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These conversations occurred in late 1999 and the first half of 2001. Sophie married in early 1999, and has a child in January 2000. Her natal village is Mbawa, one of the villages in the MDICP sample.

### **ON A BUS**

[This conversation occurred early in 1999, when Sophie was returning from visiting her sister in Lilongwe, and was written down a few days later. Several men on the bus contribute initially, one continues but when I asked Sophie which one (this was six months later), she didn't recall which one. The first man who spoke was well dressed, with trousers, shirt and shoes; the woman was "quite poor", wearing plastic shoes.]

In the bus from Lilongwe to Blantyre, a family caught a bus from Lilongwe, there were five children, two were crying and there was also a lot of noise in the bus.

1<sup>st</sup> man: Whose kids are these?

Woman: So why are you not taking care of them?

W: Don't you see that I have carried this one too?

2<sup>nd</sup> man: Why? Those who are crying are of the same size and so small that there can't be another child after them.

W: Those who are crying are twins, so this one was born after them.

2<sup>nd</sup> man: So you had twins? Why did you become pregnant before they grew? But you women, why do you behave like that? Don't you hear from the radio or at the hospital about family planning?

W: My husband doesn't like family planning.

3<sup>rd</sup> man: Her husband is here, let's ask him.

W: Ask him.

3<sup>rd</sup> man: Where is he?

W: At the back.

3<sup>rd</sup> man: Oh! He is far back, but please, I want to talk to him before he gets out of the bus, why doesn't he like family planning?

W: He says we must finish bearing then close, he says if we use the method of family planning I can stop giving birth before we have enough children.

M: But see, you are the one who suffers, see he is there at the back and yet you are alone suffering with the children.

W: No, he has taken another child who was born before the twins.

(People in the bus laughed). A woman told a boy who was with her to take care of the kids who were crying; the boy picked one up.

M: Look, she doesn't have pants, that's why we are saying that you have to take time to get ready before the child is born, giving birth rapidly is not good, look, your children are not well dressed.

W: So what can I do? I don't care if they aren't dressed well, it is their father's responsibility.

M: But you are the one who suffers, don't take it as your husband's responsibility only, it's yours too. You have to think twice.

### **AT THE BUS STATION**

[This conversation occurred late in 1999 and was written the next day. Asuweta is Sophie's cousin, Shawn is a schoolmate of Asuweta's who Sophie had not met. Both have secondary education]

Former classmates, a lady and a gentleman:

A: Shawn, how are you found here?  
S: Looking at the ?????? Who are you?  
A: Aah, is it true that you have forgotten me?  
S: Oh Asuweta, are you Asuweta? Oh, I was not recognizing you.  
A: Why?  
S: You are now fatter than the time we were at school.  
A: Is it?  
S: Sure.  
Then I went to greet Shawn since I was escorting my cousin –Asuweta is my cousin. Asuweta introduced me to Shawn, that he was her classmate.  
S: Asuweta, are you married?  
A: Yes I am/, and I have a kid of three years.  
S: Ok.  
A: What about you?  
S: I am also married and I am a Reverend.  
A: Oh congratulations.  
S: But why have you become so fat nowadays, Asuweta?  
A: My husband takes care of me.  
(We all laughed).  
S: No, I know that you are taking family planning injections, that’s why you are getting fat.  
A: How did you know?  
S: Ah, that time you were a girl, but now , eeh, it’s too much, don’t you know that these things aren’t good? And that they have side effects?  
A: Ah, for those people who don’t follow instructions they are not good, but for those who follow instructions well, these methods are good and helpful.  
S: Asuweta, do you remember Hilda?  
A: Which Hilda?  
S: Who was our classmate.  
A: Remember we had two Hilda’s, which one exactly?  
S: That one who was coming from Blantyre.  
A: Oh, Hilda Ndawala?  
S: Yes, that one.  
A: I have remembered her.  
S: Do you know that she is married now and last month she was in Liwonde Hospital?  
A: What was she suffering from?  
S: Stomachache, at first she was admitted at Zomba hospital because her parents are in Liwonde and she was not getting all right, so they took her to Liwonde hospital. There it was getting worse though she was receiving treatment. Now she is seriously sick at home and now people are just waiting for the day.  
A: What was she suffering from?  
S: She was taking family planning pills.  
Asuweta: Shawn, explain well, is that the disease?  
S: The pills caused sores in her stomach. Those pills take time to dissolve. So she was feeling pain in her stomach and she went to the hospital after the problem became worse. That’s when the doctors saw that they were the pills that were leading to that problem.  
A: Ah, how come?  
S: Those pills are not good, now Hilda has cancer, that’s why she’s going to die soon, as I am talking. She is unable to do anything on her own. Please don’t use those methods, they are not good, I tell you Asuweta.  
A: Ah, it’s just a matter of time and, as I have already told you, it’s that they are not good for those who don’t follow the instructions.  
Sophie: How did you know that it was the pills that caused that problem?  
S: She herself told me soon after the doctors realized that the problem was the pills. I met her at Zomba Hospital four months ago, and met her brother last week at Liwonde, he was telling me that they just transferred her from the hospital to their home because there was no change, things were only becoming worse.  
SOPHIE: So do you mean your wife cannot use those methods?  
S: My wife can’t do that, I can’t allow her to take pills.

A: Ah Shawn, do you want your wife to be suffering with children?  
SOPHIE: Asuweta, how can she suffer?  
A: Ah, Sophie, don't you know nowadays things are not fine, giving birth oftenly [often, with short spacing] is dangerous.  
S: But to suffer from cancer because of family planning pills is dangerous too.  
SOPHIE: So Shawn, you have said that your wife can't use those methods, do you want your wife to give birth oftenly? If you don't want that, what do you do to avoid it?  
S: I don't do anything, but if we have enough children, my wife will just stop bearing.  
SOPHIE: How will she stop?  
S: She can be closed at the hospital (TL).  
A: Then that means she can use the methods.  
Then the bus came, they caught it and I returned home.

### CONVERSATION WITH SISTER IN LAW

[This conversation was occurred before Sophie's marriage, in Sophie's village. The sister-in-law has a Form 2 education, with a Junior Certificate].

My brother's wife (sister-in-law) who lives in Mangochi came to see us at home. One day she started talking about her neighbor.

SIL: Sophie, Mrs. Mwale is pregnant.

SOPHIE: Oh, how old is her last born?

SIL: He is about four.

SOPHIE: Four...

SIL: Yes, four, if I am not wrong, but he is four I am sure. Ah! At least she has taken care of him for a long time.

SOPHIE: Was she using *kulera*?

SIL: Eh! She refuses to take *kulera*.

SOPHIE: Why?

SIL: She says her husband doesn't allow her to take modern methods of family planning.

SOPHIE: Is there any reason why her husband doesn't allow her to use them?

SIL: He says that when one uses modern methods of family planning...

SOPHIE: eeh...

SIL:...he says it is very difficult to have another child when you want to have it. It becomes very difficult to become pregnant.

SOPHIE: But is that true?

SIL: Some say so.

SOPHIE: Do you chat with her about family planning?

SIL: But not often, one time she herself said that she can't manage to use modern methods of family planning because when you take them they have side effects.

SOPHIE: What are the examples?

SIL: Especially for the pills, many people hate pills.

SOPHIE: Why do they hate them?

SIL: They say that they just stay in the stomach without dissolving, so they cause sores in the intestines.

SOPHIE: Did you hear someone talking about that?

