



**Debating and defining the
global right to reproductive
healthcare**



CSW

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Forum: The Commission on the Status of Women

Issue: Debating and defining the global right to reproductive healthcare

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Introduction

Every day around 800 women and girls pass away worldwide as a result of preventable complications with pregnancies. This is due to the fact that women all over the world are still being deprived of basic human rights, such as Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR). This mostly happens in lower-income countries or countries at war, but not only there. Unfortunately, it also still happens in richer Western countries.

Some reasons that women and girls aren't able to get the resources needed such as contraception, that they need can be sexuality, race, religion or even (lack of) wealth. Lots of women simply can't afford proper healthcare or contraception. A result of the lack of these facilities and products lead to unwanted pregnancies.

As a result of those unwanted pregnancies, a lot of women and girls are dropping out of school and not getting good job opportunities, making their futures less bright because of something females cannot control.

Over the last few years, access to healthcare and contraception has declined in some wealthier and more developed regions, like certain states of the USA, where abortion has been outlawed and is seen as a crime or even as murder. These bans have led to an increase in the number of maternal deaths in the USA, a MEDC. It also takes away a basic human right that is needed since an estimated one in four pregnancies ends in an abortion.

To lower the abortion numbers, there are multiple factors to take in consideration. One of those being education. More women die in places where they don't get educated about their bodies and the things that their bodies need. That is why giving classes in countries worldwide may help young girls know what to do with their own reproductive organs and body.

Not discussing this matter would lead to the mortality numbers rising again in LEDC's.

Definition of key Terms

Contraception

Artificial methods and techniques to prevent pregnancies during sexual intercourse such as the pill, condoms and IUDs. It is also known as birth control. Not all methods of contraception have been proven to be as effective. These ineffective methods being methods such as coïtus interruptus.

Contraceptive

This more specific form of contraception that focuses on the semen not reaching the ovum (egg produced in a woman's ovaries). There are four types, barriers (condoms, diaphragm), oral contraceptive (the pill), vaginal rings and lastly tubal ligation and vasectomy.

LEDC

LEDC is abbreviation for Less Economically Developed Country. This means that the economical state of this country is not as developed as MEDCs. These are countries that are still developing and relatively poor. There are 45 countries declared a LEDC by the UN, such as Afghanistan Chad and Congo.

Maternal deaths

Maternal deaths are deaths that happen because of the bearing or birthing of a child or the termination of such pregnancy. It is declared a maternal death when the passing away of a female takes places during the length of a pregnancy, during or because of the birth of a child or within forty-two days after the termination of a pregnancy.

MEDC

MEDC stands for More Economically Developed Country, these are the relatively richer and more developed countries. The economy is well developed, and the habitants of such countries have a higher life expectancy and better access to education and health care. Some examples of MEDCs are Canada, United States and all countries in Europe.

Period poverty

The lack of access to safe and hygienic products needed for menstruation and the inaccessibility to basic sanitation and facilities regarding menstruation such as education on the matter. The period poverty rates are the highest in countries that fall under the LEDCs.

Unsafe abortion

Unsafe abortions are defined by the WHO (World Health Organisation) as *“a procedure for terminating an unintended pregnancy carried out either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment that does not conform to minimal medical standards or both.”*

General overview

This issue is not a recent problem, it has been a problematic topic for centuries.

Ancient texts show that women have used birth control and abortions for at least 4000 years. This was never an issue in any country and most religions. even though a lot of religions did see it as an act against humanity, these said religions did not make an issue out of it. Christianity did see the termination of a pregnancy, when not necessary for the safety of a woman, as immoral. Not because of the foetus dying, but because the mother was at risk. If the woman did die during the procedure, she would go to hell. The Christians thought that because the procedure was voluntary, and thus considered as suicide, which was prohibited by the Bible. But after the Hippocratic oath, that aspiring doctors had to take if they wanted to become a doctor, which states: *“I will give no deadly medicine to anyone if asked, nor suggest any such counsel; and in like manner I will not give to a woman a pessary to produce abortion.”* doctors were too scared to offer the option of abortion unless the mother was at risk. This mostly happened in Western countries, as in Eastern countries the doctors and medical workers were not scared to offer the procedure and discuss it.

