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for women

Soroptimist



International

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WOMEN AND NON COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

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AWARENESS

This month's focus - Women and Non-Communicable Diseases - comes on the heels of the September 2011 UN High Level meeting on non-communicable disease prevention and control. As this is an emerging issue of critical importance to women and girls and to achieving the MDGs, SI will be releasing a new Where We Stand position statement on Women and...Non-Communicable Diseases before the end of 2011.

A new public health crisis is emerging – one that is largely preventable but, left unchecked, is having a devastating impact. NCDs are quickly becoming the world's worst killers – costing lives in the worst cases and financial losses in the best cases. Women and girls are both particularly vulnerable to and affected by NCDs, and they often have less access to prevention and treatment. While NCDs used to be found primarily in resource rich countries in the Global North, increasingly middle and low income countries are affected by these diseases.

What are NCDs?

Non-communicable diseases generally fall into four categories: cancers, cardio-vascular diseases ('CVDs'), chronic respiratory diseases, and diabetes.

Ten leading global causes of deaths in females, 2008

1. **Cardiovascular disease** (33.2%)
2. Infectious and parasitic diseases (13.9%)
3. **Cancer** (13.0%)
4. **Respiratory diseases** (7.3%)
5. Respiratory infections (6.6%)
6. Unintentional injuries (5.1%)
7. Perinatal conditions (5.0%)
8. Digestive diseases (3.1%)
9. **Diabetes mellitus** (2.6%)
10. Neuropsychiatric conditions (2.3%)

How are NCDs preventable?

The World Health Organisation has identified four primary risk factors for NCDs: tobacco use, unhealthy diets, alcohol use, and physical inactivity. As these risk factors primarily relate to lifestyles, with education and investment changes can be made.

Why are women more at risk of NCDs?

There are many reasons, but let's look at a few of the most critical:

- Low socio-economic standing in society means that women and girls are exposed to more risk, have less say over their own lifestyle choices, and are less educated about prevention
- Warning signals of CVDs are different for women, and a lack of understanding is leading to problems in under-diagnosis.
- Urbanisation has led to changes in dietary and physical activity patterns; in 2008, nearly 300 million women worldwide were obese (compared to 200 million men). Adolescent girls are

much less likely to participate in physical activity, due to social constructs, restraints, and low self-esteem.

- Smoking rates are increasing among young women, and young girls are an emerging target market for tobacco companies. Smoking accounts for around 50% of lung cancer cases in women, the second leading cause of cancer death in women.
- As you may have read in a recent SoroptiVoice blog (<http://www.soroptimistinternational.org/blog/post/182-red-tea-anyone>), women are affected by alcohol consumption differently than men. Global alcohol consumption is on the rise.
- Women are significantly more at risk of developing chronic respiratory disease based on their exposure to the harmful burning of solid fuels for cooking, light, and heat. It is likely that this increased exposure accounts for an estimated 1.5 million premature deaths each year.

Why do women experience more barriers in accessing prevention, treatment, and care?

Women experience economic barriers (unable to pay for treatment or prioritise spending for their family over their own health), social and cultural barriers (less access to services and information), physical barriers (women who live far away from health services are less able to travel than male counterparts), and system-wide barriers (many health systems are not responsive to the unique needs of women and girls).

How are women more affected by NCDs?

- Collectively, NCDs are the leading cause of death for women worldwide
- NCDs affect children via the poor health of the mother
- NCDs are financially devastating – costing already poor families not only for treatment, but in the loss of income and productivity
- Women are primarily responsible for household work – this is lost when they suffer from the effects of NCDs
- Even if they themselves do not suffer from any NCDs, as primary caregivers for their families, women often bear the increased care burden

For more information, read the [NCD Alliance publication “Non-Communicable Diseases: A Priority for Women’s Health and Development”](#), released in February 2011 at CSW55. This is the first ever report focussing on the impact of NCDs on women.

[ADVOCACY](#)

Below we have collected a series of articles on global advocacy efforts to address the emerging crisis of NCDs. SI chose to focus on NCDs this month on the heels of the United Nations High-level Meeting on Non-communicable Disease Prevention and Control, which took place on 19th-20th September, 2011, in New York.

[Leaders Gather at UN Headquarters for a High-Level Meeting on Non-communicable Diseases \(NCDs\)](#)

The four main noncommunicable diseases - cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic lung diseases and diabetes - kill three in five people worldwide, and cause great socioeconomic harm within all countries, particularly developing nations.

[SI Signs Statement on Mental Health and Non-communicable Disease](#)

In advance of the United Nations High-level Meeting on Non-communicable Disease Prevention and Control, taking place next week, Soroptimist International supported a joint statement from the NGO Forum for Health (Geneva) and the NGO Committee on Mental Health (New York).