SIL: Yes, one time a woman passed away in Mangochi. So someone was saying that she died as a result of the pills. When she was operated at the hospital, the doctors found all the family planning pills she had been taking and there were wounds in her intestines.

SOPHIE: Ooh.

SIL: Yes.

SOPHIE: Does this happen to many people?

SIL: Many people say so. But if they are dangerous, why do doctors tell us to use them?:

SOPHIE: So what do you think Mrs. Dafutula used for her to take so long without having another child?

SIL: She was using a string, but aaah, strings don't work.

SOPHIE: Why do you say so?

SIL: Mrs. Dafutula got pregnant while the string was on her body, so can you say that strings help?

SOPHIE: How do you know that strings don't help?  
SIL: As I have already said, she got pregnant while the string was on her waist.  
SOPHIE: So what method do you see is good and helpful?  
SIL: Injection, remember I told you that I started taking injection. (Last time she wrote me a letter telling me that she had started taking injections, but she was bleeding for about two weeks).  
SOPHIE: Did my brother allow you to use them?  
SIL: Yes, he can't refuse.  
SOPHIE: Who started talking about that?  
SIL: Me.  
SOPHIE: Why did you suggest using family planning?  
SIL: Iii, nowadays things are very difficult, Sophie.  
SOPHIE: What do you mean things are difficult?  
SIL: If I am bearing children often, how can I do some things that can help me? And sometimes they can't grow well because they lack good care from their mother because they are the same size. On top of that, nowadays things are very expensive. We don't need to have many children, what are we going to feed them if we bear many children? Iii, it's better to use family planning, and some men do understand. Had it been that your brother didn't allow me to use it, I could have been using it secretly.  
SOPHIE: Do some women use it secretly?  
SIL: Why not?  
SOPHIE: Eh, are you sure?  
SIL: Yes, some men don't understand, but it is we women who feel pain when bearing, so why can't someone use it secretly? Many women use it secretly.  
SOPHIE: Do you know someone who uses it secretly?  
SIL: Many, some women keep their family planning cards at their friends' houses to hide it from their husbands.  
SOPHIE: So don't their husbands know about this?  
SIL: How can they know? Many women use injections so men can't know.  
SOPHIE: Have you ever heard about someone who was using methods of family planning secretly and her husband learned?  
SIL: I've never heard. You know, Sophie, nowadays many women are clever, they can't be discovered when they are using secretly.  
SOPHIE: Is it?  
SIL: Yes.  
(Interrupted by some man who was selling vegetables.)

### **VISIT WITH EVENESS**

[This conversation occurred with Sophie's friend Eveness, and Eveness's aunt, in Area 18 of Lilongwe, where both Eveness and the aunt live, early in 2000 and was written in Sophie's journal after a week or two. Eveness has a Form 4 education; the aunt is about 40 years old.]

One day I went to see my friend Eveness. She has two kids. I met her aunt, who also went to see her. Then her aunt started asking:

Aunt: Eveness, how long did it take for Suzie to be born after Chrissie's birth?

E: Aunt, Suzie was born unexpectedly.

A: How?

E: We didn't plan for her to be born, it was an accident. But I can't make such a mistake again, nowadays I am clever, I am taking injections at Banja la Mtsogolo [a clinic affiliated with Marie Stopes].

SOPHIE: Why did you decide to be taking family planning injections?

E: Oh Sophie, it's not good to give birth oftenly.

SOPHIE: Why, is it difficult?

E: Sophie, don't you know?

SOPHIE: What?

A: Nowadays things are not as good as they were during our parents' time.

SOPHIE: Eh

E: You have to take care of the child before you give birth again.

SOPHIE: Ooh

E: Yes, and this helps us to do something profitable.

SOPHIE: What do you mean that it helps you to do some profitable things?

E: If you can be giving birth often you cannot have time to have a business, or even taking care of your home, because you can always be busy taking care of your little child.

SOPHIE: Is it?

E: Yes.

A: That's true, but sometimes things happen accidentally, as you have already said.

SOPHIE: How, Aunt?

A: I am saying so through experience.

SOPHIE: Ooh?

A: Yes.

SOPHIE: What happened?

A: Iii, my last born daughter was born unexpectedly, and it touched me and I don't understand up to now.

SOPHIE: Aunt, what happened?

A: Aah, I will never believe any method of family planning and I can't ever encourage someone to take any method of family planning.

SOPHIE: Aunt, what happened, tell me.

A: I have five children and all are girls.

SOPHIE: Eeh.

A: It was not my plan to have such children.

SOPHIE: Eh, what were your plans?

A: When I had two girls...

SOPHIE: Ehe...

A: All I wanted was a boy and I could have stopped there.

SOPHIE: Ooh, you mean you wanted to have three children only?

A: I wanted to have not more than three.

SOPHIE: So what happened for you to have five?

A: As I have already told you, I wanted a boy, so when I had two girls I had all the hope that I would have a boy, but unfortunately I had a girl.

SOPHIE: Iii!!!

A: Yes, and I tell you I was not expecting to have a girl.

SOPHIE: Eh.

A: So when that third daughter grew up I hoped that maybe if I can be pregnant I will bear a baby boy, but shame [alas], another girl came.

SOPHIE: Oh.

A: Yes, ah, that time I couldn't do otherwise, I planned to start family planning.

SOPHIE: Do you meant that you had never used any method of family planning?

A: No, I wasn't using any.

SOPHIE: So why weren't you bearing after a short time?

A: Iii ,Sophie, long ago we were taking a long time to sleep with a husband after the birth of a child.

SOPHIE: Why?

A: Parents were not allowing us to sleep together (to have sex) before the child grow.

SOPHIE: So how long were you taking?

A: We were taking about eight or nine months. Also, for those who have a short back, it can take one and a half years or two years without getting pregnant.

E: Aunt, can that be true?

A: Yes.

E: Aunt, you are lying.

A: No Eve, we people, we are different.

E: Aunt, I am saying this because I only took five months after the birth of my first born, then I had my periods.

A: Yes, we people are different. Some have long backs and some have short backs.

SOPHIE: Aunt, can you tell me well about short and long backs--what do you mean?

A: People who take a long time without having monthly periods after the birth of their children have long backs. Those people cannot be pregnant soon, they bear after a long time.

SOPHIE: Is it?  
A: Yes.  
SOPHIE: What about those with short backs?  
A: Those who have short backs are those who don't go much time before menstruating.  
SOPHIE: Eeh  
Aunt: Yes.  
E: Ah, had it been that I am one of those who have long backs, Sophie.  
SOPHIE: Yes.  
E: Ah, I can't use any method of family planning, ah what for?  
SOPHIE: Ooh  
E: Yes, ah, sometimes these methods of family planning have problems, sometimes you can close yourself with them.  
SOPHIE: Do you see any problems with the injections you are taking?  
E: Not much, only headaches.  
A: Yes, that's why I didn't use them.  
SOPHIE: Aunt, you said you used one of the methods.  
A: Yes, I used it because I was angry because I was not having a boy.  
SOPHIE: So what method did you use?  
A: I used a loop, but it was useless.  
SOPHIE: Oh.  
A: Yes, had I known...  
SOPHIE: eh...  
A: I couldn't have used it, and I cry up to today.  
SOPHIE: Aunt, what happened?  
A: I used a loop, but I found that I was pregnant while the loop was there.  
SOPHIE: Is that true?  
A: Yes, it is true, but oh, I cried.  
SOPHIE: Oh, shame [what a pity]  
E: That's true, she told me.  
SOPHIE: But how were you feeling after having that loop?  
A: I was bleeding too much, then I stopped.  
SOPHIE: Eh!  
A: So I went to see the doctor.  
SOPHIE: Eh...  
A: I was told that the loop was in its place, then I stopped bleeding.  
SOPHIE: Eh.  
A: Then three months went without having monthly periods.  
SOPHIE: Oh  
A: Yes, then I went there for a check up since I was told to go there for a check up after three months.  
SOPHIE: Eh  
A: There I was told that it was all right.  
SOPHIE: Eh  
P: Some doctors don't want to tell the truth.  
A: Then I was feeling strange things in my body.  
SOPHIE: Like what?  
A: I started vomiting, feeling tired  
SOPHIE: Eh  
A: I was feeling like I am pregnant, but I wasn't thinking about it because I knew I had already protected myself with that loop.  
SOPHIE: Ehe!  
A: But things got worse, so I decided to go for a checkup.  
SOPHIE: Eh  
A: When I went there, the doctor told me that the loop had moved from its place.  
SOPHIE: Ah!  
A: Yes, he told me that the loop is not in its place. But I tell you, the world became small for me.  
SOPHIE: liii!

