

Forum:	United Nations Habitat (UN-Habitat)
Issue:	Achieving Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Care
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Introduction

The third sustainable development goal is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, and a large part of that goal is sexual and reproductive care. The fifth goal also pertains to this topic as reproductive rights are important when addressing gender equality for women and girls. There is a wide range of problems regarding sexual and reproductive health, but the main aspects are maternal and neonatal mortality, sexually transmitted diseases, and family planning. Many of these problems already have well-developed solutions, the most crucial being contraceptives. However, in many areas around the world, people do not have access to contraceptives and other reproductive care either because of their social and economic status or the general lack of health facilities. To combat these problems, measures must be taken to expand the reach of health care to all.

Definition of Key Terms

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The United Nations created 17 universal development goals in 2015 to be achieved by 2030. This topic is included in the third goal of ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all. Sexual and reproductive care is a human right as outlined by the United Nations.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Good sexual and reproductive is a state of complete, physical, mental, and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system. Reproductive health is related to women's rights regarding contraceptives, pregnancy, and childbirth. Sexual health includes both men and women such as sexual diseases and contraceptives. Developing education is important in improving the sexual health of young people; however, in many areas, sexual and reproductive health is a taboo subject that young people are not educated on because of religious and cultural norms.

Midwives

Midwives are trained health professionals who assist mothers and newborns through childbirth. Midwives may deliver babies at specialized birthing centers or make house calls. The use of midwives is often preferable as middle and low-income families may not have access to hospitals, and medical assistance greatly increases the chances of successful childbirth.

Unsafe Abortions

Unsafe abortion is the termination of pregnancy while lacking skilled professionals and minimal medical standards. These unsafe procedures are life-threatening and cause approximately 50,000 deaths annually. In many countries, abortion is outlawed and clinically assisted abortion is not available, forcing young women to attempt unsafe procedures. Likewise, abortion is still largely a culturally unaccepted procedure by older people and religious institutions, and some women will decide to not receive medical help in fear of social backlash.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)

HIV is the virus that attacks the immune system which causes death by Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). As of June 2019, 37.9 million people globally were living with HIV while only 24.5 million were accessing antiretroviral therapy (ARV). In the last 30 years since the beginning of the HIV epidemic, more than 60 million people have been infected, more than 25 million have died, and more than 16 million children have been orphaned by AIDS. HIV is common among those involved with sex trafficking, as well as young people in general. HIV is transmitted sexually but can often be prevented by using contraceptives such as condoms. While HIV is incurable as of 2020, proper treatment can allow individuals to live long and healthy lives. ARV requires regular checkups and medication, so federal insurance or specialized programs assist individuals in receiving treatment.

Maternal Mortality

Maternal mortality or maternal death is the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy. Complications causing death or disability include severe bleeding and infection, which happens much more frequently with women of low social and economic status because of the lack of health professionals and medical resources. Maternal mortality rates are one of the biggest indicators of a country's health care; census, surveys, models have been used to estimate levels of maternal mortality. Global and regional estimates of maternal mortality are developed every five years, using a regression model.

Neonatal Mortality

Neonatal deaths refer to the death of a baby during the first 28 days of its life. The neonatal period is divided into subparts such as early neonatal deaths (occurring during the first seven days of life) and late neonatal deaths, which is after the early period to the last day. During this period, mortality is used to indicate maternal and newborn health. Countries in conflict or LEDCs experience the highest rates of maternal and neonatal mortality today.

Contraceptives

Contraceptives prevent pregnancies by keeping a woman's ova (egg) and a man's sperm apart or preventing a fertilized egg from developing. Barrier methods such as condoms are the most crucial contraception globally as it is 98% successful in preventing pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STI), as well as being cheaper and more accessible. Other desired contraceptives are intrauterine devices (IUD), progestogen-only pills, vaginal rings, and permanent female and male vasectomies. Birth control methods should depend on several factors. includes health, frequency of sexual activity, number of partners and the desire to have children in the future.

Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP)

The Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) is a set of activities to manage and prevent situations such as sexual violence, a decrease in morbidity and mortality, reducing disease transmissions, and providing reproductive health services in the early stages of an emergency. MISP must be carried out in case of an emergency (such as sexual violence) by trained staff.

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-Based Violence is one of the most pressing human rights violations today. It is the violence against a person due to their gender. This issue mostly affects women and girls but it may also affect men and boys. Types of gender-based violence include sexual violence, domestic violence, forced and early marriages.

Central Medical Stores

Central Medical Stores is the center of a network of health commodities including medicines in the public sector. Its aim is to serve the public and to provide the public with preventative, curative, and diagnostic medicines that are of good quality, safe, and effective. It is overseen by the government and the distribution of the medicines is planned.

Millennium Development Goals

Millennium Development Goals consist of eight goals agreed by 191 member states of the UN at the start of the millennium. These goals include reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating diseases such as HIV and AIDs.

