

By choice, not by chance: family planning, human rights and development

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The ability to decide on the number and spacing of one's children is taken for granted by many in the developed world and among elites in developing countries. Yet, for a majority of people in developing countries, especially the poorest ones, the power and means to determine the size of their families are scarce or inadequate. An estimated 222 million women lack access to reliable, high-quality family planning services, information and supplies, putting them at risk of unintended pregnancy. In developed countries too, high levels of unintended pregnancy exist, especially among adolescents, the poor and ethnic minorities.

The huge unmet need for family planning persists, despite international agreements and human rights treaties that promote individuals' rights to make their own decisions about when and how often to have children.

Today, family planning is almost universally recognized as an intrinsic right, affirmed and upheld by many other human rights. Because it is a right, voluntary family planning should be available to all, not just the wealthy or otherwise privileged.

Shortages of contraceptives are only one reason why millions of people are still unable to exercise their right to family planning. Access to family planning may also be restricted by forces including poverty, negative social pressures, gender inequality and discrimination. Ensuring access for all women, men and young people requires a multipronged effort: simultaneously strengthening health systems, introducing or enforcing laws that protect individuals' rights, reducing poverty, challenging harmful traditional practices, eliminating child marriage, ending discrimination, removing logistical impediments and ensuring a broad range of supplies.

Ensuring universal access to voluntary family planning is a matter of protecting human rights. But it is also a

matter of economic and social development. Studies have shown that investing in family planning helps reduce poverty, improve health, promote gender equality, enable adolescents to finish their schooling and increase labour-force participation.

When a woman is able to exercise her reproductive rights, she is more able to benefit from her other rights, such as the right to education. The results are higher incomes, better health for her and her children and greater decision-making power for her, both in the household and the community. When women and men together plan

their childbearing, children benefit immediately and in their long-term prospects.

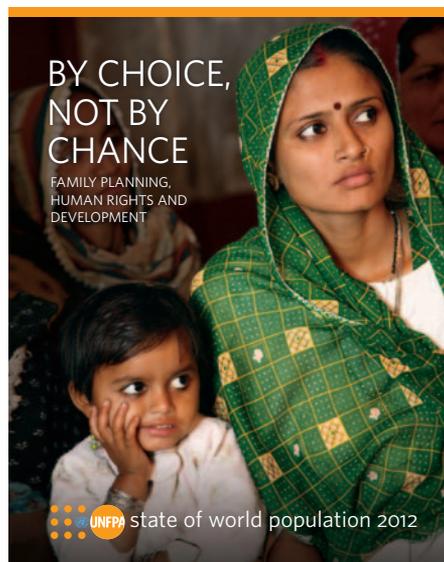
A study in one community in Bangladesh found that women who used family planning earned wages that were one-third higher than the wages of their counterparts who had not used family planning.

Another study concluded that spacing pregnancies by three to five years could reduce infant death by 46 per cent in developing countries.

And a study in the United States confirms that motherhood during adolescence lowers a girl's chances of obtaining a high school diploma by up to 10 per cent and reduces

annual income as a young adult by as much as \$2,400.

Family planning helps avoid unintended pregnancies, which can have an adverse effect on the ability of a woman to enjoy a range of other rights. An adolescent who becomes pregnant, for example, is often forced to drop out of school, and is thus deprived of her right to an education. An unintended pregnancy can endanger a woman's health, undermine her opportunities to earn a living and trap her and her entire family in a cycle of poverty and exclusion.



Of the 80 million unintended pregnancies that are projected to occur in 2012, an estimated 40 million will likely end in abortion. Addressing the unmet need for family planning worldwide would avert 54 million unintended pregnancies and result in 26 million fewer abortions. Research also shows that where family planning supplies, information and services are widely available, abortion rates are lower.

Much of the research to date has focused on access to family planning by women and female adolescents. But males, too, have an unmet need for family planning. Data published in recent years also reveal the unmet need of other underserved groups, such as older people, unmarried people, ethnic minorities, refugees, migrants, sex workers, people living with HIV/AIDS and women and girls vulnerable to sexual violence in conflict zones or in humanitarian crises.

Every adult, adolescent and young person everywhere, regardless of sex, social status, income, ethnicity, religion or place of residence must be empowered to decide freely and responsibly how many children to have and when to have them.

Meeting the total need for quality, voluntary family planning among all 222 million women who currently lack access to it would cost an estimated \$8.1 billion a year.

In July 2012, UNFPA, the United Kingdom Department for International Development, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and others organized a summit that garnered \$2.6 billion in funding commitments from donor countries and significant commitments from developing countries to make family planning available to an additional 120 million women and adolescent girls in

developing countries by 2020. Much more financial support and political commitment is needed to eliminate all unmet need and to enable everyone to exercise their right to family planning.

The State of World Population 2012, drawing on the latest research, calls on developing and developed countries, international organizations and civil society to:

- **Radically increase financial support and political commitment** to ensuring that rights-based family planning is available to all who want it, when they want it, and that services, supplies and information are of high quality.
- **Promote family planning as a right**, the exercise of which enables the attainment of a whole range of other rights.
- **Integrate voluntary family planning** into broader economic and social development because family planning enhances both.
- **Eliminate economic, social, logistical and financial obstacles** to voluntary family planning so that everyone who chooses to use it has access to it.
- **Reduce the number of unintended pregnancies and abortions** by increasing availability, reliability and quality of family planning supplies and services.
- **Make family planning programmes available to the full range of users**, including adolescents, unmarried people, and all others who need it.
- **Include emergency contraception** in the range of supplies available through family planning programmes.
- **Engage men and boys** in family planning, for their own benefit and to support the right of women and girls to use contraception.

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