

Focus on Women's Health, April 2015

As part of the initiative set up by Sr Mary Mallany IBVM, Canadian Province in recognition of Beijing +20 this is the second thematic focus on women's issues twenty years on. It coincides with the UN World Health Day 7th April, and the UN World Malaria Day 25th April.

Key Facts concerning Women's Health

(from WHO Fact Sheet No. 334, updated Sept 2013)

- Worldwide women live an average four years longer than men.
- In 2011, women's life expectancy at birth was more than 80 yrs in 46 countries, but only 58 yrs in the WHO African region.
- Girls are far more likely than boys to suffer sexual abuse
- Road traffic injuries are the leading cause of death among adolescent girls in high- and upper middle- income countries
- Almost all (99%) of the approximate 287,000 maternal deaths every year occur in developing countries.
- Globally, cardiovascular disease, often thought to be a "male" problem, is the number one killer of women
- Breast cancer is the leading cancer killer among women aged 20-59 yrs worldwide

Maternal Mortality

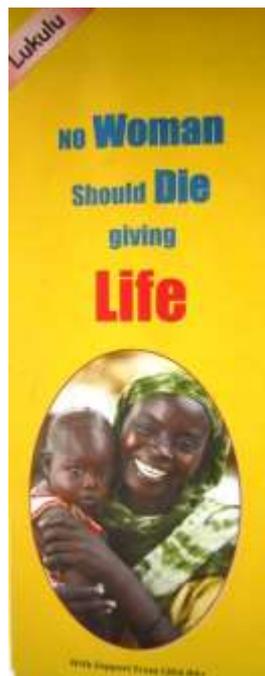
Key Facts: (WHO Fact Sheet No. 348)

- Every day, approx. 800 women die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth
- 99% of all maternal deaths occur in developing countries.
- Maternal mortality is higher in women in rural areas and among poorer communities
- Young adolescents face a higher risk of complications and death as a result of pregnancy than older women
- Skilled care before, during and after childbirth can save the lives of women and newborn babies
- Between 1990 and 2013, maternal mortality worldwide dropped by almost 50%

(Southern African Community - Zambia)

In Zambia, IBVM is responding to this issue by working in partnership with the Ministry of Health through the construction of Maternity Units at Rural Health Centres. This is bringing maternity care closer to remote impoverished rural women. One IBVM member currently sits on the District Committee for the Review of Maternal Deaths

- The maternal mortality ratio in developing countries in 2013 is 230 per 100,000 live births versus 16 per 100,000 live births in developed countries



The IBVM network of members, co-workers, associates, students, past-pupils and friends, being itself a global entity, is ideally situated to educate and respond to such critical issues that affect this global picture of women's health... indeed much is happening already....

FMG - Female Genital Mutilation

Key Facts (from WHO Factsheet No. 241)

- FMG includes procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons
- More than 125 million girls and women alive today have been cut in the 29 countries in Africa and Middle East where FGM is concentrated
- FGM is mostly carried out on girls between infancy and age 15
- FGM is a violation of the human rights of girls and women
- In December 2012, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the elimination FGM
 - Research shows that, if practicing communities themselves decide to abandon FGM, the practice can be eliminated very rapidly.

(Eastern African Province)

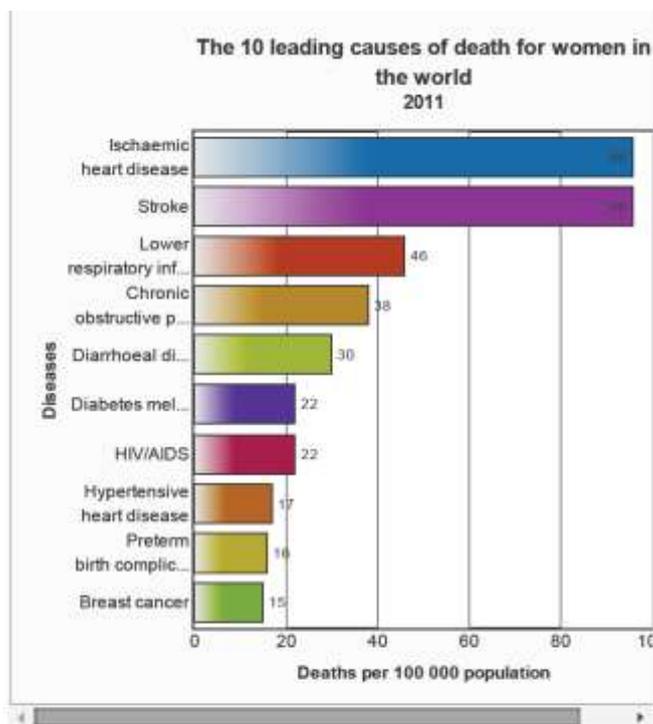
In relation to this last WHO point it is well known within IBVM circles that the efforts in our Eastern African Province in educating local communities, working with traditional leaders, and providing alternative rituals for initiation within communities, has been very effective in bringing about change.

HIV & AIDS

Key Facts (WHO Fact Sheet No. 334)

- In 2011, about 820,000 women and men aged 15-19 yrs were newly infected with HIV in low- and middle- income countries; more than 60% of them were women
- Globally, adolescent girls and young women (15-24 yrs) are twice as likely to be at risk of HIV infection compared to boys and young men in the same age group
- For women aged 15-44, HIV & AIDS is the leading cause of death worldwide

(Provinces known to be actively working with people living with HIV & AIDS include Eastern Africa and the Community of Southern Africa)



Data source for charts: Cause specific mortality: regional estimates for 2000-2011

From WHO Fact Sheet No 334

Invitation to Action:

A brief mention has been made as to what is happening in a small number of our Provinces. We know much more is happening elsewhere! We invite you to:

- Scan Institute websites to see what others are doing
- Share what is happening around women's health in your respective areas and networks among our wider UN NGO network
- Use available resources to develop awareness around the current state of these issues (and more) in your own country
- Lobby and hold Governments accountable for what they promised eg in MDGs. The UN Country Peer Review reports are good to see what was promised and what has been done. (Search on www.un.org & www.who.int)

World Malaria Day 2015: Invest in the future. Defeat malaria

- Malaria is one of the 10 leading causes of death for women in low income countries (WHO 2011)
- Approximately half of the world's population is at risk of malaria but specific risk groups include non-immune pregnant women as malaria causes high rates of miscarriages and can lead to maternal death
- The number of reported malaria cases dropped in Timor-Leste (where IBVM are present) from 220 cases per 1000 people in 2006 to less than 1 case per 1000 people in 2013

The WHO new goals and targets set out in a draft post-2015 strategy aims to reduce malaria cases by 90% by 2030 from current levels. 4 countries have recently been certified malaria free. The WHO post-2015 strategy sets the goal of eliminating the disease from a further 35 countries by 2030.

As the main nurturers of families women have a key role to play with the theme for 2015 World Health Day being **Food Safety. How safe is your food?** The WHO (World Health Organization) is promoting efforts to improve food safety, from farm to plate (and everywhere in between).



World Health Day 2015 (7th April).

A campaign toolkit is available from the WHO website: www.who.int