

Introduction to Women's Health

Foundations of Maternal and Child Health
HSC 4579

Key Questions

1. What is Health?
2. What is Public Health?



3. What is women's Health

Important Public Health Terms

Health Education

- Any combination of learning experiences designed to facilitate voluntary adaptation of behavior conducive to health
- Examples: prenatal care, nutrition classes

Health Promotion

- The science and art of helping people change their lifestyle to move toward a state of optimum health
- Examples: nutritional labels, bike paths, etc.

Health education vs health promotion

- Think of an example of **health education** in women's health?
- Think of an example of **health promotion** in women's health?

Historical perspective

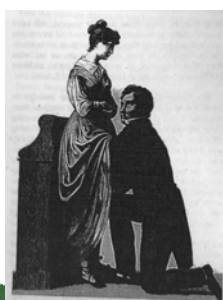
- Women's health began as reproductive health
 - The only distinction made between women and men (physically)
- Midwives – traditional birth attendants



A midwife attending a child-bearing woman (sixteenth century illustration)/Corbis-Bettmann

Our bodies, ourselves for the New Century

History continued...



Our bodies, ourselves for the New Century

- Medicine develops into a discipline – male dominated
 - Gynecology and Obstetrics
- Birth position was changed

Medicalization

- ▶ Medicalization of pregnancy and birth
- ▶ Site of care shifted from home to hospital



From "Lying-In: A History of Childbirth in America" by Wertz and Wertz, Yale, 1989

The Rise of Obstetrics & Gynecology

- ▶ Initially, medical management of pregnancy did not result in gains in health
- ▶ Gains in maternal health, as the field of Obstetrics advanced, but also other advances occurred in same time period.

What are some advances that took place during that time period that might have improved population health?

The Current Situation: Good and Bad

- ▶ Cesarean births on the rise
- ▶ Midwifery making a comeback
 - Move towards natural birth
- ▶ Birth experience becoming more humane
 - Birthing rooms, allow family to participate
 - Consideration of attachment, bonding

American Women

- ▶ **Elizabeth Stanton and Susan B Anthony:** energized women's rights movements in 1800's and the first **feminist** in the U.S.
 - **Liberal feminism**– philosophy that sees the oppression of women as a denial of equal rights, representation, and access to opportunities.

American Women

- ▶ **Elizabeth Blackwell:** first woman to receive a medical degree in the U.S. (1849)
- ▶ **Dorothea Dix:** one of the best-known early American nurses–learned from Florence Nightingale (1873).
- ▶ **Louise McManus:** First nurse to earn a PhD in the U.S. and central in establishing schools of nursing.
- ▶ **Margaret (Higgins) Sanger:** Leader in the movement to legalize birth control in medicine.
- ▶ **Mary Breckinridge:** trained nurse and midwife–worked to formalize training for midwives
- ▶ Boston Women's Health Collective– authored the landmark work *"Our Bodies, Ourselves"*– encouraged many women to explore women's health issues.
<http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/>

Women's Social Movement

- ▶ First women's health conference: 1971 in NYC

Feminism



- **DEFINITION:** The policy, practice, or advocacy of political, economic, and social equality for women. It is the principle that women should have economic and social rights equal to those of men.
- **First wave:** Suffragists and abolitionists 1800's
- **Second wave:** 1960s and 1970s
- **Third wave:** 1980s and 1990s

What does feminism look like today?

Minority Women – Gain a voice

- ▶ The first and second wave feminist movements excluded minority groups
- ▶ Much of the leadership of the women's movement was white, middle class
- ▶ National Black Women's Health Project (now called the Black Women's Health Imperative) was established in 1983
 - Addresses issues of general women's health, as well as issues that disproportionately affect women of color

Types of Feminism

"There are so many types and ways of expressing feminism, it should feel easy and natural for women and men to embrace, rather than run from it."