A: Yes, ah, I was not expecting such a thing.  
 SOPHIE: So how did you know that you were pregnant?  
 A: I asked the doctor to check me and he told me to go the following day for scanning.  
 SOPHIE: Ehe!  
 A: So I went there, the doctor told me that, 'Madam, we are very sorry, you are pregnant'.  
 SOPHIE: Iiii!  
 A: Oh, I cried then, I asked them if they can tell me if the child is a boy or a girl.  
 SOPHIE: Eh  
 A: They told me it was a girl.  
 SOPHIE: Iii!  
 A: I tell you, I cried.  
 SOPHIE: Why did you cry?  
 A: I did not plan to have a child at that time, on top of that it was a girl.  
 SOPHIE: Is it?  
 A: Yes, maybe these were the plans of God, we can't compete with him. Ah, though there are these methods of family planning, some methods do not work.  
 SOPHIE: Iii, but it's painful.  
 A: Very.  
 SOPHIE: But, did you agree with your husband to take that method?  
 A: No one can take \*\*\* without the knowledge of her husband.  
 Sophie: Ooh.  
 A: Yes.  
 SOPHIE: Why are you saying so?  
 A: Because there are some instructions which are supposed to be known by a husband.  
 SOPHIE: What kind of instructions?  
 A: How to care for the loop.  
 SOPHIE: Ooh  
 A: Yes.  
 SOPHIE: Ooh, is it?  
 A: Eveness, I am going, I want to go to the maize mill, I don't have flour.  
 P: O.K., Aunt, thanks for coming.  
 A: Thanks, bye Sophie, we will meet again another day, I am rushing to the maize mill.  
 SOPHIE: O.K., Aunt, thanks.  
 A: Thank you, bye.  
 SOPHIE: Bye, I also want to leave soon.  
 A: O.K., bye.

### CONVERSATION ON AIDS

[This conversation occurred before Sophie was married, in Mdala, Sophie's natal village. The man was known to Sophie, and had recently married a woman in Mdala. The man is poor, education may be Standard 3 or 4]

I sat under the tree (at home) and a man was passing by.

Man: Hey! Sister, why are you here at home, your friends are at the funeral, don't you know that Mrs. Makungwa has passed away?

SOPHIE: I know, but I am not feeling all right, I am suffering from a headache.

Man: Oh, sorry, get well soon. I am going to attend the funeral.

SOPHIE: O.K., see you.

Man: But iii, if people rest after death...

SOPHIE: eh...

Man: Mrs. Makungwa is going to rest.

SOPHIE: Why are you saying so?

Man: Iii, Mrs. Makungwa has suffered a lot, and it's because of her husband.

SOPHIE: Her husband?

Man; Yes

SOPHIE: How?

Man: You ask me as if you don't know how her husband Makungwa was moving.

SOPHIE: So you mean his wife died only because he was just moving?

Man: Yes.

SOPHIE: What do you meant? Do you mean that all men who move, their wives will die?

Man: Yes, if they cannot hold their hearts when they see some women. Some men, they don't see with eyes only, but they just want to sleep with ladies wherever they go.

SOPHIE: Eh

Man: Yes, so they will leave us here on earth, they will leave this world before time, nowadays the graves are open for such people.

SOPHIE: Why are you saying they will leave this world before time?

M: They will die with *kazunze amako* (makes your mother suffer.)

SOPHIE: What is that?

Man: AIDS.

SOPHIE: So why are you saying *kazunze amako*?

Man: Because when one suffers from AIDS, it is his mother or father who cares for him and the parents suffer as if they were with him when he was taking the virus.

SOPHIE: So you have said that some men don't hold their hearts and that they want to sleep with ladies wherever they go, and you have added that they will die with AIDS.

Man: Yes, they will die whether they like it or not, don't you see how Makungwa is looking nowadays?

SOPHIE: Eh

Man: You just keep quiet, soon you will hear that he has followed his wife, he is going to die soon.

SOPHIE: What is the relationship between sleeping with ladies and dying?

Man: Iii, sister.

SOPHIE: Yes?

Man: You went to school, you are educated and you know what AIDS is, don't you know that it is very difficult to know that this woman or that has AIDS? So if you can be sleeping with anyone or someone who you don't know, how can you know that this one has AIDS or not?

SOPHIE: Eh

Man: What pains me is that someone takes it there and gives it to his wife at home who was faithful to her husband.

SOPHIE: Eh

Man: For example, Mrs. Makungwa was a good woman and she was not moving around, but her husband gave her AIDS. And many women in this village will follow, because I can see that all the girlfriends of Makungwa, nowadays they don't have good health, they are becoming thin, and one passed away last month.

SOPHIE: Which one?

Man: Mmh, that friend of yours. Mr. Sanuwedi's daughter.

SOPHIE: Iii

Man: Yes, she was Makungwa's girl friend and that one died with AIDS. Many will follow because Makungwa was taking himself as a rich man because of the harvest he had.

SOPHIE: Eh

Man: Can't you see nowadays there is nothing in the shop.?

SOPHIE: Eh

Man: Eh, they have finished with girls, that's why he went bankrupt.

SOPHIE: Is it?

Man: Yes, eeh, nowadays things are not fine. AIDS is very dangerous, it is better to stick to one partner.

SOPHIE: Eh

Man: Long ago I had so many girlfriends and I was just sleeping with them anyhow, but nowadays things have changed, you can't sleep with a woman without using a condom.

SOPHIE: Eh

Man: But even condoms are not strong.

SOPHIE: Which women are you talking about, your wife or someone who is not your wife?

Man: Ah, can one use a condom with his wife?

SOPHIE: Eh

Man: Ah, what for? Girlfriends.

SOPHIE: Why?

Man: Ah, a girlfriend is not perfect, you can't know, maybe she can have some man friend, and maybe that one has AIDS. So if you can sleep with her without a condom, it's easy for you to take AIDS.

SOPHIE: Ooh

Man: Yes, eh, some girls nowadays like business, what they want is money, they forget about their life.

SOPHIE: Have you ever met with such girls?

Man: Ah, yes, don't you see such girls?

SOPHIE: No.

Man: Ah, there are so many girls who do that.

SOPHIE: Eh.

Man: They attract men to go after them so that they can have money from different men.

SOPHIE: Did someone attract you?

Man: Many.

SOPHIE: So what did you do?

Man: You know.

SOPHIE: No.

Man: We men, sometimes when women attract us, we fail to hold our hearts. We can't do otherwise.

SOPHIE: So what do you do?

