

Committee: Human Rights Council

Topic: Ensuring Female Reproductive and Maternal Health

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I. Introduction

214 million women of reproductive age in developing countries who want to avoid pregnancy are not using modern contraceptive methods, hence having unwanted pregnancies that are a potential health risk and or the family can not afford another child. However, women's voices have been overlooked regarding the issue of family planning around the globe. An underlying discrimination against women is at the heart of this issue. Therefore, tackling this issue is an important first step in empowering women since it is a key obstacle holding women back. Access to family planning in the form of contraceptives is a health issue that has the potential to combat poverty and all the social, economic and political problems that come along with it. This is not an issue of only women empowerment, but also socioeconomic. By empowering women to plan their pregnancies, they are able to control the amount of children they have which leads to more economic stability and better standard of living, as well as development of communities.

200 million women want but can not get access to family planning. 40 million women still give birth without any assistance. Pregnancy is the number one killer of teenage girls worldwide, and contraceptives have been shown to reduce the number of women dying in childbirth by a third. In the poorest 69 countries in the world, this issue is linked to poverty that produces diseases and chronic political and economic instability. Because women in many parts of the world do not have access to voluntary family planning in the form of contraceptives, they are forced to give birth when they are too young, too old, too unhealthy or too often for their bodies to handle. Also, being able to space births by 3 years gives a newborn 50% more chance of survival, and they are 35% more likely to live until 5. Birth assistance also reduces maternal and infant mortality.

Extensive studies have shown that everyone in the family is better off when women are able to space and time their pregnancies. Unplanned pregnancies among people already facing extreme poverty can have devastating consequences on women's health and on existing children. When pregnancies are planned the entire family is generally more healthy and economically more able to survive. In the last 50 years no country has emerged from poverty without expanding access to contraceptives. So family planning has the potential to reduce and even end poverty. It is also a key to empowering women because it is a major barrier holding women back. And limits put on women are at the center of poverty.

II. Definition of Key Terms

a) Contraceptives

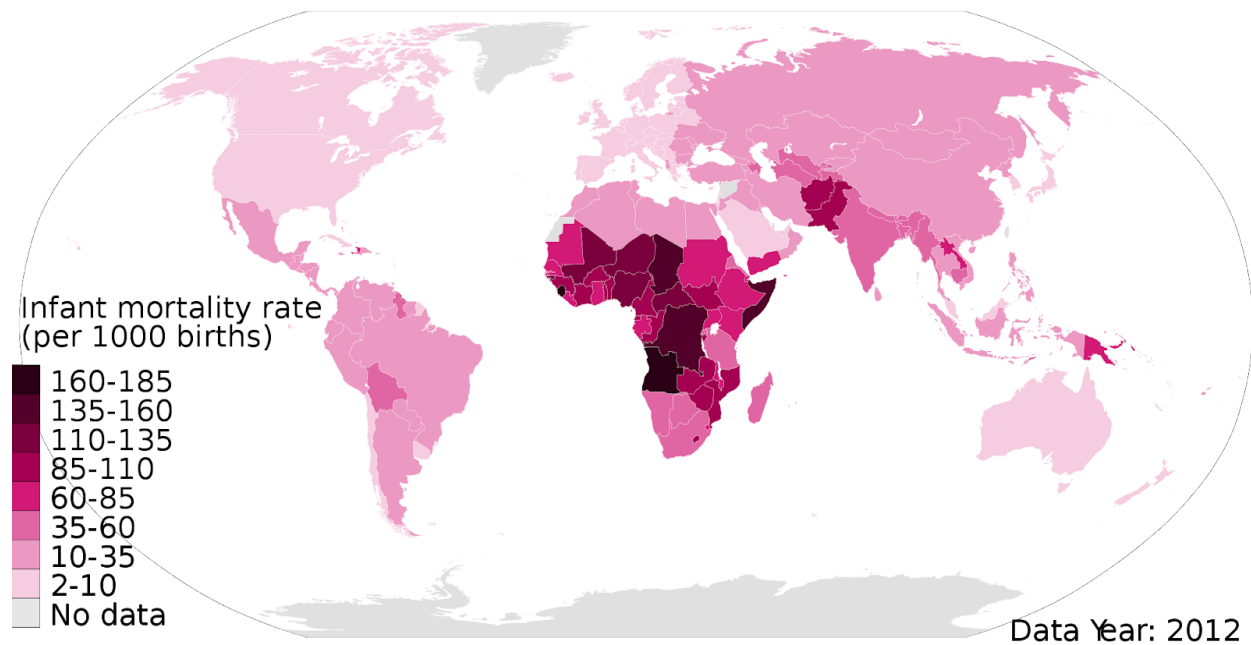
Prevents pregnancy by interfering with the normal process of ovulation, fertilization, and implantation.

