

From Contraception to Reproductive Health

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« Health is defined in the Constitution of the World Health Organization as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. In the context of this positive definition, *reproductive health* is not merely the absence of disease or disorders of the reproductive process. »

Within the framework of WHO's definition of health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, **REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH** addresses the reproductive processes, functions and system at all stages in life.

Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a responsible, satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the right of men and women to be informed of, and to have access to, safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of fertility regulation of their choice, and the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant.

Reproductive Health

If a woman has a difficult delivery, a tradition cloth is tied between two sticks and we carry her 7 km to the health center. You know how long it takes to walk like that? There is nobody who can help here...

- *Togo, Voices of the Poor*

Women and Poverty

- Women represent a disproportionate share of the poor.
- Women in the poorest compared to the wealthiest households have much higher fertility rates and far fewer safe deliveries.
- Women in poorest compared to wealthiest households have gaps greater in skilled delivery than other services.

Women's Status Affects Access to Health Services

- Lack of mobility, decision-making power, and income constrain women's health service use.
- Prohibitions against women seeking care from male providers are also a serious constraint.

Women's Health and Development

Improving women's health and nutrition

Equity

Productivity

Widespread benefits,
especially to children

Cost-effective allocation
of health resources

Determinants of Women's Health Status

Women's Health Status

- Individual behavior and psychological factors
- Biology
- Social, economic and cultural influences
- Health and nutrition services

Women's Health as a Human Right

Recent conventions and treaties recognize women's right to:

- Reproductive choice
- Pregnancy-related care
- Freedom from violence

Risks Due to Biological Factors

- Pregnancy-related complications
- Higher risk per exposure of contracting STDs, including HIV/AIDs
- Special nutritional requirements, e.g. iron
- Gynecological cancers

In Addition to Reproductive Risks

- Women have higher death and disability from depression, domestic violence, and sexual abuse.
- Compared to the main causes of men's burden of disease which are injuries and substance abuse.

Health and Nutrition Problems Affecting Women

Infancy and childhood (0-9 years)

- Sex selective abortion
- Genital mutilation
- Discriminatory nutrition
- Discriminatory health care

Exclusively or predominantly during the life cycle.

Intergenerational cycle of growth failure

Early Teenage Pregnancy

+ Low weight and height in teens

Small adult women

Low birth-weight baby

Child growth failure



Female Genital Mutilation

Why Mom? Why did you let them do this to me?

These words continue to haunt me.

It's now four years after the operation and my children continue to suffer from its effects. How long must I live with the pain that society imposed on me and my children?

- a mother bears witness

Dimensions of the Problem

- About 2 million girls undergo female genital mutilation each year.
- At least 90% of women have undergone the operation in Djibouti, Egypt, Mali, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, and Somalia.

Health and Nutrition Problems Affecting Women

Adolescence (10-19 years)

- Early childbearing
- Abortion
- STDS and AIDS
- Undernutrition and micronutrient deficiency
- Rising trend in substance abuse

Sexually Transmitted Infections Including HIV/AIDS

- Women who become suddenly poor through the loss of a male partner are frequently forced into prostitution to earn a living. In fact HIV/AIDS is largely seen as a woman's illness.

- South Africa, Voices of the Poor

Gender and STDs

- Young women aged 15-25 are most at risk.
- Social norms make it difficult for women to insist on mutual fidelity or condom use.

Dimensions of the Problem

- Women now represent 43% of all adults living with HIV/AIDS.
- In Africa, more women than men are living with HIV.
- Physiologically, men are four times more likely to transmit the virus to women than women to men.

Health and Nutrition Problems Affecting Women

Reproductive years (15-44 years)

- Unplanned pregnancy
- STDs and AIDS
- Pregnancy complications
- Malnutrition, especially iron deficiency

Malnutrition

- When a meal is served in a house, the men eat first then women eat if something is left.

- Pakistan, Reproductive Health Matters

Impact of Poor Maternal Health and Nutrition on Offspring

- One-third of all under-five mortality occurs during the first month of life
- 20% of babies have low birth weight
- Pregnancies spaced less than two years apart result in double the infant deaths than longer intervals.