Man: Sometimes you fail to hold yourself, I've told you.

SOPHIE: So have you ever slept with someone who was not your wife?

Man: (with low voice) Yes, but don't tell my wife.

SOPHIE: No, ah I can't tell her.

Man: I know you can't.

SOPHIE: I can't, ah, how can I start it? I can't tell her. Where was that?

Man: It was in Mangochi, where I went to sell fish.

SOPHIE: Eh

Man: Eh, there are many beautiful girls in Mangochi.

SOPHIE: Ooh

Man: Eeh, and it is difficult to hold your heart.

SOPHIE: Eh

Man: I don't like chatting with ladies, to avoid that.

SOPHIE: To avoid what?

Man: To be attracted, that I can be attracted by someone who can have AIDS.

SOPHIE: Eh

Man: But that day I failed to hold my heart because all my friends had found girls to sleep with.

SOPHIE: Are you sure?

Man: I am very sure, and I can assure you that you should not trust men.

SOPHIE: Ooh

Man: Yes, when men are far from their wives, they do whatever they want. I saw that day.

SOPHIE: They do what?

Man: They spend nights with other ladies.

SOPHIE: So does it mean that all businessmen do that?

Man: Most of them do that.

SOPHIE: Ooh

Man: Yes, if there are some who don't do that....

SOPHIE: eh...

Man: ...there are only few.

SOPHIE: O.K., so what made you not able to hold your heart that day in Mangochi?

Man: O.K., we went to a certain restaurant to buy food...

SOPHIE: Eh...

Man: ...it was around 7 p.m.

SOPHIE: Eh

Man: Eh, we found so many girls there and they dressed very well, they were looking very beautiful and attractive. That's why I was attracted, because of the way they were looking.

SOPHIE: Do you mean men are attracted because of how the ladies are looking?

Man: Yes, like how those girls dressed.

SOPHIE: Ooh  
Man: Eh  
SOPHIE: So continue, how were you attracted to find one?  
Man: It was my first time to go to Mangochi to buy fish for sale [to bring back and sell]....  
SOPHIE: Eh...  
Man: At first I was going to Muera by bicycle, but one friend of mine told me to go to Mangochi with him.  
SOPHIE: Ah, where you met the girl.  
Man: Yes, my friends are used to sleep with such girls, but I was afraid since it was my first time to meet with such a situation.  
SOPHIE: Eh, so?  
Man: So all my friends met with their usual girlfriends and I was forced to find mine.  
SOPHIE: Eh  
Man: At first, I refused, but my friend told me if I cannot find one I would spend a lot of money for accommodation and food, and they added that the girls are ready to prepare food for me for they have their houses, so I can save money paying for a room anytime I go there to buy fish.  
SOPHIE: Ooh  
Man: Sure, that's why I was forced to find mine. Her name was Jenet, but ah, I will never do that again.  
SOPHIE: Why?  
Man: Ah, instead of saving my money I spent much, had I known I couldn't have done that.  
SOPHIE: What happened?  
Man: Of course I was sleeping and eating at her house while waiting for the fresh fish we bought to dry.  
SOPHIE: Oh, were you buying fresh fish?  
Man: Yes, we were buying fresh fish and waiting there for a week maybe for them to dry.  
Sophie: Ooh  
Man: Yes, that's why my friends were saying that I can save money for the week we were spending there.  
SOPHIE: O.K.  
Man: Yes, but iii, Jenet was demanding a lot of things.  
SOPHIE: Like what?  
Man: Eeh, many.  
SOPHIE: What kind of things was she demanding?  
Man: Expensive clothes, food and oils for her hair.  
SOPHIE: Ah, is that true?  
Man: Yes, that's true.  
SOPHIE: Why do you think she was demanding like that?  
Man: Ah, it's only because I was sleeping with her.  
SOPHIE: Because you were sleeping in her house?  
Man: Yes, but not only that, mainly because she was helping me, she said.  
SOPHIE: Helping you?  
Man: Yes (he laughed).  
SOPHIE: What do you mean?  
Man: Ah, you are a grown up person, don't you know what I mean?  
SOPHIE: No, I don't know, can you tell me what you mean?  
Man: Why do men find girlfriends when they are away from their wives?  
SOPHIE: Ah, I don't know, that's why I want to know from you.  
Man: Ah, no, you are telling lies.  
SOPHIE: No, I know nothing.  
Man: (he laughed) That's not true.  
SOPHIE: I am sure, please tell me, I want to know.  
Man: The ladies need money because they have sex with them, so they charge different amounts of money.  
SOPHIE: Ooh  
Man: Yes.  
SOPHIE: Why do they charge different amounts?  
Man: If they can use a condom, they charge a small amount, but if they can do without using a condom, they charge a large amount of money.  
SOPHIE: Is it?  
Man: Yes.

SOPHIE: Why do they differentiate?

Man: Those girls are clever. Though they do that [prostitution], they know that there is AIDS, and they know that they can take AIDS any time. So they think that it is wise to charge a large amount of money when they have sex without using a condom, because they think that it's easy to take HIV or any sexual transmitted disease.

Sophie: Oh

Man: Eh

SOPHIE: So were you having sex with Jenet? Is she the girl you are saying that you failed to hold your heart?

Man: Yes, and it was only her who I slept with other than my wife.

SOPHIE: Oh

Man: Yes.

Sophie: So were you using a condom or not?

Man: Eeh, Can I do without using a condom?

SOPHIE: Eh.

Man: She is a prostitute. She sleeps with many men, Oh, can I know that she can have AIDS?

SOPHIE: Do you mean that you can't know if someone has AIDS?

Man: Ah, you can't know. Maybe she took it a week before I met her, how can I know? And moreover, she charges men she sleeps with a lot of money.

SOPHIE: Oh, how did you know?

Man: The place we found her and her friends.

SOPHIE: Ooh

Man: Yes, it's like their business.

SOPHIE: Ooh

Man: Yes, eh, it's dangerous to take AIDS, you know?

SOPHIE: Ooh

Man: Yes, where can I find its medicine, eh, to take syphilis or other sexual transmitted diseases which have medicine is better than having AIDS.

SOPHIE: Ooh

Man: Eh

SOPHIE: So you were using a condom?

Man: Yes

SOPHIE: Who said that you should use a condom, you or Jenet?

Man: It was me.

SOPHIE: Ooh

Man: Yes, Jenet told me that she was ready to do without using a condom or to use it.

SOPHIE: Ooh

Man: Yes, but iii, I refused, I was afraid as I've already said.

SOPHIE: Ooh

Man: Yes, I was thinking about my wife who is very faithful, that I can take AIDS from that prostitute and give it to her.

SOPHIE: Ooh

Man: Eh, and on top of that I have many children and some of them are little. So if I and my wife can die with AIDS, who will take care of our many children? Oh, that's why I became afraid of sleeping with a prostitute, and I confess that it was my first and last time, I will never do that again. And I don't want my wife to know that one time I did such a thing. So that's why I have told you to please not tell my wife about this.

SOPHIE: Ah, believe me, I can't tell her.

Man: O.K.

SOPHIE: So you have said that you were also thinking about your children?

Man: Yes, I've got little ones.

SOPHIE: How many children do you have?

Man: I have eight.

SOPHIE: Oh

Man: Yes.

SOPHIE: I only know five.

Man: My first born is a street vendor in Lilongwe, so he called his brother, my second born, to go there. Three years have gone now without [their] coming here.

SOPHIE: Oh

Man: Yes.

SOPHIE: Do you want to have more children or not?

