

Forum: UN Commission on the Status of Women

Issue: Developing measures to safeguard access to reproductive healthcare for women

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Introduction

The issue of developing measures to safeguard access to reproductive healthcare for women is of utmost importance in promoting gender equality and ensuring women's rights to health and well-being. Access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare services, including family planning, maternal healthcare, safe abortion, and prevention of reproductive health conditions, is crucial for women to exercise control over their bodies, make informed decisions about their reproductive health, and lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

Throughout history, efforts have been made through international conferences, such as the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), to develop measures to safeguard women's reproductive healthcare access. In 1994, ICPD played a crucial role in recognizing reproductive health as a fundamental human right and highlighting the importance of empowering women in decision-making regarding their reproductive choices.

However, despite the progress, challenges persist in ensuring equal access to reproductive healthcare for women worldwide. Barriers such as cultural norms, lack of comprehensive education, and gender-based discrimination hinder women's ability to exercise their reproductive rights. As a result, these difficulties have often put women at risk.

Definition of Key Terms

Reproductive Healthcare

Reproductive healthcare refers to the services, education, and information related to reproductive system health, including family planning, prenatal care, maternity services, and prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding means taking protective measures to prevent harm or ensure safety. \

Cultural norms

Cultural norms mean the shared beliefs, values, customs, traditions, and practices that are prevalent within a particular society or community.

Reproductive rights

Reproductive rights are the fundamental rights of individuals to make autonomous decisions about their reproductive health, including the right to access reproductive healthcare services, choose the number and spacing of children, and make decisions regarding contraception, safe abortion, and maternity care.

Background:

The recognition of reproductive healthcare as a fundamental right for women has evolved over time. Various historical events and international agreements have shaped the understanding and importance of access to reproductive healthcare. Understanding the topic's history provides a context for the current challenges and discussions surrounding reproductive healthcare.

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 was a significant milestone in highlighting the importance of reproductive health and rights. The ICPD Programme of Action emphasized universal access to reproductive healthcare services, including family planning and safe abortion. It recognized that women's ability to make choices about their reproductive health is closely linked to their empowerment and overall development.

Following the ICPD, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, further emphasized the need for gender equality in accessing healthcare services, including reproductive healthcare. It called for the removal of barriers that hinder women's access to reproductive health services and the elimination of violence and discrimination against women in this context.

Despite these commitments and efforts, many women still face barriers to accessing reproductive healthcare. These barriers can be social, cultural, economic, or legal. Limited access to contraception, restrictive abortion laws, insufficient sexual education, stigma and discrimination, and socioeconomic disparities all contribute to the challenges women face in accessing reproductive healthcare services.

Addressing these barriers requires comprehensive approaches that focus on promoting awareness, education, policy changes, and improving healthcare infrastructure. Efforts should ensure the availability, affordability, and quality of reproductive healthcare services, empowering women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and rights.

Unsafe examples of barriers to accessing reproductive healthcare

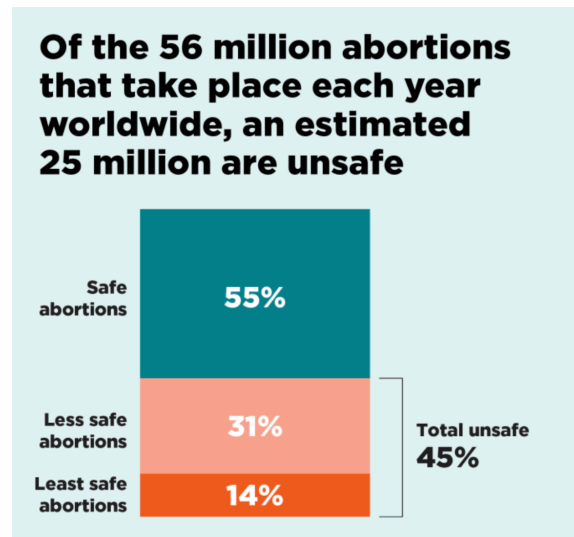


Figure 1: Chart of abortions from a study conducted by the World Health Organization from 2010 to 2014

