Gender,
Women's Health,
Human Rights

Eszter Kismodi
RHR/FCH/WHO
X137
Tel: * 41 22 791 1470
E mail: kismodie@who.int
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.
Sex, Gender (exercise)
A gender perspective involves:

- Looking at sex disaggregated data
Reproductive ill-health accounts for substantial proportion of global burden of disease, 2001

% of young people reporting a coercive sexual experience

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Burden of Blindness in Men and Women

Women 64%
Men 36%

Mortality rate from Road Traffic Accidents, Worldwide, 2000—per 100,000 population
A gender perspective involves:

- Looking at sex disaggregated data
- Trying to interpret the meaning of differences (gender analysis)
Gender Analysis

- exposure, risk and vulnerability
- social-cultural-religious traditions
- social, economic status
- education
- health seeking behaviours
- the response of health systems and services
- the roles of health care providers
- access to health services
- ability to follow advised treatment
- political participation
- public policy
Higher prevalence of blindness among women: Why?

- Studies show that women have a higher biological predisposition to cataract than men, and a socio-cultural predisposition to trachoma (i.e. through child care activities, household environment etc).

- but, while these pre-dispositions to some diseases might explain a small portion of the sex difference in blindness rates, this difference is too small to account for the overall difference in prevalence.
Most likely explanation?

• Differential use of eye-care services due to differences in gender roles and behaviours.
• Studies have found distinct differences between men and women in surgical coverage across age groups.
• Differences in surgical coverage often due to factors such as gender norms, literacy levels, socio-economic status, marital status and other factors that have strong gender dimensions in many contexts.
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)
Programming and planning

• “The recent five year plans in Bangladesh emphasised empowering women. The Fifth five year Plan aims achieving the goal of equality between men and women. It has major thrust on integration of gender issues in the mainstream of development as supportive of macro objectives of poverty reduction, human resource development, closing the gender gap and establishment of social justice.” (Fifth Periodic Report of Bangladesh to CEDAW 2003)
The life span approach to women’s health

Environmental factors
- Poverty
  - habitat
  - education
  - environment
  - nutrition
- Unequal power relations
  - discrimination
  - coercion
  - decision-making
- War & civil instability

Women’s life span
- Pregnancy
- Birth
- Childhood
- Adolescence
- Productive and reproductive years
- Old age
The life span approach to women’s health

Environmental factors

- Poverty
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UNEQUAL POWER RELATIONS
- discrimination
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POVERTY
- habitat
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UNEQUAL POWER RELATIONS
- discrimination
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Old age
- neglect
- violence

War & Civil instability

Productive and reproductive years
- overwork
- poor access to health services
- marital rape
- lack of information
- lack of autonomy
  - financially
  - within family/country
- commercial sex
- lack of control over reproduction

Productive years
- overwork
- poor access to health services
- marital rape
- lack of information
- lack of autonomy
  - financially
  - within family/country
- commercial sex
- lack of control over reproduction

Reproductive years
- overwork
- poor access to health services
- marital rape
- lack of information
- lack of autonomy
  - financially
  - within family/country
- commercial sex
- lack of control over reproduction

Adolescence
- exploitation
- sexual abuse
- physical violence
- early marriage
- forced sex
- poor access
  - education
  - health services

Birth
- infanticide
- food allocation
- feticide

Childhood
- food restrictions
- abuse
- incest
- harmful traditional practices (FGM)
- child labour
- poor education

Pregnancy
- sex selection
- allocation
- feticide

Women’s life span

DEPARTMENT OF REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RESEARCH

DÉPARTEMENT SANTE ET RECHERCHE GÉNÉSIQUES
Definition of women’s health

• "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."

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:
International recognition of human rights related to women’s health

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1946)
- ICCPR - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)
- ICESCR - International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
- International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994
- Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995
Rights related to women’s health

- Right to health
- Right to be free from inhuman and degrading treatment
- Right to non-discrimination
- Right to liberty and security of the person
- Right to the benefits of scientific progress
- Right to privacy and confidentiality
- Right to information and education
- Right to marry and found a family
- Right to maternity protection
- Right to decide the number and spacing of one’s children
- Right to life and survival
- Women’s Health
What is a “rights-based” approach?

- A **conceptual framework** for the process of human development that is **normatively based** on international human rights standards, and **operationally directed** to promoting and protecting human rights.

- Integrates human rights **norms, standards and principles** into plans, policies and practices.
Why use a rights-based approach?

Governments have a legal obligation to:

- **Respect** rights - refrain from interfering with the enjoyment of rights e.g. withdrawing health care from specific populations

- **Protect** rights - prevent violations of human rights by third parties e.g. private companies, individual citizens (e.g. men who beat and abuse women)

- **Fulfill** rights - take appropriate governmental measures toward the full realisation of rights e.g. allocating resources for and setting in place quality health services
Rights-based approach: Accountability

- claim-holders ⊆ women

- duty-holders ⊆ government, private sector, service providers

- adequate laws, policies and practices ⊆ e.g. training of service providers, supplies and equipment for health services

- benchmarks for measuring progress ⊆ e.g. improvement in percentage of pregnant women having skilled care at delivery
Levels of application

• Laws and policies
  – formal recognition of midwives, policies to ensure that can practice adequately;
  – appropriate minimum age of marriage for young women (and young men);
  – provision of information on sexuality, contraception, etc.
  – resource allocation for essential medical care for entire population.
Levels of application

• **What services are offered**
  - Essential obstetric care; choice of family planning; STI prevention and treatment;
  - Services for women and men, married and unmarried, young and older people.

• **How services are offered**
  - Provider-client interaction: respect, protection of confidentiality, privacy, informed decision-making;
  - No discrimination on basis of social class, health status, etc.
Exercise
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