b) Family Planning

Allows individuals and couples to anticipate and attain their desired number of children and the space and time their births. It is achieved by using contraceptive methods.

c) Infant Mortality

The death of young children under the age of 1.



d) Birth Assistance

When there is an experienced health worker or doctor present to deliver the baby.

e) Depo-Provera

Contraceptive injection for woman that lasts for 3 months.

f) Unsafe Abortion

The termination of a pregnancy by people lacking the necessary skills, or in an environment lacking minimal medical standards, or both; unsafe abortion is a life-threatening procedure.

g) Sexual Health

The World Health Organisation states that good sexual health means that both parties have consentually agreed upon act and carry it out respectfully, free of violence; in order to avoid consequences such as infections like HIV or sexual violence.

h) Sexual Violence

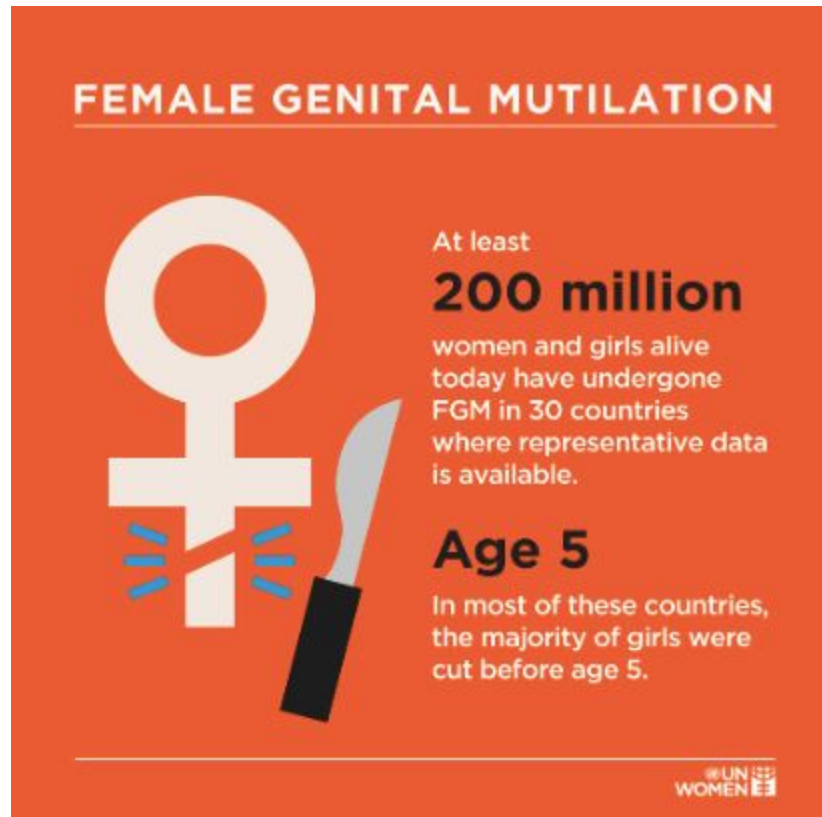
Any sexual act that is not wanted and or consensual; forced sexual acts.

i) HIV

A virus that damages the immune system and is transmitted the sexual acts.

j) Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. FGM has no health benefits for girls and women and can cause severe bleeding, urination issues, cysts, infections, as well as complications during childbirth in addition to an increased risk of newborn death.