Impact of Maternal Death on Infants and Children

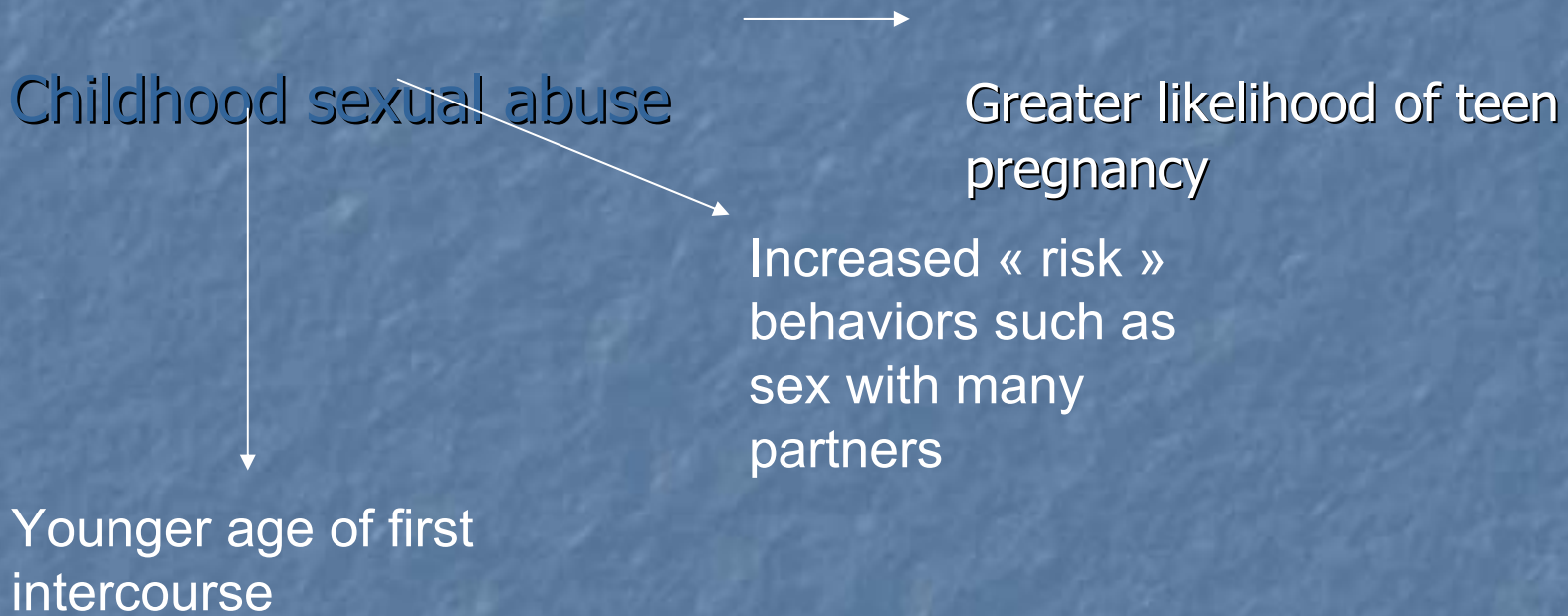
- Almost certain newborn death
- Two million children orphaned annually
- Increased probability of older children dying, especially daughters
- Increased probability of children's absenteeism from school

Violence against Women

Men rape within the marriage. Men believe that paying dowry means buying the wife, so they use her anyhow at all times. But no one talks about it.

- *Voices of the Poor*

Violence Contributes to Adolescent Pregnancy



Health Consequences of Abuse

Fatal Outcomes

- Homicide
- Suicide
- Maternal deaths
- AIDS-related deaths

Non-Fatal Outcomes

- Unwanted pregnancy
- Chronic pain syndrome
- Injury
- Depression
- Alcohol/Drug Use
- STDs/HIV
- Irritable bowel movement
- Gynecological disorders
- Low birth weight

Health and Nutrition Problems Affecting Women

Postreproductive years (45+ years)

- Cardiovascular diseases
- Gynecological cancers
- Osteoporosis
- Osteoarthritis
- Diabetes

Health and Nutrition Problems Affecting Women

Lifetime Health Problems

- Gender-based violence
- Certain occupational and environmental health hazards
- Depression

Lifecycle Perspective - Important

- Sexual abuse during childhood increases the likelihood of mental depression in later life.
- Repeated reproductive tract infections can lead to infertility.
- Girls fed inadequately during childhood may have stunted growth, leading to higher risks of childbirth complications.

Health Professional as a Change Agent

Bridge gap between health facility and household

- Reach beyond clinic or hospital with information and services
- Participate in dialogue with community on problems and issues
- Conduct audits of women's deaths which look beyond clinical causes

Health Professional as a Change Agent

Use influence beyond the health sector

Lobby for legislation and its enforcement to curb harmful practices such as

- Domestic violence, child marriage and gender bias

Urge government to increase education and employment opportunities for women

Health Professional as a Change Agent

Address social and cultural factors affecting women's use of health services

- Educate and involve family decision-makers, especially husbands
- Take into account constraints on transport, money and time
- Ensure adequate numbers of female health providers

Health Professional as a Change Agent

Promote women's right to essential services

- Prevention and management of unwanted pregnancies
- Safe pregnancy and delivery services
- Prevention and management of STDs and gynecological cancers

Health Professional as a Change Agent

- Promote essential interventions for behavior change
- Promotion of positive health practices
 - Safe sex
 - Adequate nutrition
 - Quality of care, including privacy and informed choice

Health Professional as a Change Agent

- Elimination of harmful practices
 - Young marriage and childbearing
 - Domestic violence, rape and female genital mutilation
 - Trafficking of girls and forced prostitution
 - Overuse/abuse of medical technologies, such as C-section, episiotomy