A Global Perspective on Women’s Health

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Key Factors Impacting Women’s Health

- Economic status
- Literacy
- Employment opportunities
- Urban vs. rural residence
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Country/region of residence
- Biological, social, and cultural factors
- Gender inequalities and the value society places on women
Key Demographic Facts

- Females comprise 52% of the world’s population

- World population growth is greatest in developing countries - where the majority of the world’s women live.

- Worldwide average life expectancy: 66.0 yrs for females, 62.7 yrs for males

Life expectancy of women (years) by country
Life Expectancy World Map

- Women tend to outlive men
- In many countries gender ratios become unequal

HIV has drastically lowered life expectancy in areas of Africa

Early Childhood Mortality World Map

Under-5 mortality rate (probability of dying by age 5) per 1000 live births, 2008

Least developed countries: 10% (1 in 10 children) dies before the age of 5

Source: World Health Organization Map Production: Public Health Information and GIS, WHO 2010
Early Childhood Mortality

• Major causes of death in childhood worldwide:
  - Respiratory Infection
  - Diarrhea
  - Malnutrition
  - Malaria
  - HIV/AIDS
  - Measles
  - Preventable, much more common in developing countries

• Typically girls are more likely to survive early childhood than boys.
  - Exceptions are China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, where girls are more likely to die than boys

• In some societies male children receive preferential treatment

• An estimated 100 million baby girls may be missing from the world
  - Due to female infanticide, sex-selective abortion, and neglect
  - When baby girls do not survive as long as baby boys, it may be a sign of gender-based discrimination
Currently worldwide maternal mortality rate:

• 260 deaths/100,000 live births

UN goal by year 2015:

• 213 deaths/100,000 live births

Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births), 2008

• 358,000 women die annually from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth:
  Hemorrhages, infections, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, and complications of unsafe abortions

Maternal Mortality: Causes and Prevention

- 99% of maternal deaths estimated to be preventable through:
  - family planning,
  - skilled attendant at deliveries,
  - timely emergency care for obstetric complications

- In developing countries, 40% of births occur in a health facility and 57% with a skilled birth attendant

- Family planning prevents unintended pregnancy and allows families to plan, space and time births
62% of women worldwide (married/in union) use a modern contraceptive

Developed countries: Short-acting, easily reversible contraceptive methods (BC pill) more common

Developing countries: Longer-acting methods (IUDs, sterilization) more common

An estimated 123 million women do not use contraception, 80 million women have unintended pregnancy each year, 60% end in abortion, often in unsafe conditions

Source: US Census Bureau International Statistics
The termination of an unintended pregnancy either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking the minimal medical standards, or both.

World Health Organization definition

- Over 19 million women have unsafe abortions annually
- Unsafe abortion cause 13% of maternal deaths
- Unsafe abortions can be reduced by:
  - Access to safe and effective contraception
  - Less restrictive abortion policies
  - Access to sex education
  - Availability of emergency contraception
Rates of Safe and Unsafe Abortions

Abortion Rates per 1,000 women aged 15-44

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>SAFE</th>
<th>UNSAFE</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORLD</td>
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</table>

- Nearly half of all abortions worldwide are unsafe
- Nearly all (97%) of unsafe abortions in developing countries
- Family Planning is therefore important for
  - Empowerment of women
  - Reduction of poverty
  - Improved maternal and infant health

• Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are transmitted from one person to another through sexual contact

• Globally 333 million new cases of STIs diagnosed each year

• STIs can cause serious risk for pregnant women and their fetuses
  — Can cause ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage, stillbirth, congenital infections, low birthweight, and newborn blindness
  — HIV and syphilis can be transmitted mother-to-child during pregnancy and delivery
  — Risk of acquiring/transmitting HIV increases with an untreated STI

• Infertility can be a long-lasting complication of STIs

**PREVENTION**: Education about safer sex, access to testing, early treatment, and countering stigma about STIs
HIV/AIDS Facts for Women