According to a study by the World Health Organization (WHO), from 2010 to 2014, only 55% of all abortions were conducted safely, while almost one-third (31%) of abortions were "less safe," meaning they were either performed by a trained provider using an unsafe method or by an untrained person albeit using a safe method like misoprostol, which is a drug that can be used for medical purposes. About 14% were "least safe" abortions, meaning it was provided by untrained persons using dangerous methods, such as the introduction of foreign objects and the use of herbal concoctions. Deaths from complications of unsafe abortion were high in regions where most abortions happened in the most minor safe circumstances. Unsafe abortions are usually because of the situation where women and girls cannot access effective contraception and secure abortion services or are illegal in the country or city. This brings severe consequences for their own health, even causing death and that of their families.

Major Parties Involved

World Health Organization (WHO)

The World Health Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations, responsible for international public health. WHO provides technical guidance, sets global health standards, and promotes health equity. It has been involved in advocating for safe and accessible reproductive healthcare services, conducting research, and providing evidence-based recommendations.

International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF):

The International Planned Parenthood Federation is a global non-governmental organization that works to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights. IPPF operates in over 170 countries and advocates for comprehensive sexuality education, access to contraceptives, and safe abortion services. It supports and works

closely with local organizations to provide reproductive healthcare services and education to vulnerable populations, emphasizing the importance of choice and autonomy.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA):

UNFPA is an agency within the United Nations that focuses on population and reproductive health issues. UNFPA works to empower individuals and communities to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health.

Sweden:

Sweden is well-known for its progressive approach to reproductive healthcare. Sweden has implemented comprehensive sexual education programs in schools and has policies that prioritize access to contraception and safe abortion services. Sweden places a strong emphasis on women's rights and autonomy in making decisions about their reproductive health. Additionally, Sweden has laws in place that protect and uphold women's rights to make decisions about their own bodies, including the right to choose to have an abortion.

Canada:

Canada has a strong commitment to reproductive healthcare and women's rights. The country recognizes the importance of ensuring access to comprehensive reproductive health services for all individuals. This includes access to contraception, prenatal care, safe abortion services, and postnatal care. Canada promotes comprehensive sexual education in schools, aiming to provide young people with accurate and age-appropriate information about sexual health, relationships, and consent. This education encourages healthy decision-making and empowers individuals to take control of their reproductive health.

Netherlands:

The Netherlands is recognized for its liberal approach to reproductive healthcare. Netherlands has a well-established system that provides comprehensive sexual education, access to contraception, and safe abortion services. The Netherlands places a strong emphasis on informed decision-making and provides support and counseling for individuals seeking reproductive healthcare services. Informed decision-making is highly valued in the Netherlands. Individuals seeking reproductive healthcare services receive comprehensive counseling and support to ensure they have the information they need to make choices that align with their values and circumstances. This includes information about alternatives to abortion, such as adoption or parenting support.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
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December 13, 1971	Roe v. Wade: The landmark Supreme Court case in the United States, which legalized abortion, recognizing a woman's constitutional right to access safe and legal abortion.
September 5~13, 1994	International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD): The ICPD held in Cairo called for universal access to reproductive healthcare services and emphasized the importance of women's empowerment and reproductive rights.
September, 1995	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, the declaration emphasized the importance of women's rights, including access to reproductive healthcare services.
2015	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The SDGs, adopted by the United Nations, include Goal 3, which focuses on ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services.
December, 2019	COVID-19 Pandemic: The global pandemic highlighted the vulnerabilities and challenges faced by reproductive healthcare systems, including disruptions to services and increased barriers to access.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

There were few attempts to resolve the issues such as the International Conference, Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations Commission on the Status of Women(CSW) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has been instrumental in advocating for women's reproductive healthcare rights and should continue to prioritize access to comprehensive sexuality education and reproductive healthcare services in its annual sessions. To begin with, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) recognized the importance of reproductive health and rights and called for universal access to reproductive healthcare services. It emphasized the need for comprehensive sexuality education, access to contraception, safe abortion services where legal, and the elimination of harmful practices. The ICPD Programme of Action (1994) stands out as having had a significant impact on safeguarding access to reproductive healthcare for women since it successfully recognized reproductive health and rights as fundamental human rights, promoting informed decision-making.