Now abortions were limited, and most women were forced to have kids and were seen as a breeding machine for their husbands. In the 19th century, women started protesting since many families moved to the city, and there was less space for big families. Women then also wanted to be able to choose when they would be intimate with their partners and when and under what circumstances they wanted children. Lots of protests took place and women wanted to be heard and have more options. Planned Parenthood was introduced. By the 1970s abortion was seen as a way to help women, as now girls can achieve their dreams too.

This issue is about finding the right balance in giving women rights that work in every country, no matter the size or economic state, this is of course no easy task. Globally the rights are now very different based on religion, race, wealth, and other factors. Looking at LEDCs in the Middle East, the situation is very different from that in countries in the west of Europe. For example, in the Middle East and Africa, Women and girls experience a lot of period poverty, but in Scotland, period products such as pads and tampons are free now. Not being able to afford these products leads to one in five girls staying home from work or school during their menstruation even in wealthy

countries such as the United States of America. Menstruation and a woman's cycle are taboo in a lot of countries, which is why a lot of people, not only males, are not educated on the basic facts of biology and a lot of girls don't even know what a period is before and after menstruating for the first time.

Not only is the situation on periods different in countries but so are abortions rights. Both countries in the East and West have taken the safe option of this procedure away from females. Even though, as stated before, one in four pregnancies end in an abortion, that is 25 percent. Seeing that fact, abortion could be seen as a common need for women, even though the procedure is still illegal in some countries. This leads to women doing at-home, unsafe abortions, or even at clinics that pretend to offer a safe version of the procedure. Outlawing the procedure does not mean it will stop it from happening. The abortion rate is 37 per 1000 people in countries that prohibit it or only allow it to save the mother's life and 34 per 1000 in countries that do allow it. This is not a big difference. The difference is that in countries where it is (partially) prohibited, women are at risk of having an unsafe abortion, while it is seen as one of the safest medical procedures when done right by professionals in sanitary conditions. The WHO says that these unsafe abortions are the third leading cause of maternal deaths worldwide and lead to five million largely preventable disabilities. On the brighter side, there has been progress made in this field. The maternal death rate has been going down, but it is still a lot.

Not only do women die, but unborn fetuses and infants die too because the mother does not get the medical help she needs during the pregnancy, such as tests and medicine. A lot of babies also do not get the care they need after birth, such as vaccinations and medical help. It is estimated that one percent of all pregnancy in the United States end in a foetal death or stillbirth, this is when a foetus dies after twenty weeks during the pregnancies but before it is born. And around twenty-seven percent of newborns pass away during their first year of life. The main cause is prematurity or low birth weight.

In the year 2020, one year into the pandemic, around 12 million women lost their right to contraception. This led to 1.4 million accidental, unwanted pregnancies across 115 low- and middle-income countries. These statistics show how big the problem is in LEDCs. Post pandemic the situation in these countries is still a big problem. Women in those countries do not have access to recourses such as education and contraception.

To this day, in the year 2023, this issue is still a big and active problem in our society. Women cannot get the medical attention they need. They experience discrimination. not addressing

this issue will lead to more women, children, and even infants dying for reasons they cannot control, such as skin colour or the economical state of the country they are living in.