Man: Eh! Eight are enough.

SOPHIE: How many are you in your family?

Man: Our family?

SOPHIE: Yes, I mean how many children did your mother have?

Man: We are four, I and my three sisters, some passed away.

SOPHIE: How many passed away?

Man: Five

SOPHIE: So that means your mother bore nine children.

Man: Nine.

SOPHIE: Yes.

Man: Oh, yes, nine, to add with five who passed.

### **FAMILY PLANNING AND AIDS**

[Neighbor has Standard 7, she doesn't work, is doing night school Form 1, her husband is a soldier, she's about 24, like Sophie. She's Sophie's "confidante" in the barracks: she's told me a lot of stories and her secrets. She's worried about her husband]

One day I was chatting with my next door neighbor when a man who was on T.B. treatment was passing by. She started:

Neighbor: Iii, nowadays things are becoming dangerous.

S: How?

N: If one can receive TB treatment for three times, just know what it is.

S: It is what?

N: AIDS.

S: Why have you said so?

N: Ii, look at that man, he is receiving treatment for TB. But look how he is looking. His wife is hiding that her husband is on TB treatment, why is she hiding?

S: Why?

N: She knows that maybe people can think they have AIDS.

S: Do you mean that all people who suffer from TB have AIDS?

N: No, but those who suffer from it for three times...

S: Eh

N: Yes, don't you know?

S: No.

N: I am saying this from experience, I've seen many people who have died.

S: So do you know that they died from AIDS?

N: Yes, to suffer from TB many times, malaria any time, means what? It's AIDS.

S: Do you mean you know that this one has AIDS when you see that he has suffered from those [illnesses] you have mentioned?

N: Yes.

S: Are those the only signs that you can know that a person has AIDS?

N: Ah, but you can't know in the early stages, had it been that everyone knows that this one has AIDS, many people could not have taken it.

Sophie: Why have you said so?

N: Ah, no one can go for someone who is already dead.

S: Do you mean to have AIDS is to die?

N: Yes, what's next after AIDS? It is death.

S: Oh.

N: Yes, why are you asking me as if you don't know that AIDS is a killer? The day before yesterday I told my husband, 'My husband, I have started my periods again, so can I continue taking injections or not?'

S: You are making stories.  
N: No.  
S: Ah! We were talking about AIDS, now you are talking about family planning injections.  
N: You, listen, all the men who were friends of my husband are receiving TB treatment and some have passed away. To follow up how these died, they had AIDS.  
S: Ahaa!  
N: Yes, sometimes for we women, we find that we have AIDS when we give birth.  
S: So what were you thinking when you asked your husband like that?  
N: Sometime back I heard that he had girlfriends and he always came home at late hours, I believe that he already gave me the virus.  
S: Iiii.  
N: Yes, it will be known [to others] if I have another child, and he says he wants me to have another child, maybe he can be a boy (she has two daughters.) [would get sick after the birth]  
S: Ooh.  
N; Yes, but I am afraid that it may be if I can bear a child I can die.  
S: Ooh.  
N: Yes, so that's why I called him, I said 'My husband, you told me to stop taking injections, so I have started my periods again.'  
S: Were you not having periods when you were taking injections?  
N: Yes, but sometimes I was having a few drops, for one day only.  
S: Ooh.  
N: Yes.  
S: O.K., continue...  
N: "So are you sure that you want me to have another child?"  
S: Ehe.  
N: So he said, 'Why are you asking me such a question, don't you want another child? I want a boy, do you think we can have two children only? And all are girls? I want a boy.'  
S: Eh, so what did you say?  
N: I said, 'No, my husband, I haven't said that I don't want a boy, but I am afraid to have a child. Maybe we have HIV, so I want you to assure me before I get pregnant. I am afraid I can die, our children will suffer.'  
S: Ehe  
N: ! Eh! My friend, I tell you he became angry and he wanted to beat me.  
S: What did he say?  
N: Iii, he said, 'Who told you that we have HIV? Do you think that AIDS just comes and ends in the body like malaria? Maybe it's you who took it somewhere and gave it to me.'  
S: Ehe.  
N: Then I answered, 'No, where can I take AIDS, I don't move around. It's you who can take AIDS outside and give it to me because you come here at midnight and I heard that you had a girlfriend, your sister told me.'  
S: You heard it from your sister-in-law?  
N: Yes, my sister-in-law told me that the girl was going to my mother-in-law's home.  
S: Is it?  
N: Yes.  
S: So what did he say?  
N: He just said that 'you and my sister, you are all fools.' Then he left.  
S: Iii.  
N: Yes.  
S: So what are you doing now, are you still using injections or not?  
N: I told you that he told me to stop taking injections, he wants a boy.  
S: Ooh.  
N: Yes.  
S: So what are you going to do now?  
N: Ah! I will start to take injections again but my husband will not know.  
S: Do you mean you will be taking injections secretly?  
N: Yes, ah! My husband is not faithful. I am afraid I can die if I bear again.

S: Do you mean those two children you have are enough?  
 N: Iii, but I want to have some.  
 S: So where will they come from, yet you are saying that you don't want to bear again?  
 N: I will be taking injections, but if I can see that there is no sign of AIDS between I and my husband, I will stop (we both laughed).  
 S: Iii!  
 N: Yes, Iii, my mother will suffer if I die soon (she said while laughing).  
 S: So how many children do you want to have?  
 N: Four can be enough.  
 S: Ooh.  
 N: Yes.  
 S: How many were you in your family, I mean in your parent's family?  
 N: My mother had five children but all passed away, it's only me who left, so if I can die she will not have a child.  
 S: Oh! Sorry.  
 N: Sure.  
 S: Why do you want only four, yet you have said that your mother had five, only that four passed away?  
 N: Four are many, I can't manage to feed more than four, things are becoming more expensive than during the days of our parents.  
 S: Ooh!  
 N: Yes, but I just made a mistake.  
 S: Eh!  
 N: Had I known, I wouldn't have used any method of family planning.  
 S: Ooh  
 N: Yes, or let me say that had it been that my that my husband was faithful, I couldn't have taken any method of family planning.  
 S: Why are you saying so?  
 N: Some times, these methods of family planning are not good, especially the modern methods. I wish I could bear like Mrs. Maliakini, did you see Mrs. Maliakini's children?  
 S: Yes, why do you want to bear like her?  
 N: You know, it's better to have children after a short time, then stop.  
 S: Ooh!  
 N: Yes, to bear three or four children without using any method of family planning.  
 S: Ooh! So why are you saying that sometimes the modern methods are bad?  
 N: Sometimes they can make you barren, especially injections.  
 S: How do they make you barren?  
 N: Some people don't have their monthly periods. So I think that if they can take too many injections it can be very difficult for them to be pregnant.  
 S: Is it?  
 N: Yes, that's why I have said that had it been that I knew...  
 S: Eh...  
 N:...I couldn't have used any method of family planning, and let me tell you that you must not think of taking family planning methods. They are not suitable for people like you who have only one child--if they don't suit your body you cannot have another child.  
 S: Where did you hear that?  
 N: Some people say and I know. Eh, we've chatted a lot, I am going. But please don't tell anyone what I've told you.  
 S: About what?  
 N: that I was saying that man is on TB treatment, his wife doesn't want people to know.  
 S: Ah, I can't tell people about that.  
 N: Bye  
 S: Bye

## AT THE MAIZE MILL

[Woman 1 with 11 children probably never went to school; the other one maybe up to Standard 8 because she's a cashier at the maize mill. Sophie had never met either of them before]

One day I went to the maize mill, I sat where two women were sitting.

