

Reproductive care in Sub Saharan Africa- a Desperate Need

In the Global South, pregnancy can be considered a death sentence rather than a blessing. Every day in 2017, approximately 810 women died from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. Many of these deaths occur in Sub Saharan Africa in countries such as Chad and South Sudan. Lack of access to organizations like Planned Parenthood and prenatal care leaves women vulnerable and can put them in dangerous situations. Despite this, there is hope for these women, as nearly all maternal deaths in Sub Saharan Africa are preventable. Giving women in the Global South a safe way to take control over their reproductive system could reduce unsafe abortions and maternal deaths by over 70%. By introducing organizations that could supply women with sex education, birth control, and prenatal care, the number of maternal deaths would decrease, and their quality of life would increase dramatically. The implementation of women's health facilities in Sub Saharan Africa would be a significant step to reaching the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal #5, as giving women the ability to have a healthy pregnancy or to choose not to have a child at all is empowering and creates a path to equality.

Unfortunately, many of the women who suffer from the lack of reproductive health care are teenagers. Young girls who become pregnant will have to stop going to school, which is often one of the only ways that women can increase their social status and earn money of their own. Along with that, it is usually very unhealthy for girls to have children so young. Maternal conditions are the top cause of mortality among girls aged 15-19 globally, and in the Central African Republic, there are 229 annual births per 1,000 girls in that age range. Without medical professionals to keep these girls healthy, many of them die during their pregnancy or in

childbirth. If a prenatal doctor could regularly check in on these pregnant women, it is likely that any health problems could be caught and dealt with before it is too late.

According to Planned Parenthood, more than 200 million people in developing countries who want to delay or plan childbirth lack access to birth control, information, and services. In the absence of these programs, many women turn to unsafe options to fulfill their medical needs. An estimated 93% of women of reproductive age in Africa live in countries with restrictive abortion laws, so they must find illegal and unregulated options. In Africa, 99% of abortions are unsafe resulting in one maternal death per 150 cases. These deaths could be prevented if organizations with medical professionals would advocate for legalizing abortion for health reasons and provide safe abortions to women who would have resorted to a dangerous procedure.

Another problem that the implementation of reproductive medical centers could help prevent is the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Sub-Saharan Africa currently ranks first in STD yearly incidence compared to other world regions. Due to the lack of healthcare, many of these diseases remain untreated. Some sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and Syphilis can pass from a pregnant mother to her baby. approximately 1000 HIV infected infants are born every day in Africa. HIV is especially dangerous to babies, who already have a weak immune system and are vulnerable to disease. However, a medical organization that could test for and treat sexually transmitted diseases as well as raise awareness would prevent the spread of STD's and reduce the number of HIV positive infants and pregnant women.

Women in Sub Saharan Africa are often solely responsible for the care of their child. When a young woman becomes pregnant, she is expected to give up her education and become a

full-time mother. This means giving up the chance getting a job and following a passion.

Unfortunately for women who would rather pursue a career than become a mother, abortion is an illegal and unsafe option for many women in Sub Saharan Africa. Supplying these women with birth control would prevent pregnancies for women who do not want to have a child or know it will be unsafe for them to give birth in a more sustainable way. Education about the pill would de-stigmatize taking birth control and could reassure women who are skeptical.

My plan to team up with reproductive medical centers and set up buildings that would give access to birth control, safe abortions, and prenatal care to Sub-Saharan African Countries would reduce the number of maternal deaths and improve the lives of women who choose not to have children. These organizations would educate people about reproductive issues and hopefully persuade them to go to these organizations in times of need or to learn more about reproductive health, birth control methods, or healthy pregnancies.

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