Timeline of Key Events:

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| 1847 | Male doctors came together to create the AMA, which turned into the male authority of medical practises. The AMA consisted of males with no expertise in the female reproductive organs. |
| 1855 | The first rubber condom was created after the invention of latex. |
| March 3, 1873 | US Congress passed the Comstock law, which made them the only rich Western nation to criminalize birth control. |
| 1886 | The first commercially manufactured birth control suppository was created. |
| 16 October 1916 | Margaret Sanger opened her first birth control clinic, which was shut down by authorities 9 days later and Sanger got arrested. She chose Jail time over paying a fine. This led to a lot of media attention to her practices and women's right to birth control. |
| 1921 | Margaret Sanger created the American Birth Control League, the precursor of the Planned Parent Federation of America. |
| 1923 | Margaret Sanger opened the first legal birth control clinic but only used contraceptives for life-threatening pregnancies. |

1929	As a result of a breakthrough in reproductive biology, the first pregnancy test is invented.
1930s	During the Great Depression, companies that wanted to sell contraceptives but were not allowed to by law started selling them with the label “feminine hygiene”. Women now solely relied on fake advertised forms of birth control such as a popular product: Lysol Douche.
1952	The third International Planned Parenthood conference took place, where the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) was founded.
1960	Approval of oral birth control for women (The Pill) by the FDA.
1975	The first World Conference for women took place in Mexico City.
1995	World Conference for Women took place in Beijing
May 2019	Nine states in the USA have passed bills to limit the abortion procedure.

Major parties involved

The AMA

The Ama was founded in 1847 by male doctors in America, as stated before. They gave themselves the authority of medical practices. They scrutinized Reproductive healthcare workers such as midwives and nurses causing their practises to be phased out. On top of that the AMA believed they were the ones who could decide when abortion was necessary, even though the AMA was mostly physicians who lacked knowledge on pregnancies and reproductive health. Members started a criminalization campaign against abortion and female abortion providers which led to the

ban of abortion. Currently, the AMA states to support the fact that women should have the right to have abortion as an option during pregnancy.

Ippf

Founded in 1952, the IPPF, International Planned Parenthood Federation, uses volunteerism to bring education regarding sexual and reproductive health, provision of contraceptives, maternal care, safe abortions and responses to humanitarian crises. This organisation has established local networks with 150 member associations (MA) in over 146 countries all over the world and bring all these values to being regardless of age, race, gender, income or location. With six regional offices in Nairobi, Colombia, Trinidad, Tobago, Tunis, Kuala Lumpur, Brussels and Bangkok and a sub-office in Delhi. the Ippf were granted consultative status with the WHO (World Health Organization) and established the first international family planning conference in Latin America. IPPF became the first international organization with the community-based distribution of contraceptives. The group Ippf was awarded the United Nations Population Award. The Ippf launched the charter on sexual and reproductive rights in 1996.

South Sudan

South Sudan has the highest number of maternal deaths, with around 1223 per 100.000 live births. They recognize the historic inequalities between men and women but have promised with the Transitional Constitution and Bill of Rights from 2011 that equality between males and females is guaranteed. Since South Sudan is an Islamic state, induced abortion is a crime, except when it is to save the mother's life. To control this, there are lots of policemen outside of maternity wards in public hospitals. This way many unmarried women seeking help after complications from an illegal abortion cannot get the help needed, therefore putting themselves at risk of either passing away or being arrested if they go to said hospitals. Many doctors disobey state policy, in honour of the Hippocratic oath, and refrain from reporting these cases to authorities to protect unmarried and vulnerable women.

UK

The United Kingdom has a long history of promoting and fighting reproductive rights for women. The new Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Women & Girls Strategy is a good chance for the UK government to continue its legacy by putting reproductive choice at the heart of its plans for global gender equality. The UK is determined to work with other nations to put an end to preventable deaths for mothers, children, and infants by the year 20230. The United Kingdom

realized this problem is now bigger than ever after the COVID-19 pandemic which, as stated before, affected millions of females.

USA

In America, abortion was not outlawed until the mid-1800s, before that it was a part of normal life for women. The procedure was almost always performed by women, males were barely involved in female reproductive healthcare. Half of the women undergoing abortion were black, most of them enslaved. They did not want their children to be born in slavery or did not want to carry their boss's child. Keeping in mind the unproblematic history of this issue, the opinion about abortion has changed in the country of America over the last centuries. In recent years, multiple states have banned abortion, taking away the option of a safe way to abort unwanted pregnancies. The USA does state to support birth control and planned parenthood.