1<sup>st</sup> woman: How are you?

S: I am fine, how are you?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: I am fine.

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: How are you?

S: Fine thank you, how are you?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: I am fine.

S: Thanks.

1<sup>st</sup> woman: How is the baby at your back.?

S: It is fine.

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: A boy or a girl?

S: He is a boy.

All: O.K.

S: Yes

1<sup>st</sup> woman: How many children do you have?

S: He's my first born.

All: Aah

Sophie: Yes

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Aah! Why? I thought he is your second or third born.

Sophie: No.

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Where were you? Were you at school? Your age-mates have three or four children.

Sophie: Ooh

All: Yes

S: (to 1<sup>st</sup> woman) How many children do you have?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: I have eleven children

S: Eleven?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes, eleven.

S: Are they all alive?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes, they are all alive. But now, iii, I have started family planning.

S: Do you mean you have started family planning after those eleven children?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes, eh, at first I was afraid, but now eleven are enough, I don't want to have another child.

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Why can't you just have a T.L.?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Eeh! TL is dangerous, you suffer a lot when you have it.

Sophie: Ooh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Eh, but I and my husband, we are on separation.

S: Oh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes.

S: So why did you separate?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Because of some disagreements.

S: Why are you taking family planning while you are separated?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Because I heard that in the coming future we will be paying to take methods of family planning, so I want to have many injections before they start selling them, maybe I can be barren (then we all laughed).

S: Who told you that you can be barren when you have many injections?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: It is true, that's why I was afraid to take them before my children were enough for us.

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: It's true, it is easy to be barren when you are taking injections.

S: (to 2<sup>nd</sup> woman): How many children do you have?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: I have two.

S: Ooh.

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Yes

S: How many did you give birth to?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Two, but the first born is with my mother.

Sophie: Why?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Eh! I got pregnant when he was so young so I just sent him to my mother. I was very shy with people when I got pregnant when he was less than a year old.

S: Why didn't you use the methods of family planning?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: My husband did not allow me and I was afraid to take them.

S: Why were you afraid?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Because people say many things about these methods.

S: What do they say?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: They say that if you are taking these methods maybe you cannot have another child...

S: Ehe...

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: ...so I was afraid that maybe I cannot have another one.

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes, that's true.

S: Which method are you talking about, do you mean all methods or just injections?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: All methods have their disadvantages.

S: Have you ever heard someone complaining about them?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Many people complain about them.

S: do you have an example?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: My aunt passed away because of Norplant.

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Iiii

S: Ooh, sorry. How sure are you that she died because of Norplant?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Some doctor told us.

S: What happened?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: My aunt went to the hospital to have Norplant.

S: Eh

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: there she had it, but after four or five months she started suffering.

S: What was she suffering from?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: She was saying that she was feeling pain in her stomach.

S: Ooh! So what did the doctor say?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: He asked her if she took any method of family planning...

Sophie: Eeh...

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: ...so she told him that she had Norplant, and the Doctor told her that was why she was not feeling good.

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Is that true?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Yes

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Aah, I can't take that method.

S: Eh, continue, so what did she do?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: She told the doctor to remove the Norplant.

S: Ooh

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Yes.

S: So he removed it?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: No, that day she was told to come after one week, then she went after one week and was told that the specialists who know how to remove Norplant were very busy and she was given another day to go and have the Norplant removed.

S: Ehe

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: She was twice told to come back, until she was seriously sick and admitted at the hospital.

S: Ooh

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: I tell you she died before these doctors removed her Norplant.

S: Ooh, sorry, so why did they fail to remove the Norplant?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Let me tell you, the doctors and nurses are very clever, they just know how to put the Norplants in but they don't know how to remove them.

S: Is it?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Yes.

S: Did you hear someone complaining about Norplant?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Many people were worried about family planning methods, but some have known that they are helpful, nowadays people are civilized.

S: Why are you saying that people are now civilized?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: At first many people were hating modern methods of family planning, but nowadays we meet with many women at family planning clinics.

Sophie: Ooh

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Yes

1<sup>st</sup> woman: That's true, we were hating these methods because people were talking this and that.

S: What were they saying?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: They were saying that the government doesn't want people to be bearing too much because the population is very high, so that's why they introduced the modern methods of family planning.

S: Where did you hear about that, and who was saying so?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: I met with a certain woman at the hospital and she was saying that.

S: What happened for her to start talking about that?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: I went to Scale [clinic time when mothers bring babies to be weighed] with my eighth born daughter...

Sophie: Eh...

1<sup>st</sup> woman: So the nurses used to teach us about modern methods of family planning.

Sophie: Eh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: So many people were saying that they are bad.

S: What did the nurse say about *kulera*?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: She said that it is good to bear children after a long time, rather than bearing children yearly.

S: Eh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: We cannot have healthy bodies and we cannot have time to do things which can be profitable for us.

S: Ooh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes

S: So what did the woman you were talking to say?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: She said that they just want us to stop bearing and many were not happy with the family planning methods of now.

S: What did you say?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: I commented that the methods were dangerous, because they can make us stop bearing while we are young.

S: Eh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: They can lead us to diseases.

S: Is it?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes, because if you can stop having children while your blood is strong then you cannot be feeling alright.

S: How?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: For example at the age of yours.

S: Eh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Can you say that you can use methods of family planning?

S: Why not?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Aah, no, be careful, do you want to have only one child?

S: No.

1<sup>st</sup> woman: So please don't use them, you must have three or four then start using family planning methods that maybe you can be worn out, you can't get worried because you have a number of children.

S: Ooh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Iii, no, that's not true, people laugh at you. I regret what happened with me when I got pregnant while my first born were young. People were laughing at me and that's why I was forced to go with him [take him] to the village to stay with my mother.

S: It was good to you that you sent him to your mother, but what can I do if that can happen to me, I don't have a mother. So who can take care of the child?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Ah, don't worry, nothing can be wrong, we do traditional medicine that a child cannot suffer from any malnutrition disease.

S: Ooh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: No, she is cheating you, nowadays things have changed.

1<sup>st</sup> woman: If you want to [space] just use traditional methods, I am suffering with the injection I am taking now, and yet I have eleven children. So what more with you who has one child?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Mmmmh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: But I know that the injection is giving me fever because I don't have a husband but had it been that I have a husband maybe I couldn't have felt fever.

S: Ooh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes

S: Why is it like that?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Because the injections are supposed to be taken when you are meeting with a man, so I don't have a husband the medicine has nothing to meet with in my body.

S: Ooh (the 2<sup>nd</sup> woman laughed).

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes.

Sophie: O.K., we have chatted a lot. I am going now.

All: Okay, thanks, bye

S: Bye.

### **CONVERSATION WITH BROTHER**

[Brother has secondary school, was working but when V's mother passed away he came home to take care of things]

One day I went to my village to see my brother so I was asking him about someone who was once my classmate. My brother's name is Justice.

Sophie: Justice...

J: Yes?

S: How is Denimo now, I heard that he was sick?

J: Eh you, people were saying that he passed away in Lilongwe but it was not. true.

S: Iii, shame, who started saying that?

J: People knew that he was seriously sick, he became very thin and many were saying that he has AIDS.

S: Eh

J: So some said that they heard from the radio that he passed away.

S: Who sent the message?

J: The names were similar on the radio, they said Denimo Shaibu. This one is Denimo Elias, he did not die then but he is now very serious in Lilongwe.

S: I heard that his wife is Judy, how is she?

S: Oh, what was she suffering from?