III. General Overview

a) UN activity relating to Female Reproductive Health

i) The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Decided upon at the United Nations General Assembly of 2015, aim to address and solve some of the most pressing global issues in the following 15 years. Relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), the SDGs incorporate a variety of relevant goals and targets linked to health and education, as well as gender equality. The goals include: having accessible sexual and reproductive health services, comprehensive sexual reproduction and having the ability to make decisions about one's own health.

ii) UNWOMEN

Assists and supports UN Member States to achieve global standards for gender equality by working with Governments and civil society to create laws and programmes, as well as services that ensure a better standard of living for women and girls.

iii) The United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency (UNFPA)

Aims to make pregnancy an option and not forced due to lack of awareness. Furthermore they aim to make every childbirth safe. The UNFPA supports access to a wide range of sexual health services, including voluntary family planning, maternal healthcare and comprehensive sexuality education. It also calls for the realization of reproductive rights for all.

iv) The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)

ICPD emphasizes that reproductive rights are not a new set of rights, however they are a constellation of freedoms and entitlements that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights instruments and other consensus documents. Reproductive rights refer to a diversity of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights affecting the sexual and reproductive life of individuals and couples respectively.

b) Reproductive Health

Adequate sexual and reproductive health/care indicates complete physical, mental and social well-being in all areas relating to the reproductive system. It implies that people have a safe sex life and the freedom to decide whether or not to have children or sex. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Sexual health-related issues are wide-ranging and include:

i) Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

More than 1 million sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are transmitted everyday worldwide. Infections with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and reproductive tract infections (RTIs) can all lead to serious medical issues such as infertility and cancer and can strain the victim drastically. In 2016 988 000 pregnant women were infected with syphilis, resulting in over 200 000 stillbirths and newborn deaths since STIs can also be transmitted from the mother to baby.

ii) Unintended pregnancy and unsafe abortion

Unintended pregnancy and unsafe abortion methods are common, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Having unplanned pregnancies can not only put a strain on families financially but the mother physically as maybe she has already had many children and did not receive proper medical care; hence pregnancies become more high risk both for the newborn and mother. Unsafe abortion also has many health risks for women namely the risk of infection, hemorrhaging and injury to internal organs.

iii) Sexual Violence

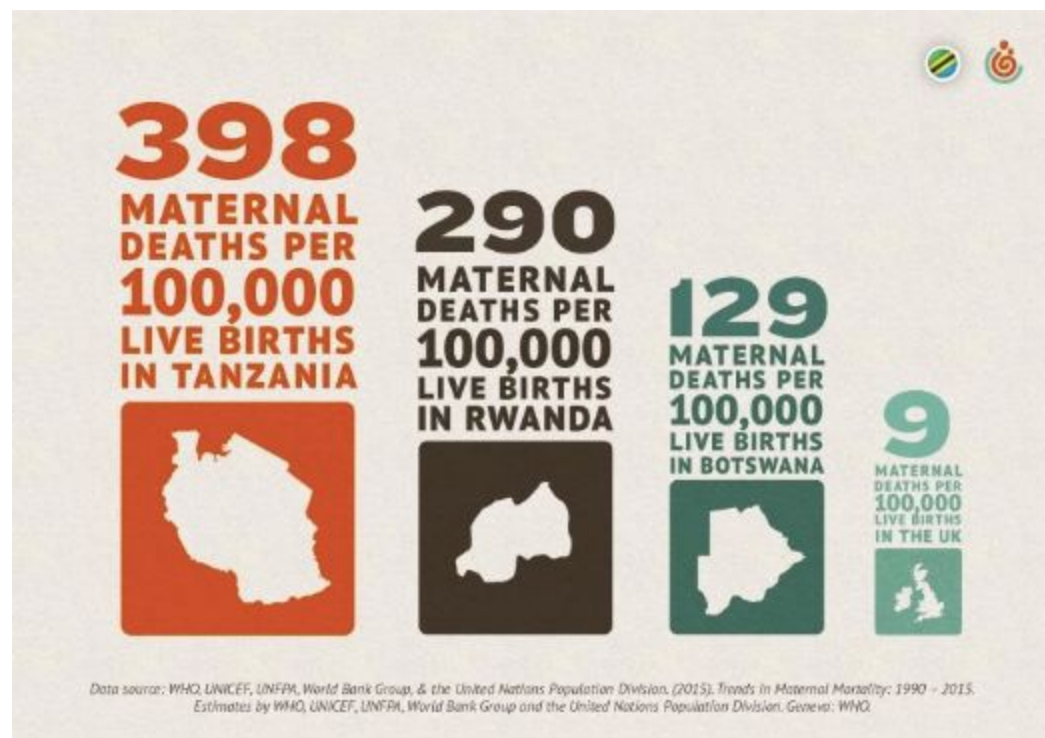
According to a study done by UNWOMEN, 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence by a non-partner or an intimate partner at some point in their lives.