WHI

The WHI, Women's Health Initiative is a health study funded by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI). The study started at the beginning of the 1990s and concluded. After that the WHI has done follow up studies. The original study focussed mainly on cardiovascular disease, cancers and osteoporotic fractures. The WHI continue to focus on ways to prevent major death causes or causes of other problems.

Previous attempts to resolve the issue

There have been several conferences in the last decades to solve the issue at hand. The most recent one being the wd2023 that took place in July 2023. This was the largest conference on health, rights and well-being of girls and women in the world It took place in Kigali, Rwanda. But the most important conference was the one in Beijing in the year 1995. This conference was a significant turning point for the global gender equality agenda. This agenda is still relevant and unfinished.

In Scotland the government has tried to better the problem by making period products free for all women and girls. This led to schools having to offer productions to their students and fewer girls missing school because they were menstruating.

Possible solution

Any possible solution would first need to recognize the need for the right of reproductive healthcare as a basic human right. All solutions for this problem consist of multiple things to take into consideration: education, inaccessibility, funding and religion.

Education

The main problem is that lots of females and governments are not educated enough to know about the topic and what to do with it. If there are things such as educational campaigns, lectures and classes, people, especially women and girls, know what their bodies need and how to get it.

Inaccessibility

There are multiple reasons a woman does not have access to the services, products or medical help she needs. For example, race, religion or money. Tackling that part of this problem will help progress being made.

Religion

A lot of religions don't allow abortion. This will probably not change, that is why considering this is hard but very important as a lot of countries have one religion throughout the whole nation.

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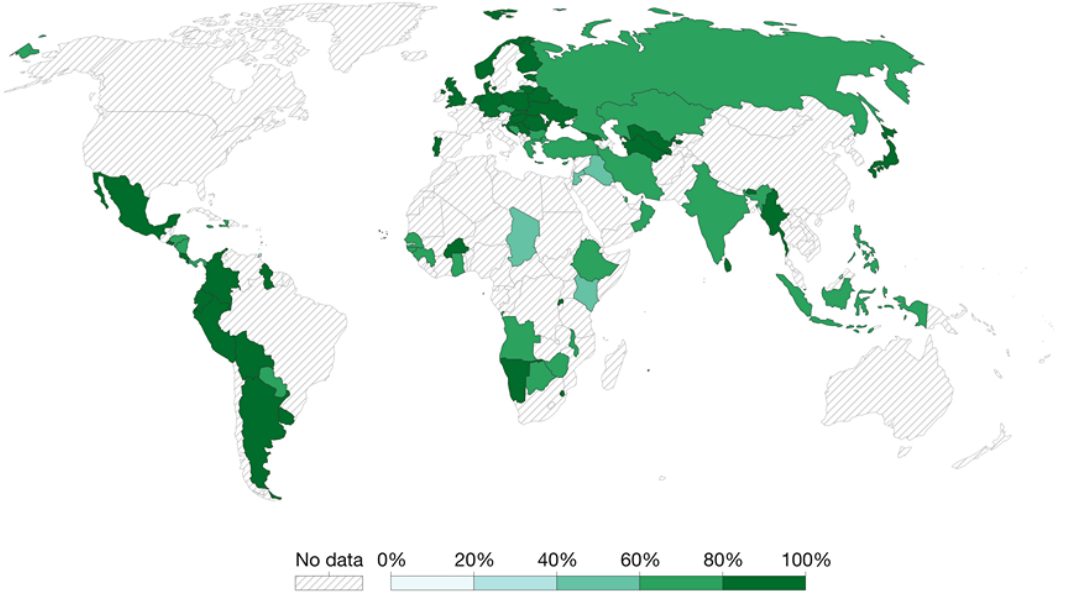
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Access to sexual health care and education, 2022



Extent to which countries have laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education. Measured using an index of specific legal enablers and barriers for 13 sexual and reproductive health indicators covering: maternity care, contraception and family planning, comprehensive sexuality education, HIV and HPV.



Source: Data from multiple sources compiled by the UN

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