["The Global Challenge of Chronic Disease - Interaction of Physical and Mental Health Risks"](#)

The NGO Committee on Mental Health and the NGO Health Committee, of which SI is a member, collaborated to present a symposium on the global challenges of chronic disease on September 8, 2011. The symposium was timed to precede the UN High-Level Meeting on "Non-Communicable Disease Prevention and Control" entitled: "Mental Health and the Scope of Non-Communicable Diseases". This meeting took place in New York (September 19-20).

[UN launches global campaign to curb death toll from non-communicable diseases](#)

The United Nations today, 19 September 2011, launched an all-out attack on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cancer and diabetes with a summit meeting devoted to curbing the factors, like tobacco and alcohol use, behind the often preventable scourge that causes 63 per cent of all deaths.

[General Assembly President urges greater use of mobile technologies in health](#)

The rapid expansion in the use of information and communications technologies in developing countries provides them with a crucial tool to prevent and control diseases, the President of the General Assembly said today, urging leaders to promote the application of digital technologies in health.

[World leaders must take binding steps to curb unhealthy food industry – UN expert](#)

A United Nations human rights expert today, 16th September 2011, called for taxing unhealthy food, regulating harmful marketing practices and standing up to the food industry, urging world leaders not to miss the chance at a summit next week to end a state of affairs that kills nearly 3 million adults each year.

[Non-Communicable Diseases: A Women's Health, Rights and Empowerment Issue](#)

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which include cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, lung disease, and mental health are one of the greatest health and development challenges of the century, responsible collectively for 2/3 of all deaths worldwide. Though all people the world over are susceptible to the threat of these chronic diseases, this is a women's health rights and empowerment issue because these diseases impact girls and women differently. At the same time, women are a crucial part of the solution to this crisis.

[UN food expert: "Chance to crack down on bad diets must not be missed"](#)

"Our food systems create sick people: failure to act decisively on this issue kills almost 3 million adults each year, and it is one reason why public health expenditures increased by 50 per cent over the past ten years in OECD countries. Yet now, world leaders are about to miss a once-in-a-generation opportunity to crack down on the marketing practices and public policy gaps which contribute to unhealthy diets and consign people to debilitating diseases," warned the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, on the eve of a high-level UN summit* (September 19-20) aimed at mapping out a global response to non-communicable diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease and type II diabetes.

[Political declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases](#)

[ACTION](#)

Petition: Demand a Healthy Future, Free From Chronic Disease

Arogya World have teamed up with the Global Health Council, NCD Child, Women Deliver, NCD Action, Public Health Institute, The Max Foundation, Disruptive Women in Health Care and Hriday and started the Women for a Healthy Future Movement to mobilise women around the world to demand action against NCDs. The first activity of this movement is a petition through which women ask world leaders to reduce the vulnerability of women and children to NCDs.

Support the [Arogya World](#) petition and join a network of women who are dedicated to reducing the vulnerability of women and children to NCDs. Tell world leaders that we demand a healthy future for women and children by [clicking here](#)! The petition was taken to the UN in September but is still open to signatures with a target of 10,000 signatories.

About Arogya World:

Arogya World is a U.S. based non-profit organisation committed to changing the course of chronic disease, one community at a time. Arogya in Sanskrit means good health. More literally it means to "live a life without disease".

[LINKING TO EDUCATE TO LEAD](#)

Monthly Message from International Programme Director Hilary:

Two thirds of all deaths in the world are caused by non-communicable diseases. These deaths impact particularly on women and girls for all the reasons given above.

These deaths are often avoidable through positive action. In the developed world they are defined as chronic diseases, in other words, there is treatment available. There are education programmes to inform so that certain risks can be avoided, for example knowledge about healthy eating and regular check-ups for breast cancer, ovarian and cervical cancer.

That is not to minimise the difficulties of treatment or to say that deaths do not occur BUT there is more chance of help.

But in a recent meeting held in the UN centre in Vienna, representatives of the nuclear energy arm of the UN talked about women's issues being at the forefront their programme. We were told that cancer in many countries can be treated and palliative care provided. However 75% of cancer deaths occur in the developing world because there is no treatment and no palliative care. So the nuclear knowledge provided through this agency is being used to help bring radiotherapy treatment to these countries. They are also encouraging a comprehensive cancer strategy with screening, palliative care and end of life care. All things that in many developed countries are now the norm.

So through our links with the United Nations we can:

Educate: through our representatives at the UN centres we can then go out with knowledge to argue for relevant treatment, information, screening etc.

Empower: women can be given the knowledge to self-test, learn about diet, seek correct treatment, and demand their human right to proper health care.

Enable: through raising money, lobbying for better treatment, putting pressure on health providers, networking with educational establishments, partnering with health providers.

All these areas of activities are the stuff of Soroptimist work.

Knowledge gives power so use it.

Demand human rights for women and girls which means healthy and fulfilling...lives!

Hilary Ratcliffe

SI Programme Director