-based frameworks have become entrenched within reproductive and maternal health programmes and policies they have been
scrutinised by anthropologists working in the area of health across the global North and South. These studies have critically analysed the production of rights-based indicators, measures and frameworks of evidence as applied to maternal health. Of specific note here is the work of Merry 2011. Other work in this domain has focused on how maternal health policy interventions have been shaped by religious thinking and patriarchal influences, reinforced social inequalities, exclusion and ‘risk’ or contributed to more mixed systems of care as in the case of abortion services as in Sambaiga et.al 2019. Set in a broader scholarship on the anthropology of human rights, development and gender rights this work speaks to the connections and disjunction between universal and local conceptions of reproductive health and rights as in Petchesky and Judd 1998, and Unnithan 2019. These studies examine how citizenship and the body are experienced in/through the new reproductive rights-based regimes of health. They ask to what extent rights-based people’s health movements can shift policies toward a people rather than population-centred approach, and investigate the collaborations and contribution of anthropologists working with activists and development practitioners to this emerging field.

**General Overview**

The fundamental anthropological understanding of health as a human right is provided by Farmer 2003. A key contribution to the anthropology of reproductive health is the edited volume by Obermeyer 2001. The analytic contribution by Petchesky 2001 in this collection is on the connections between reproductive health and rights. Discussed from a feminist perspective it provides an excellent general overview of the main issues in the field.


Broad anthropological understanding of health as a human right from the perspective of suffering as connected to structural violence


Excellent detailed chapter on the meaning, significance, conceptualisation and application of a cultural perspective on reproductive health and rights

**Monograph**

Of the few monographs in this field Berry 2010 and Allen 2002 provide a critical evaluation of international safe motherhood policies from the perspective of childbirth and loss experiences in Guatemala and ideas of maternal risk in Tanzania respectively. Merry 2009 considers the different mode of ethnographic and theoretical engagement in her study of the translation of universal human...
rights into local contexts by civil society groups and actors. Unnithan 2019 provides a detailed account of the meaning and application of reproductive rights on-the-ground among those who make, mobilise and are targeted by rights-based maternal health policies in India.


Early, detailed ethnographic insight on local perceptions of maternal risk and the impact of international policies on safe motherhood in Tanzania.


Evaluates global policies on safe motherhood and reproductive rights in the context of on-the-ground experiences of maternal mortality and indigenous midwifery in Guatemala.


Brings together perspectives in legal anthropology with gender issues in the context of civil society mobilisation on women’s rights against violence.


Builds on the concept of reproductive governance and agency through ethnographic insights and analysis on how reproductive rights and justice are perceived on-the-ground and practiced in the domain of birth, infertility, sex selection and surrogacy, among state policymakers and civil society actors in India.

**Anthologies**

The three strands of anthropological work which bear on maternal health policy-making draw on a vast body of work as represented in different edited collections. While Castro and Singer 2004 bring together critiques of international health policy-making from a social exclusion perspective, contributions to Merry and Goodale 2007, Wilson and Mitchell 2002 and Goodale 2009 expand on the anthropological perspective on human rights to challenge studies on human rights for their neglect of the social relational aspects and range of diverse perspectives involved in rights processes. Feminist anthropological work on reproductive and sexual rights is theorized in the works of Petchesky and Judd 1998, Cornwall and Wellbourn and Unnithan and Pigg 2014. Interdisciplinary
contributions to Hunt et al. 2015 provide a policy-near evaluation of the mobilization of evidence in
rights-based policy making on reproductive and maternal health in practice. Adams work on Metrics
(2016) is central to reevaluating the statistical basis of policies on maternal mortality.

Doi:10.1215/9780822372280-003

   Contributors challenge the ability of metrics, including maternal mortality ratios to solve
global health problems.

Examination*. Walnut Creek, Calif: AltaMira Press.
   Medical anthropology text which critically examines the making of, and engagement with, health
policies in the global North and South

Cornwall, Andrea, and Welbourn, Alice, eds. 2002. *Realizing Rights: Transforming Approaches to
   Insightful contributions from anthropologists and development practitioners working in the
domain of reproductive rights, challenging conventional and simplistic public health programmes
of sexual reproductive ‘empowerment’

   Excellent reader showcasing the range of anthropological contributions in the domain of human
rights

Hunt, Paul., Yamin, Alicia. E., Bustreo, Flavia. 2015. ‘Evidence of the Impact of Human Rights-Based
Available online* [https://www.hhrjournal.org/volume-17-issue-2/] * open access at
www.hhrjournal.org
   Develops the rationale behind the adoption of rights-based approaches within international
health and development organizations, primarily WHO. Includes an important discussion on what
kinds of evidence become important for human rights work in the area of maternal health

   Critical and powerful perspective from different southern contexts on the ways in which
reproductive rights are articulated arguing for rights to be considered as notions of moral claims
and entitlements

Introduction to special issue which examines the important but understudied link between reproductive rights and justice through different case studies


An important anthropological collection which situates the study of human rights in the wider everyday discussion of rights which takes place in the language of claim-making and with reference to diverse notions of entitlement.

**Articles/ Chapters**

Important anthropological perspectives have been developed in the past decade which focus on re-framing health indicators and measures more generally as in Erikson 2011, in the context of rights governance as in Merry 2011, and as applied to maternal health as in Unnithan 2015 and Brunson and Suh 2019. Morgan and Roberts pioneering concept of reproductive governance is further developed in El Mounia and Singer 2019 on the connection between human rights and reproductive governance. Public health applications of anthropological perspectives appear in Behague and Storeng 2008, Storeng and Behague 2017, Melberg et. al 2018 and Wendland 2019. While Lange 2016, Kvernflaten 2019 examine the impact of specific maternal health policies in Benin and Nicaragua respectively. Gruenbaum 2011, takes a broader discursive approach to understand the rights mobilisation around Female Genital Cutting in Sudan. Dudgeon and Inhorn 2004 discuss the perspective of men’s influences on women’s health and rights.


Ethnographic examination of the tensions between vertical (disease specific) and horizontal (interrelated health) approaches to health in public health and policy perspectives. Focuses on role of evidence in maternal health policymaking


Concerned with meaning and power involved in processes of measuring, accounting and quantification of maternal health.

Important summary of social science and anthropological work on men’s involvement with women’s health and their inclusion within reproductive rights research and reproductive health programmes


Introduction to special issue in which contributors examine reproductive governance ‘from below’


https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822393948-003

Uses ethnography to demonstrate how evidence can be gathered in ways that reduces social suffering


Important ethnographically based article which argues that the inclusion of marginal groups in maternal health programmes generates resistance to institutional birth

The burden on women’s access to maternal health care is examined through the free c-section policy introduced within public hospitals. This policy in itself, the authors conclude, is insufficient to improve women’s perception of the quality of care.


Interesting study which demonstrates that a focus on numbers and indicators and related health worker reporting promotes inaccuracies and top down accountability


Leading article which traces increasing reliance of governance processes on measurable indicators of human rights, social justice and reform


Clearly demonstrates the limitations of a mortality-indicator approach in fully comprehending and redressing the factors underlying maternal deaths


Important insights into the less discussed issue of post-abortion care


Drawing on research on maternal death in southeastern Africa, challenges the assumptions of statistical models of maternal mortality