- Emerged in the human population in 1981
- 33.4 million people infected worldwide, 0.8% of the world’s adults
- 2.7 million new infections each year; infection rate is increasing fastest in women
- Half of the world’s population living with HIV/AIDS are women
- Over 1 million women die each year of HIV/AIDS
- Heterosexual sex is the mode of transmission for >80% of infections

### Share of HIV Infected Population That are Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>North America</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
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<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe/Central Asia</td>
<td>43%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle East/North Africa</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>53%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>50%</td>
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</table>

HIV Prevalence (% of Adult Population Infected) Worldwide

- 70% of people with HIV live in sub-Saharan Africa

Strategies of Prevention
- Microbicide vaginal gel
- Male circumcision
- Consistent condom use
- Treatment of other STIs

Source: UNAIDS, A Global View of HIV Infection, 2010
Tuberculosis (TB)

- One third of world infected, >900 million women and girls with TB worldwide

- 2.5 million will get sick, 1 million will die of disease each year

- Leading infectious disease killer of women

- TB more likely to be diagnosed later in women, and women are more likely than men to die of TB

- Stigma associated with diagnosis impacts quality of life

- Treatment of TB is difficult with multi-drug resistant forms
Malaria

• >250 million people affected annually, 1 million deaths

• Risks to pregnant women:
  — anemia, death in pregnant women
  — miscarriage, stillbirth, low birth-weight in the infant

• 125 million pregnancies occur annually in malaria endemic areas of the world

• Key to prevention and treatment:
  — encouraging use of insecticide-treated bed nets and
  — early diagnosis and treatment
Cancer

- Most common cancers in women: breast, cervical, lung, stomach, colorectal

- Breast cancer: leading cause of cancer deaths in women
  - 1 million new cases annually worldwide
  - Risk increases with age
  - Incidence varies by ethnicity and region

- Cervical cancer: second most common (493,000 new cases annually)
  - 85% of cases occur in low-income countries
  - Linked to Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection
  - Pap smear highly effective in early detection
  - HPV vaccine
Chronic Disease

- Chronic diseases are significant causes of death and disability in women, higher incidence in poorer women
  Contributing factors: Smoking, sedentary lifestyle, unhealthy diets

- Cardiovascular diseases are the leading causes of death in older women, often under-diagnosed

- Tobacco is implicated in nearly 10% of cardiovascular disease in women

- Prevalence of diabetes increasing: 122 million women worldwide have diabetes
Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Facts

- Some behaviors considered GBV: rape/attempted rate; domestic violence; infanticide of female infants; sex-selective abortion; trafficking of girls for slavery or prostitution; traditional cultural practices that may harm women/girls

- Risk factors for GBV:
  - Young age
  - Military presence in a country
  - War
  - Dislocation/displacement of populations
  - Certain cultural customs/traditions

- UN estimates that women ages 15 - 44 more likely to be injured or die from violence than from cancer, traffic accidents, malaria, and war combined
Women and Aging Facts

- Health in older age reflects genetics, environment, and lifetime living circumstances and experiences.
- 336 million women 60+ worldwide.
- Increased likelihood of poverty, depression, and lack of access to health care as women age.
- Longer life expectancy than men; widowhood often brings loss of income, social isolation.
- New responsibilities with aging - e.g., raising grandchildren.
Concluding Thoughts

• Remarkable gains in women’s health, and advances in prevention and treatment of women’s diseases in recent decades.

• However, preventive health care, family planning, and skilled obstetric care are not available to many women around the world.

• Wars, economic instability, and disease pandemics adversely impact women’s health.

• Key factors in improving women’s health: political will, provision of adequate resources, and women’s education.
Suggestions for Further Reading


Global Alliance for Women’s Health (GAWH). Key Facts on Women and Diabetes, Rev. 2-05.09, and Women, Diabetes and Development, 8 April 2008.


WHO, “Ageing and Health: A Framework for Action, Focus on Gender,” “TB is Single Biggest Killer of Young Women,” and “Women’s Health Fact Sheet”