

Women's Health

Over the years, the health status of women, particularly black women in South Africa, has been neglected by government. This is evidenced by indicators such as the high maternal mortality rate in black women and the high incidence of cervical cancer and sexually transmitted diseases.

Women's health should be understood within a socio-economic context and not within the narrow context of women's reproductive health. The health status of women in South Africa has equally been compromised by deteriorating economic, political and social conditions. In particular, educational discrimination and migrant labour have contributed to the worsening of women's health status.

Among the Obstacles to Better Women's Health are:

- inadequate legal protection;
- gender inequality in the provision of health services;
- violence against women;
- lack of participation by women in decision-making processes;
- lack of access to appropriate information; and
- inadequate and unreliable data on women's health

We call on government to address the following issues:

- **Development**
 - Initiate programmes which address women's needs in:
 - capacity and confidence building;
 - literacy;
 - job creation;
 - provision of adequate clean water and fuel;
 - food security; and
 - safe environment.
- **Legislation**
 - enshrine women's equality in the Constitution and Bill of Rights;
 - legalise abortion on demand;
 - provide legal protection for women victims of violence;
 - enact a law protecting women against rape in marriage;
 - provide access to child care in the workplace;
 - provide maternity benefits with job security; and
 - provide protection against occupational health hazards.
- **Provision of Health Services**
 - develop comprehensive women's health care services as part of the national health system;
 - give priority to screening programmes for diseases which affect women (for example, carcinoma of the cervix);
 - train and re-socialize health workers to correct their negative attitudes to women;

- end discrimination against women in access to prison health services; and
 - institute affirmative action programmes for women in health training institutions
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- Violence
 - fund and create women's shelters and crisis centres.
 - Decision-making processes
 - increase the involvement of women at decision-making levels.
 - Access to Appropriate information
 - make information easily available in all languages;
 - make radio and television available for appropriate women's health programmes; and
 - incorporate health and sex education into the school curriculum.
 - Data on Women's Health
 - carry out a comprehensive national situation analysis on women's health status;
 - commission participatory research that articulates women's needs; and
 - desegregate data collection and analysis by sex.