J: AIDS

S: How did you know she had AIDS?

J: She herself was telling Harrison Napolo that "look Harrison, how I am now, this is AIDS, and I and my husband we are going to die, look how Denimo is and look at me, we are going".

S: Why was she saying so?

J: Ah! She knows how she was walking [moving, a synonym for promiscuity], ah, to say the truth that girl was a prostitute and has slept with so many men, can't she have AIDS?

S: Is it?

J: Yes.

### **WORLD AIDS DAY**

On World AIDS Day the First Lady was speaking on the radio, she was advising people about AIDS.

1<sup>st</sup> Lady: I am very sorry that in our country we have many orphans now. And the population of orphans is increasing every day. To follow up why it is like that, it is because of HIV. Many men of ages between 40-49 are those who have HIV and these bring the HIV to their wives at home. At the end the parents die and leave the children alone. This is not good. Please let us be faithful to our partners. Most of the time women are faithful, but you men, you take the HIV and give it to faithful women. And to the youth—you are our leaders of Tomorrow, so you have to keep yourselves. Especially for the girls who used to walk with men,

so that. Please stop the customs that can spread AIDS, for example, *chokolo* (to marry the wife of your brother after the death of your brother or to marry the sister of your wife after the death of your wife). This custom can spread AIDS and members of the same family can be dying one after another because you can't know that maybe the deceased has died of AIDS so his/her partner can have AIDS also.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Lady also said: Some people you call boys or men for the girls who fall down (mature), you call them. You say to remove dust (*kusasa fumbi*). How can you know that those people have AIDS or not? You are killing your children yourself. I want these customs to stop, they are not good. Lastly, some people used to find a man to keep with the widow after the burial of her husband, you say to comfort her. That is not good, maybe her husband died with AIDS, that means the man can easily take it, or maybe the man can have HIV so if he can give it to the widow that means she will die with AIDS at the end no parent can be there to look after the children. So please, let us Malawians take part to fight against AIDS. Because this disease hinders development. How can people work while they are not feeling well all the time? Let us fight against AIDS.

### AT THE CLINIC

[Sophie had seen the women before but had never talked with them. They also live in the barracks where Sophie lives, she thinks they did not reach secondary education].

In September 2000 I went to the family planning clinic to take a family planning injection. Before we met the nurse, I sat outside with two women. I started asking:

S: Have you come to take family planning?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes, I want to change the method. At first I was using a traditional method so I got pregnant while I was using it.

S: What method were you using?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: I was using a string.

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: You didn't follow instructions, that's why you got pregnant.

S: Do traditional methods have instructions?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Yes.

1<sup>st</sup> woman: What instructions?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: if you want to use a string...

S: eh

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: You have to take it before you bring the baby to the mat (first time to have sex after the birth of the baby).

1<sup>st</sup> woman: ooh

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Yes

S: Ooh

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Yes, but it is good to wait to have your periods before you bring the baby to the mat.

S: Aah, so what about to those who stay for a long time without having periods after the birth of their baby?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: She is just saying that some men can't manage to wait for that. For example, my husband can't wait for that, and if you are doing that your husband can bring you disease, because he can't wait for you, instead he can go out to sleep with other women. It's better to be pregnant before the baby grows than to have AIDS and die.

S: Ooh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes, that's why here we are advised to take family planning methods when the child is six weeks old, that if your husband wants to sleep with you, you cannot refuse because you know that you have already protected yourself.

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Aah, six weeks only?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes, six weeks.

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Ah, that's unhygienic. They just tell us that, but even they themselves cannot do that.

1<sup>st</sup> woman: But if you think about that, then you are chasing your husband out to have girlfriends. Don't you know that men are like kids? You must know that the time that a man can take AIDS to you is when the child is small, so you must be careful, and don't say that you must wait to have your periods before you bring the child to the mat. No.

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Ooh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes, can you understand that I got pregnant before I had periods after the birth of my first born?

(I and the 2<sup>nd</sup> woman wondered).

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes, and that time I and my husband never thought of pregnancy. My husband thought it was *mwana mphepo* and I started taking roots medicine for three months.

S: Eh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Then I started vomiting, but I was not even thinking that I can be pregnant. Then I went to the hospital and the doctor told me to check me up, maybe it can be pregnancy. I laughed and told the doctor that it can't be because that time I had a string on my waist. Then the doctor sent me to maternity clinic for a check up. I found that I was pregnant and it was the fifth month.

Sophie & 2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Mmmh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Yes, I tell you I cried.

Sophie: Iii

1<sup>st</sup> woman: Then I started going to the maternity clinic.

S: How old was your first born when that happened?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: She was nine months but I didn't stop breast-feeding her.

S: So what method do you want to take?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: I want to take injection and I will never use traditional methods again.

V to 2<sup>nd</sup> woman: What methods do you want to take?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: I take pills.

S: For how long have you taken pills?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Soon after the birth of my child.

S: How old is your child?

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: He is one year and six months.

S: Ooh

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Yes, and what method do you take?

S: I want to start today, I want to take injections.

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: Ooh

1<sup>st</sup> woman: How old is your child?

Sophie: Four months

1<sup>st</sup> woman: O.K.

Sophie: Yes

Then the nurse called us to go inside.

Nurse: Welcome women, thanks for your coming. I am sure you have come for *kulera*, not so?

All: Yes.

Nurse: O.K., how many have come to start today? (I raised my hand together with the 1st woman).

Nurse: For you who want to start today, you are late, so come next week on Friday morning.

(Nurse pointing to me)

Nurse: How old is your child?

S: He is four months.

Nurse: Four months?

Sophie: Yes

Nurse: Iii, didn't you hear that family planning is supposed to be started six weeks after the birth of the child?

S: I heard about that.

Nurse: So why are you coming today? Do you want to have another child before the baby grows?

Sophie: No

(Nurse points to 1<sup>st</sup> woman)

Nurse: How old is your child?

1<sup>st</sup> woman: She is six weeks.

Nurse: Yes, that's good, so please you two, come on Friday morning.

We got out and left. That night my husband told me to go to Banja la Mtsogolo [affiliated with Marie Stopes] the following day.

The following morning I went to Banja la Mtsogolo to have the family planning injection.

Receptionist: Can I help you?

S: Yes, I want to take the family planning injection.

Receptionist: Enter that room.

S: Thanks.

(I found a woman in the room).  
 Woman: How are you?  
 S: I am fine, and you?  
 W: Fine, may I help you?  
 S: I've come to take the family planning injections.  
 W: Do you suffer from heart attacks?  
 S: Sometimes my heart pains.  
 Woman: How does it do?  
 S: I feel pain and sometimes it beats faster.  
 W: What medicine are you given when you feel like that?  
 S: Phenobarb.  
 W: Wait for me. (She leaves the room. After a short while she came back.)  
 W: I went to ask a doctor, he said that the injection is not suitable for you, you have to take a loop, it is K30 if you have it [at the time, the exchange rate was about 75 kwacha=\$US1.00].  
 S: How much is injection?  
 W: K40. Have you agreed with your husband about *kulera*?  
 S: Yes, it is he who has told me to come here.  
 W: Is it?  
 S: Yes.  
 W: So it's good for you to take the loop.  
 S: O.K., I will come again. I want to go and tell my husband that I am going to take the loop.  
 W: O.K., fine, you will find me.  
 S: Bye.