iv) Harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Studies collected by UNWOMEN show that at least 200 million women and girls aged 15-49 have undergone female genital mutilation in 30 different countries. In most of these countries, the majority of girls were cut before age five. More than 20 million women and girls in just seven countries (Egypt, Sudan, Guinea, Djibouti, Kenya, Yemen and Nigeria) have undergone female genital mutilation by a health care provider.

c) Maternal Health

The health of mothers and children is a key indicator of general health in all countries. Pregnant women, infants and small children are more vulnerable to infections and other health risks. They are also typically the most dependent and weakest members of any society, and thus need support and advocacy. In the Millennium Development Goal 5, a target was set to improve maternal health, and reduce maternal mortality by 75%, additionally to achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015. Despite significant declines, MDG 5a was not met. Progress in reducing maternal mortality in developing countries and services providing contraceptives were insufficient. Hence why, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a renewed opportunity to see improvements in maternal health for all women, and reach targets not met previously. Every day of 2017, approximately 810 women died from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth, almost all in low or middle income countries. This figure would have been significantly lower if women had access to skilled birth attendants before and after childbirth.



IV. Major Parties Involved and their Views

a) The United Nations

The United Nations has several agencies such as the UNFPA, UNWOMEN, ICDP that are working with governments and in collaboration with NGOs in order to ensure all women have access to sexual and reproductive care and services.

b) Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

See Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Website to find out about all the various work they are doing about the issue.

<https://www.gatesfoundation.org>

c) Kenya

Kenya is a country that struggles with widespread FGM practices and a large disparity of health service quality. In the country, “the wealthiest women are four times as likely to deliver in a health facility and with a skilled birth attendant”. In general, health facilities that are available to the public lack basic infrastructure such as running water and electricity.

d) CARE

CARE is a non-governmental organization dedicated to addressing various issues around the world. Their Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights team “works to reduce maternal and newborn mortality and improve health outcomes by increasing the quality, responsiveness and equity of health services” and advocates for better sexual and reproductive health policies around the world.

V. Relevant United Nations Documents

a) [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Woman \(CEDAW\)](#)

Often Described as an international bill of rights for women, this convention defines what constitutes discrimination against women and establishes a framework for erradicating such discrimination.

b) [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action \(PFA\) 1995](#)

c) [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

This Declaration outlines the basic rights attributed to all humans.

VI. Questions to Consider

- Should sexual and reproductive health be taught in comprehensive education, if so how will the government implement this?
- Should all women have access to contraception methods, if so how will they have access to these?
- Should practices such as FGM continue and be legal?
- How can governments stop such practices?
- What services can be offered by governments in order to ensure maternal health?
- What regulations should be put in place in order to ensure good sexual health for women?

VII. Conclusion

The issue of female reproductive and maternal health is one that has been prevalent through the decades, and with an ever growing fight for women's rights and gender equality, the fight for improved reproductive and maternal health is only gaining traction. Now is the time to act as an international community and implement policies worldwide.

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