Universal Health Coverage

Universal health coverage is the concept that the government extends access to healthcare to all through legislation, regulation, and taxation. Some countries' healthcare is paid by tax revenue, while others use a mixed private and public system. Sexual and reproductive health is in most cases a necessity, and treatment costs are often covered by universal health care. The Universal Health Coverage system has several benefits - it lowers healthcare costs for an economy and it gets hospitals and doctors to provide the same standard of care at low cost. However, it also has many disadvantages such as people not being as careful with their health without financial incentives. Also, most universal health systems report long wait times for elective procedures. These disadvantages should be addressed before achieving universal health coverage to ensure healthy lives and the well-being of all around the world.

Social Barriers

Social barriers relate to the inequalities faced by people in society. These barriers are affected by the conditions where people are born, learn, work, which may contribute to their vulnerability to HIV and AIDs.

Background Information

Access to healthcare services

Contraceptives and other forms of sexual and reproductive care are vital to a person's health and well-being. Although infection rates worldwide have generally decreased, at least half of the world is unable to access healthcare services as there are several barriers that a country may face while addressing this issue. The barriers to health services include- expenses of care, inadequate or no insurance coverage, lack of available service, and the lack of culturally competent care. These barriers may eventually lead to consequences such as unmet health needs, delayed appropriate care, inability to get preventive services, and financial burdens. According to the WHO, half of the 800 million people worldwide spend at least 10 percent of their household income on healthcare for themselves or a sick child, leaving 100 million of them with about \$1.90 a day to live with. These numbers are mostly due to a lack of services in areas such as sub-Saharan Africa and southern Asia. Africa is the continent with the highest mortality rates and the place with the poorest health data. Although measures to aid sub-Saharan African countries have increased, healthcare still remains an issue due to the lack of

awareness and prioritization from sub-Saharan Africans. Therefore, we need to find ways to ensure all regions of the world gain access to healthcare services.

Family planning

Family planning can greatly help young couples or families improve their sexual health. Family planning centers employ health professionals that can provide couples with education on contraceptives and safe intercourse, as well as factors to consider when deciding whether to raise children or have an abortion. The existence of family planning centers decreases the chance of unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions as it serves as a safe place for mothers to consider different options. However, these centers are very forward-thinking and are often only found among higher-income areas, and the majority of women in the world do not receive professional help when making major decisions about their reproductive health. Even in places where these centers exist, they face a lot of conservative protests from people with more traditional and religious views, and social stigma may still prevent some people from going to these centers. Despite the protest, family planning should become more widespread and available, and with time will become a commonly used resource for sexual healthcare.

Distribution of medicines

It is important to ensure the public's accessibility to the medication. Therefore transportation should be efficient and organized. Also, there should be a minimum amount of supply system so that they coordinate themselves faster and with less confusion. By decreasing the number of supply systems, the diverse number of different stock management tools can decrease.

Social barriers

People (mostly women) face social barriers when attempting to access sexual health services, as sexual and reproductive matters is a traditionally taboo subject. Barriers to sexual healthcare can indicate the lack of independence women have, such as how 29 countries require the consent of a partner for a woman to be able to access sexual health services. This may also violate article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states, "no one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attack upon his honor and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks." In addition, this may also be troublesome as the victim may have been sexually assaulted and is unwilling to contact the abuser or may not know the information of the abuser.

Sexually transmitted diseases - HIV and AIDS

Role of NGOs

Approximately 36.7 million people in the world today are infected with HIV and AIDS. In the last 30 years since the beginning of the HIV epidemic, more than 60 million people have been infected, more than 25 million have died, and more than 16 million children have been orphaned. Today, there are numerous NGOs such as the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, the International AIDS Society, and UNAIDS that provide comprehensive healthcare and coordinated global action on the epidemic. Most LEDCs and rural areas lack healthcare. Therefore, governments should work with NGOs related to the issue in order to increase healthcare in those areas with regards to their financial plans.

Lack of awareness

Still to this day, many people are not educated about HIV and AIDS. It would be best if countries could work with the WHO when developing their national curriculum. However, cultural norms in some countries do not allow sex education to be implemented in their system. Which is why raising awareness on the issue would be a good start. It is crucial for all countries and cultures to know about STDs such as HIV and AIDS in order to solve this issue at hand.



Caption #2: Midwives deployed in rural Afghanistan

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

UNFPA

The United Nations Fund for Population Activities supports the reproductive rights and health of adolescents and mothers. It aims to ensure safe childbirth and that pregnancy is not forced. The UNFPA works in 150+ countries, giving access to contraceptives to 20 million women yearly and delivering safe

birth supplies to victims of natural disasters of conflicts. UNFPA is focused on increasing accessibility to medicine, especially for sexual and reproductive purposes.

UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS advocates for people to design and monitor solutions and responses to AIDS. They address legal and political barriers such as encouraging the reduction of prices for the medicine to make it accessible to all. However, UNAIDS does face some obstacles while responding to this issue, such as retention in HIV care, management of treatment failure, and prevention, detection and management of AIDS-related illness. UNAIDS should work with national and international partners to address these issues, which they have been doing since March of 2019 in Zimbabwe, where around 5.3 million people are estimated to be in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa generally have higher maternal mortality rates, reflecting on the lack of medical resources provided for pregnant mothers. A woman's lifetime risk of dying from pregnancy or childbirth is 1 in 39 in Sub-Saharan Africa compared to 1 in 4,700 in industrialized countries. Many of these countries provide free but not universal health care or no healthcare at all.