Moreover, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, include Goal 3: "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages." Target 3.7 specifically focuses on universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including family planning, information, and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programs. This demonstrates the continued commitment of the international community to prioritize reproductive healthcare and rights. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), a dedicated UN body promoting gender equality and women's rights, has also addressed reproductive healthcare in its annual sessions. Discussions and resolutions aim to address barriers to accessing reproductive healthcare services, promote comprehensive sexuality education, and

ensure women's autonomy and decision-making in reproductive matters. The CSW's efforts contribute to advancing the global agenda on reproductive healthcare and empowering women.

Additionally, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) plays a significant role in addressing reproductive healthcare and rights globally. It provides support to countries in improving healthcare infrastructure, training healthcare providers, ensuring access to contraceptives, and advocating for policies and programs that prioritize reproductive healthcare and women's rights. Collaborative efforts between governments, civil society organizations, and international bodies like the UNFPA are crucial in driving policy changes and implementing programs that promote reproductive healthcare worldwide. In order to further advance the global agenda on reproductive healthcare, it is crucial for governments and international organizations to increase investments in healthcare infrastructure, training of healthcare providers, and the availability of contraceptives, ensuring universal access to reproductive healthcare services for all. Governments should also work towards eliminating legal and societal barriers to safe abortion services, where legally permissible, to protect women's reproductive rights and ensure their access to comprehensive healthcare. By incorporating these suggestions, we can continue to make progress in safeguarding reproductive healthcare and rights for women globally.

Possible Solutions

Because safeguarding access to reproductive healthcare for women is a complex issue, it is crucial to recognize that desirable solutions may vary across countries. Member states should establish a framework that outlines a comprehensive approach to addressing this issue. To make this possible, it is essential to focus on strengthening healthcare systems, Promoting Sexuality Education and Eliminating Legal Barriers.

1. **Strengthening Healthcare Systems:** Member states should prioritize the strengthening of healthcare systems to ensure the provision of comprehensive reproductive healthcare services for women. This includes improving infrastructure, facilities, and equipment in healthcare facilities, particularly in underserved areas. Resolutions can encourage member states to invest in training and retaining healthcare professionals specialized in reproductive health. Adequate funding and sustainable financing mechanisms should be established to support the improvement of healthcare systems.
2. **Promoting Comprehensive Sexuality Education:** Member states should prioritize the development and implementation of comprehensive sexuality education programs. These programs should provide age-appropriate, evidence-based information on sexual and reproductive health. Resolutions can emphasize the importance of collaborating with educational institutions, NGOs, and community organizations to ensure the widespread implementation of comprehensive sexuality education. Member states should consider cultural sensitivities and tailor the programs to their specific contexts.
3. **Eliminating Legal Barriers:** Member states should review and reform existing laws and policies that restrict access to reproductive healthcare services for women. Resolutions can encourage member states to address legal barriers that impede access to contraception, safe abortion, and other

reproductive healthcare services. This may include decriminalizing abortion where legal, removing discriminatory practices, and recognizing and protecting reproductive rights as fundamental human rights. Resolutions should emphasize the importance of aligning laws and policies with international human rights standards.

By focusing on strengthening healthcare systems, promoting comprehensive sexuality education, and eliminating legal barriers, member states can work towards safeguarding access to reproductive healthcare for women. Resolutions should call for the development and implementation of national strategies that prioritize reproductive healthcare, allocate sufficient resources, and integrate it into broader healthcare systems. Member states should also promote collaboration and partnerships among governments, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to enhance access to reproductive healthcare services. Furthermore, regular monitoring and evaluation should be emphasized to ensure progress and accountability in achieving the goals of safeguarding access to reproductive healthcare for women.

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