#### **AT HOME**

[This is a conversation between Sophie and her husband. Sophie married a man "In the army!", he's a "full corporal" and is now stationed in Zomba, where they live. He has secondary education]

S: At Banja la Mtsogolo they have said that the injections are not suitable for me, but the loop.  
 Husband: Is it?  
 S: Yes.  
 H: How much is the loop?  
 Husband: Why can't you take Norplant?  
 S: Eh, I am afraid.  
 H: Why are you afraid?  
 S: Someone told me that her aunt died because of Norplant.  
 H: That's not true, her aunt was suffering from something, it's not that she died because of Norplant.  
 Sophie: How much is Norplant?  
 H: I told you I went to find out at Baja la Mtsogolo, it's 1500K.  
 S: When did you go?  
 H: Last month.  
 S: Ooh  
 H: I think Norplant is good because you [might] forget [to take the pill], and it is expensive because it's good, go and take Norplant.  
 S: Let me think about it.  
 H: O.K., if you can get pregnant now, it is not my fault.  
 S: I am going to take the loop.  
 H: O.K., go.  
 S: But Rose's aunt told me that she got pregnant while the loop was there.  
 H: That cannot happen. These things have their instructions. So if people cannot follow those instructions, they can face such problems.  
 S: Ooh  
 H: Yes.  
 S: O.K., I will see.

## IN THE AFTERNOON

[This neighbor also lives in the barracks, never reached Standard 8, Sophie talks with her a lot but not secrets]

My next door neighbor was asking me, she is Mrs. Sukweya.

Mrs. Sukweya: Kwipoyo's mother (Kwipoyo is my son).

S: yes.

Mrs. S: Where were you this morning?

S: I went to Banja to take family planning method.

Mrs. S: Eh, but you??

S: What's wrong?

Mrs. S: Why didn't you ask me? You! Be careful.

Sophie: But please tell me what's wrong?

Mrs. S: You mean you don't want to have another child or you want to lose the next child you can have? You must know that if you can take one of the methods, that means you have chosen one of the two things I have told you.

S: Please tell me, what do you mean?

Mrs. S: What I can tell you is this.

Sophie: Eh

Mrs. S: If you want to have another child, please, please, don't use any modern method. People don't use family planning methods if they have only one child. Sometimes you can be barren or you bear a premature child if you can have another. You are still young, why are you rushing to that? Did your husband agree?

S: Yes, it is he who told me about that.

Mrs. S: I once used injections but since I had it, I was not feeling all right in my body. I stopped and after some months I got pregnant.

S: Eh

Mrs. S: Then I was suffering a lot with that pregnancy, so many people were telling me that it was because of the family planning injections I was having.

Sophie: Ooh!

Mrs. S: Yes, then I gave birth to a premature child. The child was not healthy, he was suffering a lot since he was born, then he died in April 2000.

S: Oh, sorry, you mean you had another child after Hashinga?

Mrs. S: Yes, it was also a baby boy.

S: Was it your first time to use family planning methods or you started it before?

Mrs. S: First I was not using any method, but then I started using a loop but I got pregnant while the string was there. So I thought of changing the method after the birth of Margaret. I took some medicine.

S: what kind of medicine did you take?

Mrs. S: I was given it by my grandmother. She knows much about this. So if you want I can assist you. She told me some of the trees that she uses.

S: Ooh

Mrs. S: Yes.

S: Do you have only these children, three children?

Mrs. S: No, my first born daughter, Brenda, is with my mother at the village. The fifth was the one who died.

S: How many children do you want to have?

Mrs. S: I wanted to have five or six, but oh! I felt very sorry with the death of my first born child so I told my grandmother to prepare some medicine for me to drink that I can stop.

S: Ooh.

Mrs. S: Yes, so please don't go to take any methods at Banja or any clinic. What method do you want to take?

S: I wanted injection but at Banja I was told that it is not suitable for me, but the loop.

Mrs. S: ii ii you!

S: What's wrong?

Mrs. S: If you can have a loop you can have an accident (she laughed).

S: How?

Mrs. S: do you think you can control your husband?

S: What do you mean?

Mrs. S: If you can have it you will be told that you and your husband must not have sex frequently, and if you have sex he must not go deep (she laughed again, I laughed too.)

S: ooh.

Mrs. S: Yes, if he can go deep, the loop will go inside. So is that good? Can you tell your husband stop in such a situation?

S: Is it?

Mrs S: Yes.

S: So do you have friends you chat with about these things?

Mrs. S: I had many at Sadzi (A township in Zomba), they all stopped, I told them to stop, they were all taking injection. I feel sorry for those who take injections for child spacing, though to those who want to stop it is good. If you take many injections you can be barren. But as for you, please don't even try. You are just afraid you can't be pregnant now.

S: Eh, I am afraid.

Mrs S: Did you have your menstruation period after the birth of Dalitso?

S: No.

Mrs S: Ah (laughed). So why are you afraid? Do you think you can get pregnant before having your periods?

S: It happens.

Mrs S: Ah, you are a child. Try to ask me before you do something I have seen. You know nothing. You are a child.

S: (I laughed). So what does your husband say about family planning?

Mrs. S: He told me not to take injections again, he said I have to be using traditional medicine.

S: Ooh

Mrs. S: Yes, so that is that. Think twice.

S: O.K., see you.

Mrs. S: Bye.

The following day I was coming from the hospital to see my friend's son who was admitted. I met with a friend, Mrs. Jimmy. [Only primary school, also a soldier's wife, Sophie talks with her from time to time but they aren't close].

Mrs J: Where are you coming from?

S: From the hospital to see Mrs. Adamu's son.

Mrs. J: O.K., I go this afternoon. Yesterday I saw you with Mrs. Sukweya, your new neighbor. What were you talking about? I saw her laughing.

S: We were talking about family planning.

Mrs. J: Ah, you, do you want to follow what she said? That woman is clever, I know she's discouraged you about modern family planning methods.

S: How have you known?

Mrs. J: She also told me bad things about these methods, but ah, I will never listen to her again.

S: Why?

Mrs. J: She is clever. She discourages people to take new methods, but traditional ones from her grandmother to have money, she can find many customers. She told me she can't take every new method and told me to stop taking pills, that they are bad and that I can be pregnant though I am taking pills. But I heard from some women that they have been meeting with her at family planning clinics. She takes some new methods but she doesn't want us to know.

S: Is it?

Mrs. J: Yes, ah don't do what she told you. Do what you and your husband have agreed.

S: O.K., are you taking any of these methods?

Mrs. J: Yes, I am taking pills.

S: Do they have any effects?

Mrs. J: No. Some say that pills don't work, that you get pregnant while you are still using them.

*[The interviewer married in early 1999 and moved from her village Mdala, in Balaka District, to Zomba, about an hour from the site of our project. She was 25 when she married--relatively old for a first marriage here--the husband 29. She worked with us on the household survey in 1998, the Let's Chat semi-structured interviews in 1999 and the household survey in 2001, and has consistently been one of our best*

*interviewers. Occasionally she asks a question that comes from the Let's Chat interviews, such as the one about the number of children the respondent's parents had which was meant to lead into a comparison of family sizes today with the past; she drops that line of questioning, however, probably because it seems out of place in the conversations she's having here. The secret use questions also comes from the Let's Chat interviews.*

*The family planning questions she asks are quite relevant to her own circumstances as a recently married woman with one small child. In June, she gave me the two journals she had written. After I read them, I asked her whether she had started to use family planning, she said she had, and was using the injection. I asked how she decided on the injection, she said it was her husband's decision. I said but you heard so many different things about the injection, why did you agree? She agreed because she is afraid of getting pregnant again. I asked whether her husband wanted her to start the injections because he wanted to start sex again, she said yes.]*