WHO

The World Health Organization is a part of the United Nations system, focused on developing international health and equity. WHO collects universal data on health, leads research on health crises, and assists medical help in areas in critical need for health care. The organization was founded in April 1948 and has been solving issues regarding enhancing treatment and solving health issues around the world.

Care Organization

Care is a non-governmental organization focused on women's health and human rights, especially in impoverished areas where women do not receive the proper sexual and reproductive care. Care recognizes that sexual and reproductive rights can be improved on with economic and social development, addressing the underlying systemic inequality on women's health rights.

International AIDS Society

Established in 1988, the IAS is one of the world's biggest organizations of HIV experts in more than 170 nations. The IAS works to promote works to diminish the effect of HIV. The IAS holds one of the

world's biggest HIV conferences such as the International AIDS Conference, the IAS Conference on HIV Science, and the HIV Research for Prevention Conference.

United States of America (USA)

The United States of America is a dominant example of a country that does not have a universal healthcare program. Although the United States offers equal access to healthcare, improved public health, and a system that solves medical bankruptcy, there are a few downsides to their system. If one were to be uninsured or under-insured, one may be limited in the health services which they have access to. Also, if one were to lose their job, they may lose their insurance coverage as most people get insurance through their jobs. However, the biggest problem of all is the price of US healthcare. Medical care in the US is one of the most expensive in the world - which means that healthcare for certain low income or jobless people may not be ensured.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1970	Family Planning Services & Population Research Act is established in the US, providing family planning services for those in need.
June 1981	The first cases of AIDS are reported in the US, initiating the HIV pandemic. Early cases were often homosexual men involved with drugs, but later cases included women who contracted HIV from such men.
1982	The US Centre for Disease Control recognizes AIDS as a disease.
1985	The first International AIDS Conference is held in Atlanta, hosted by the US & the WHO.
February 1987	The Special Programme on AIDS launched by the WHO aims to raise awareness and conduct research on the AIDS pandemic.
1987	The first antiretroviral medication for HIV becomes available.
1995	The Fourth World Conference on Women takes place in Beijing, highlighting the right to equal access to and equal treatment of women and men in education and healthcare as well as enhancing women's sexual and reproductive health and education.

Relevant UN Resolutions and Treaties

- Constitution of the WHO, 1948

- Human Rights Council Resolution on Access to Medicines in the Context of the Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental health, 30 June 2016, (A/RES/32/L.23/Rev.1)
- Fact Sheet No.31 on The Right to Health by UNHCR, June 2009
- Report on Fertility, Reproductive Health and Development, 16 April 2011 (E/CN.9/2011/8)
- Joint United Nations Programme on Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, 26 July 2001 (E/2001/23)
- The Right of Everyone to the Enjoyment of the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health, 13 September 2006 (A/61/338) *chapter 2 is on maternal mortality

Possible Solutions

Many people today, especially women, face social barriers when accessing sexual health services. **One solution could be reducing the cost barriers that women face.** Since 1995, the cost of contraceptives such as implants, shots, IUD, and etc have increased. Cost should not be a barrier, especially for women living in rural areas. Clinics or the government around the world should provide low cost or free birth control and family planning services to low-income women.

Another social barrier women face is due to the lack of independence women face. Countries require parental consent or the consent of a partner to purchase sexual health services. This is problematic because young adults or children that have been sexually abused may be reluctant to seek help because parental consent is required prior to accessing services. **Countries could work towards changing their laws concerning requiring parental or spousal consent when accessing sexual health services.** Nations could carry this out through the support of UNAIDS and the WHO. There should be easier access to services to every age and there should also be the provision of basic contraceptive methods and emergency contraception.

Safe pregnancies and childbirth depend on sufficient numbers of trained healthcare workers and adequate facilities for providing essential and emergency care. Therefore, **comprehensive, high-quality reproductive health care requires protection, nutrition, education, and community services.** There should also be research and data collection updates on numbers of people infected by HIV and AIDs and the public should be aware of the risks as well. Educating the public is key. People should be educated on emergencies, family planning, comprehensive abortion care, prenatal care, skilled childbirth care, and postnatal care for the mother and the baby. Communities can also contribute by being the first responders by being educated on the type of care a pregnant woman may need. This can also be done by informing the public about Minimum Initial Service Packages which are the minimum set of priority activities for decreasing morbidity and disability in crisis-affected populations. In addition, midwives,

especially in rural areas should be thoroughly trained for higher chances of successful childbirth. Safe pregnancies and childbirth depend on numbers of trained healthcare workers and adequate facilities for providing essential and emergency care.

Although sexual education should be mandatory, there are still parts of the world where it is not. This may be due to cultural norms in some countries. However, **through an evidence-based education program, countries and cultures could be more aware of the issue overall.** All nations should educate the public and raise awareness on this issue through supporting school programs that feature the risks, symptoms, how one could be infected, how the disease could lead to death, and etc. In addition, nations should increase awareness through campaigns and news sources.

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