



**FIGO 2009 Alliance for Women's Health  
Pre-Congress workshop on  
"Critical gaps in universal access to reproductive health"**



**UNDP • UNFPA • WHO • World Bank**  
Special Programme of Research, Development  
and Research Training in Human Reproduction



**Department of  
Reproductive Health and Research**

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**Report to the FIGO General Assembly, prepared by WHO**

**Introduction**

The 2009 FIGO/WHO Pre-congress Workshop, organized by the Alliance for Women's Health, addressed the theme of critical gaps in universal access to reproductive health within the areas of: adolescent sexual and reproductive health (SRH); prevention of unsafe abortion; and HIV/AIDS. Three background papers prepared prior to the meeting and related plenary presentations during the workshop informed the discussions and subsequent recommendations. In the area of adolescent sexual and reproductive health, the Workshop noted the continued vulnerability of adolescents to preventable sexual and reproductive health conditions, such as early pregnancy, sexual violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), sexually transmitted and reproductive tract infections including HIV and HPV. The lack of appropriate information and adolescent-friendly prevention and care services contributed to poor sexual and reproductive health among adolescents. It was noted that young women were particularly vulnerable. A gender-sensitive approach that promotes equal treatment of boys and girls and positive role models was seen as fundamental in efforts to improve the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents.

In the area of prevention of unsafe abortion, the meeting was concerned with the persistently high morbidity and mortality associated with unsafe abortion. It was noted that unsafe abortion accounts for 13% of maternal mortality or up to 68,000 maternal deaths annually worldwide. There was general recognition that the prevention of unsafe abortion requires a multi-dimensional approach which includes promotion of access to family planning, reducing unmet need for contraception, providing comprehensive post-abortion care and, where allowed by law, ensuring access to safe abortion.

Regarding HIV/AIDS, it was noted that there was limited access to prevention and care through sexual and reproductive health services and *vice versa*. Factors that continued to drive the HIV/AIDS pandemic were the same as those accounting for poor sexual and reproductive health such as unsafe sex, gender inequality, poverty, stigma, sensitivity

associated with sexuality, and poor access to comprehensive prevention and care programmes. It was noted that positive outcomes have been reported in instances where the response has been strategic and included a combination of approaches in prevention and treatment, including integrated services or systematically linked programmes.

## **Recommendations**

During the Workshop deliberations and in making its recommendations to the General Assembly, the Workshop used, as a guiding principle, the FIGO statement on ethical aspects of sexual and reproductive rights as published in "*Ethical issues in Obstetrics and Gynaecology*" by the FIGO Committee for the study of Ethical Aspects of Human Reproduction and Women's Health - October 2009. For each of the three thematic areas, the following approaches were identified as cross-cutting recommendations:

- use of modern innovative information dissemination and sharing techniques and strategies that support utilization;
- need for integration of services to enhance access and uptake and ensuring systematic programme linkages;
- need for update training and task-sharing, and for national and regional societies of obstetrics and gynaecology to assume leadership roles.

In the area of *adolescent sexual and reproductive health*, the Workshop made the following *recommendations*:

1. Ensure equal access to the full range of SRH health information and services to female and male adolescents of all ages irrespective of marital status, respecting their confidentiality, as a means to reach MDG5 and its target of universal access to reproductive health.
2. Actively work to prevent all forms of violence against female adolescents (including forced marriage, slavery, rape, trafficking, sexual abuse/exploitation, domestic/intimate partner violence, FGM, etc.) and provide comprehensive health services for the victims of such violence and their families;

and proposed the following *strategies*:

- Ensure that the needs of specific age and marginalized groups of female and male adolescents are addressed and integrated in the health and other sectors at policy-making, training and service-delivery levels.
- Actively support assessment and monitoring of the accessibility and quality of adolescent-friendly information and services.
- Ensure the provision of education to health-care providers and other stakeholders (including teachers, religious leaders and policy-makers) to promote non-judgemental information and services to adolescents, incorporating autonomy and informed decision-making.

In the area of *prevention of unsafe abortion and its complications*, the Workshop made the following *recommendations*:

1. Ensure access to counselling and services on all effective methods of contraception, including emergency contraception for all women, with special attention to the needs of vulnerable groups.
2. Ensure that women with abortion complications receive the same quality of care as all other women: non-judgemental, with minimum delay, and with attention to their other SRH needs.

3. Ensure access to safe abortion care to the full extent allowed by national laws in accordance with FIGO and WHO guidelines on safe abortion, and promote clear regulations that protect Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, other health-care providers and the women they serve;

and proposed the following *strategies*:

- Integrate family planning within post-partum, abortion and post-abortion care, in accordance with WHO guidelines and the joint statement on “Family planning: a key component of post-abortion care,” by FIGO and partners.
- Ensure that Obstetricians and Gynaecologists receive adequate pre-service and in-service training on evidence-based practices and technologies for contraception, abortion care, and counselling, as well as on legal, human rights, social, and psychological aspects of women’s SRH.
- Support task-sharing through the authorization, training and supervision of general practitioners, midwives, nurses, and other mid-level providers to provide contraception, safe abortion and post-abortion care.
- Provide accurate evidence-based information on unsafe abortion for dialogue with other key stakeholders, including policy-makers, the media, other professional groups, and the public.
- Strengthen the capacities of FIGO member societies to provide leadership in collaboration with other stakeholders in helping women to prevent and manage unwanted pregnancies, including access to safe and legal abortion as allowed by law.

In the area of *HIV/AIDS and SRH linkages*, the workshop made the following *recommendations*:

1. Promote universal availability of information on SRH in all HIV services.
2. Integrate HIV prevention in SRH services in particular within family planning, sexually transmitted infections, maternal and neonatal health, and cancer screening services.
3. Respect the reproductive choices of HIV-positive people including access to contraception and safe abortion (when legal), as well as pre-conception counselling and appropriate care for women who wish to have a baby;

and proposed the following *strategies*:

- In HIV-prevalent settings, promote universal HIV counselling and testing with opt-out strategy for ante-natal care users to integrate prevention of parent-to-child transmission.
- Promote greater involvement of men in SRH/HIV services, for example through couple-counselling and community-based outreach programmes.
- Utilize modern communication technologies such as SMS and internet for strategic dissemination of information on HIV prevention and care.
- Obstetrics and gynaecology societies using their respected positions in society to advocate for changes including legal reforms which address issues of HIV vulnerability, sexual violence, and gender inequalities.

This report was presented to and endorsed by the General Assembly of FIGO on 6 October 2009.