Gender, Women’s Health, Human Rights

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Sex, Gender (exercise)

- Women give birth to babies, men do not.

- Women suffer from pre-menstrual tension, men do not.

- Sex is not as important for women as it is for men.

- In ancient Egypt, men stayed at home and did weaving. Women inherited property and men did not.

- Men’s voices break at puberty, women's don't.
Sex, Gender

- **Sex** is the biological difference between males and females.

- **Gender** refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female in a particular social setting at a particular point in time.
A gender perspective involves:

- Looking at sex/gender disaggregated data
- Trying to interpret the meaning of differences (gender analysis)
- Taking the differences into account in planning research or programme interventions (gender sensitive)
Determinants of women’s health

- Biological characteristics
- Age/place in the life cycle
- Health related behaviour
- Economic status
- Educational attainment
- Political participation
- Public Policy
- Social-cultural-religious traditions of a women’s community
- Recognition of human rights of women
International recognition of human rights to health

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1946)
- ICCPR - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
- Equality of Rights Between Men and Women (Article 3), General Comment 28, ICCPR (2000)
- ICESCR - International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
- The Right to Health (Art.12), General Comment 14 (2000)
- Declaration of Alma Ata (1978)
- Special Rapporteur on the right to health (2002)
Human Rights:

- Are guaranteed by international standards
- Are legally protected
- Protect individuals and groups
- Obligate states and state actors
- Cannot be waived or taken away
- Are interdependent and interrelated
- Are universal
The right to health

- Availability
- Accessibility
- non discrimination
- physical accessibility
- affordability
- information accessibility
- Acceptability
- Quality
Women’s Health and Human Rights

- Women and Health, General Recommendation 24 (1999)
- International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994
- Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995
- International Conference on Population and Development + 5, New York 1999
Definition of women’s health

• Building on the definition of health in WHO’s Constitution, the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference for Women, Beijing, 1995, recognised that:

• "health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Women’s health involves their emotional, social and physical well-being and is determined by the social, political and economic context of their lives, as well as by biology."
Links between health and human rights

Examples of the links between Health and Human Rights

- Harmful traditional practices
- Torture
- Slavery
- Violence against women and children
- Human rights violations resulting in ill-health

- Right to health
- Right to education
- Right to food & nutrition
- Freedom from discrimination
- Reducing vulnerability to ill-health through human rights
- Promotion or violation of human rights through health development
- Right to participation
- Freedom from discrimination
- Right to information
- Right to privacy
**Health Consequences of Discrimination Against Women Throughout their Life Cycle**

**The Girl Child**
- Sex selective abortion
- Discriminatory feeding practices
- Less access to health care services than boys
- Female genital mutilation
- Child labour
- Environmental risks

**The Elderly Woman**
- Cumulative effects of lifelong discrimination
- Lack of pensions
- Disrespect, abandonment & neglect
- Discrimination & abuse in health care settings

**Lifetime Health Problems**
- Poverty
- Malnutrition and TB
- Physical & sexual violence
- HIV and AIDS
- Burden of household and family responsibilities
- Water and fuel collection

**The Adolescent Girl**
- Early marriage
- Premature pregnancy
- Lack of reproductive health services
- Unsafe abortions
- Suicide
- Eating disorders
- Targeted by tobacco advertisers

**The Woman During Her Productive and Reproductive Years**
- Discrimination in the workplace
- Exposure to health hazards at work
- Lack of access to contraceptives
- Maternal mortality
- Pregnancy-related health problems
- Intergenerational consequences of discrimination

**SOURCE:** Rights and Humanity, Ipswich, Suffolk, UK
with acknowledgement that this graphic was inspired by:
State Responsibility

- Respect
- Protect
- Fulfil
Progressive realization

• Progressive realization means that States have a specific and continuing obligation to move as expeditiously and effectively as possible towards the full realization of the right to health.
Indicators and benchmarks

- Measuring fulfilment of rights
- Provide a target to be achieved
- Help monitor the implementation
- Capturing states’ accountability
DR. AB works in the department of obstetrics and gynaecology of a regional hospital. Mrs. X was admitted to the hospital’s emergency room suffering from severe bleeding from the vagina. She was in her last month of pregnancy, and had six living children. Mrs. X was in a state of shock because of blood loss, and Dr. AB was called in to perform abdominal delivery, but Mrs X and the child died during the operation. Dr AB and a hospital colleague reviewed all of the procedures undertaken the hospital and the circumstances of the case. What more should Dr. AB do?

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• ICESCR, General Comment 14, The Right to Health, UN, ESCOR, 2000


• CEDAW, General Recommendation 24, Women and Health, UN GAOR, 1999


• World Conference on Human Rights, Declaration and Programme of Action, Vienna, June, 1993