- ▶ Liberal Feminism
- ▶ Radical Feminism
- ▶ Marxist/Socialist Feminism
- ▶ Cultural Feminism
- ▶ Multicultural and Critical Race Feminism

Topics High on the Women's Health Agenda

- ▶ Investing in biomedical research for fighting disease that involves women
- ▶ Maintaining reproductive rights and freedom of choice
- ▶ Ensuring access to healthcare providers and services and to health information
- ▶ Women are fighting to insure that "all women, regardless of their age, income, and location" have access to vital services

Reproductive Health = Human Right

International Council on Population Development (ICPD), Cairo, 1994

Definition of Reproductive Health

"**Reproductive health** is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes..."

1994, ICPD

Key Reproductive Health Concepts

- ▶ Access to family planning services
 - Availability of contraception, education, and treatment
- ▶ Maternal morbidity and mortality
 - Prevention and rapid treatment for STIs
 - Baby spacing
 - Access to preconception and prenatal care
 - Availability of safe abortion services
 - Availability of skilled birth attendants
- ▶ Infant mortality and morbidity
 - Treatment of STIs
 - Context of pregnancy (essentially, many of the factors listed above)

Reproductive Rights

- ▶ Legalization of abortion: January 22, 1973
 - *Roe v. Wade*
 - Decision that has always been controversial
- ▶ "Global Gag Rule" or "Mexico City Policy"
 - Foreign family planning agencies may not receive U.S. assistance if they provide certain services related to abortion
- Funding restrictions may lead to increase in
 - Unplanned pregnancies
 - Abortions
 - Maternal and infant deaths

What are some recent controversies in reproductive health?

Global Perspective on Women's Health

Global threats to women's health

- ▶ Poverty
- ▶ Underweight and malnutrition
- ▶ HIV/AIDS
- ▶ Violence
- ▶ Maternal morbidity and mortality

Violation of human rights

- ▶ Domestic and societal violence
- ▶ Female genital mutilation
- ▶ Honor killings
- ▶ Trafficking
- ▶ Barriers to reproductive health services

A Life Course Perspective– stages of life

1. Adolescence
2. Young adulthood
3. Midlife
4. The senior years



Adolescence

- Begins with onset of puberty
- Secondary sex characteristics and menstruation
- Sense of identity
- Peer pressure
- Risky behaviors—sexual relations, substance use, tattooing and piercing
- Teen pregnancy ~ 1 million/year (almost ½ of all pregnancies are unintended)



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Adolescence

- ▶ Top five causes of death for female adolescents
 - Accidents (unintentional injuries)
 - Cancer
 - Assault (homicide)
 - Suicide
 - Heart disease

Young Adulthood

- Sense of self with increased independence
- Risky behaviors—sexual activity, substance abuse, violence (date rape), poor nutrition, lack of exercise
- Top five causes of death for young adult women
 - Unintentional injuries
 - Homicide
 - Cancer
 - Suicide
 - Heart disease



Midlife

- Job advancement and establishment of productive careers
- Raising children, caring for elderly parents, working to keep healthy relationships
- Menopause
- Top five causes of death for women of midlife
 - Cancer
 - Heart disease
 - Stroke
 - Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
 - Diabetes

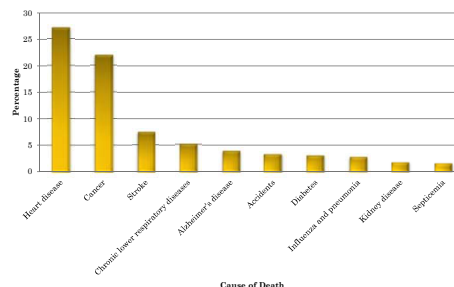


Senior Years (Ages 65+)

- Increased life expectancy for women
- Issues of retirement, possible loss of spouse and friends, depression, chronic conditions
- Post menopause years
- Top five causes of death for women of senior years
 - Cancer
 - Heart disease
 - Chronic lower respiratory diseases
 - Stroke
 - Diabetes



Leading Causes of Death in U.S. Women (2004)



Source: CDC, (2004). Leading Causes of Death .
<http://www.cdc.gov/women/icod.htm>