

# 10

## facts on women's health



This fact file highlights 10 key areas that have serious consequences for women's health over the life-course.

While life expectancy is higher for women than men in most countries, a number of health and social factors combine to create a lower quality of life for women. Unequal access to information, care and basic health practices further increase the health risks for women.

Discrimination on the basis of their sex leads to many health hazards for women, including physical and sexual violence, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, malaria and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

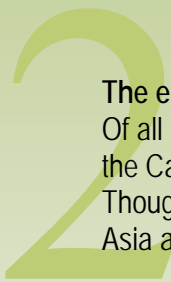
Tobacco use is a growing threat among young women, and mortality rates during pregnancy and childbirth remain high in developing countries.



## 1 Tobacco use among younger women in developing countries is rising rapidly

Smoking rates among men tend to be 10 times higher than among women. However, due to recent aggressive tobacco marketing campaigns aimed at women, tobacco use among younger females in developing countries is rising rapidly. Women generally have less success in quitting the habit, have more relapses than men, and nicotine replacement therapy may be less effective among women.

WHO



## 2 The epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa is increasingly female

Of all adults living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa, 61% are women. In the Caribbean, the proportion of women living with the virus is 43%. Though lower, the numbers of women living with HIV in Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe are also growing.



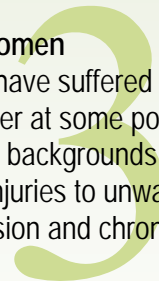
WHO/P.Virot



WHO

## 3 Violence has serious health consequences for women

Between 15% and 71% of women around the world have suffered physical or sexual violence committed by an intimate male partner at some point in their lives. The abuse cuts across all social and economic backgrounds. Violence has serious health consequences for women, from injuries to unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, depression and chronic diseases.





WHO

### Violence against women is widespread around the world

Some studies show that up to 1 in 5 women reports being sexually abused before the age of 15.

4

### Early marriage is on the decline but...

Even though early marriage is on the decline, an estimated 100 million girls will marry before their 18th birthday over the next 10 years. This is one third of the adolescent girls in developing countries (excluding China). Young married girls often lack knowledge about sex and the risks of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS.



WHO/P. Virot



WHO

### Most adolescent mothers live in developing countries

About 14 million adolescent girls become mothers every year. More than 90% of these very young mothers live in developing countries.

6



WHO/H. Bower

### Essentially all maternal deaths occur in developing countries

Every day, 1600 women and more than 10 000 newborns die from preventable complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Almost 99% of maternal and 90% of neonatal mortalities occur in the developing world.

7



WHO

**When women earn an income, they are more likely than men to buy the nets for their households**

Insecticide treated nets (ITNs) reduce malaria cases in pregnant women and their children. When women earn an income, they are more likely than men to buy the nets for their households. However, use of the nets is often linked to sleeping patterns that sometimes preclude actual use by women.

8

**The burden of COPD—a lung ailment—is over 50% higher among women than among men**

In most countries women tend to be in charge of cooking. When they cook over open fires or traditional stoves, they breathe in a mix of hundreds of pollutants on a daily basis. This indoor smoke is responsible for half a million of the 1.3 million annual deaths due to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) among women worldwide. In comparison, only about 12% of COPD deaths among men each year are related to indoor smoke. During pregnancy, exposure of the developing embryo to such harmful pollutants may cause low birth weight or even stillbirth.



WHO

9

**Women have a higher risk of becoming visually impaired than men**

Across the world and at all ages, women have a significantly higher risk of becoming visually impaired than men. Even so, women do not have equal access to health care to treat eye diseases often due to their inability to travel unaccompanied to health facilities and cultural differences in the perceived value of surgery or treatment for women.

10



WHO/M. Kopic