



The Multimedia Encyclopedia of Women in Today's World Encyclopedia of Women in Today's World

International Women's Health Coalition

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The women's health movement began to take shape in the late 1960s and early 1970s as women in developed nations were taking control of their bodies concerning issues of personal choice in relation to abortion and birth control—matters of pivotal importance during that period. As time progressed, however, the needs of women and girls in developing countries moved to the forefront and gained the attention of international human rights activists.

Continuing War Against Women

Women worldwide disproportionately suffer from health disparities, far more than men over the course of their lifetimes. Systematically, women have been increasingly disempowered, degraded, and subjugated—and nowhere is this more evident than in the state of women's healthcare in developing countries. Cultural patriarchy, economic hardship, and lack of political voice still plague women from developed nations; however, women and girls in developing countries are affected at far more alarming rates by the resulting injustices. Power, status, societal roles, norms, and biological makeup influence the healthcare and safety of women and girls globally. The quality of life for women and girls is affected by the lack of gender equity. In order for women and girls to achieve economic, political, and social justice—all of which affect the quality of life and healthcare—the issue of gender equity must be addressed. The International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) seeks to do just that.

Founders and Mission

Social activists Joan Dunlop and Adrienne Germain founded the IWHC in 1984 at the cusp of the women's health movement. The mission of the IWHC is to “promote and protect the sexual and reproductive rights and health of all women and young people, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, by helping to develop effective health and population policies, programs, and funding.” Gender equity and women's empowerment are the goals of the IWHC; specifically, it seeks to assist women and girls to obtain their rights to a healthy and just life. The IWHC does this by engaging actively in the formation of international policies and budgets that affect women's sexual health, reproductive rights, access to information related to prevention and treatment for human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), and violence prevention.

The IWHC works collaboratively with the United Nations (UN) Population Fund, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, and other agencies that influence policy and funding and that collectively benefit women and their families in developing countries. With the support of these agencies and other organizations, the IWHC “envisions a world in which women: (a) are equally and effectively engaged in decisions that concern their sexual and reproductive rights and health; (b) experience a healthy and satisfying sexual life free from discrimination, coercion, and violence; (c) can make free and informed choices about childbearing; and (d) have access to the information and services they need to enhance and protect their health.”

International Policy and Funding

The IWHC strategizes to develop international policy that works at the local level to enhance women's health and human rights in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It does this in four ways. First, it advocates—and motivates social, political, and corporate leaders to enact—policy and funding promoting women's rights and health. Second, it empowers local leaders by providing

grants and building professional partnerships with them as they develop organizations to secure women's rights and health. Third, it mobilizes women and young people to advocate for themselves, enabling them to take action to secure their rights, health, and well-being. Fourth, it analyzes and communicates facts and groundbreaking ideas for policy improvements to power brokers, health professionals, and other advocates.

The IWHC is a results-driven organization. To date, it has provided more than \$16.5 million in grants to women and youth; helped build and sustain at least 75 organizations in 10 countries; and produced and published curricula, ideas, and public health policies worldwide.

Education and Social Justice

Sexuality, reproductive rights, and gender equity are sensitive matters in developing nations that concurrently face other serious national problems, from interethnic war to lack of clean drinking water. The IWHC teaches women and young people to advocate for themselves by providing comprehensive strategies for community organizing that is inclusive of local leadership and service providers. These women and youth leaders are gifted communicators who possess the ability to bring together economically and ethnically diverse people and institutions so as to positively influence and promote ideals of sexual and reproductive rights, health, and gender equity in their communities.

Although there is much work that needs to be done in establishing global gender equity, the IWHC is a major force in pushing for and achieving the changes necessary to move nations and states in the direction of providing social, economic, and political rights to women and girls that influence their sexual and reproductive health.

- gender equity
- reproductive rights
- women's health
- women's health movements
- reproductive health
- international policy
- equities

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See Also

- [Gendercide](#)
- [Human Rights Activism](#)
- [International Organization for Women and Development \(IOWD\)](#)
- [International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009](#)
- [Public Health \(Women in\)](#)
- [Reproductive and Sexual Health Rights](#)

Further Readings

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