

The Role of Medical Students at the University of Gezira in Promoting Women's Health in Gezira State

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Article

The health of women and girls is of particular concern because in many societies they are disadvantaged by discrimination rooted in sociocultural factors that prevent them from benefitting from quality health services and attaining the best possible level of health.

In Sudan, social norms affect women's health and threatens their lives. Nearly 87% of Sudanese women undergo FGM/C according to a 2014 United Nations report. According to the World

Health Organization (WHO), Sudan has high rates of maternal mortality. On the other hand, breast and cervical cancer are the first and second causes of women's cancer-related death.

This article aims to reflect on the activities of medical students at the University of Gezira in promoting women's health in Gezira State and Sudan and to share their experiences at the regional and global levels.

We are focusing mainly on the issues that affect women's reproductive health, so we are focusing on maternal health, antenatal care, and postnatal care. We also are fighting social norms which can threaten women's lives like female genital mutilation especially type three according to the WHO classification which has led to many complications during delivery and sexual intercourse. On the other hand, we encourage families to use the modern methods of the family planning to ensure better and healthier lives for them and their children.

As I mentioned, breast and cervical cancer are the first and secondary causes of cancer-related deaths in women, therefore we are working to increase awareness of these fatal diseases and how to prevent them through self-checks for breast cancer that helps identify it in its early stages.

Also, women are more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS so we are fighting the social stigmas around these disease to encourage women to take advantage of voluntary counseling and testing, as well as supporting HIV patients continue their therapy and integration into the community. In 1948 WHO defined health as "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." We are concerned about all of the aspects of a woman's complete health -- physical, mental, and social well-being -- and in accordance we also have taken a stand against all of the types of violence against women "physical, sexual, and psychological." All these issues we are concerned about are actions that are working towards achieving the third part of our sustainable developmental goals "good health and well-being."

The Student's Role in Promoting Women's Health

The student's role in promoting women's health and concern about this issue:

First: The student organizations and association:

The medical student's community is full of the power and passion to needed make change and make a difference in the women's health situation in Sudan. We established many student organizations to take part in the process of promoting women's health in Gezira state and Sudan for example:

- A standing committee on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights including HIV and AIDS at Gezira Medical Students' Association which is follow to the International Federation of Medical Student Association "IFMSA." This standing committee is a gathering of passionate individuals who are committed to promoting sexual and reproductive health rights and are arduous about creating positive change in their local communities.
- The Sudan AIDS Free Initiative "SAFI" which is an established by partnership of the university students, the University of Gezira Student Affairs Deanship, Blue Nile Institute for Communicable Disease, and UNAIDS. The vision of this initiative is for Sudan to have zero new HIV infections, zero stigma and discrimination, 100% voluntary counseling and testing, and 100% of patients receiving the anti-retroviral therapy and continuing treatment.
- Gezira Student Network Organization which follows the international network, the Student Network Organization, and is aiming to promote student participation in all processes of ultimate health care development.

What these organizations do:

These student organizations carry out many health activities targeting two categories, the health sector students, and the public.

What services do these organization do for their targeted groups?

The first group is the health sector students: these organizations work to build capacity among students by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and experiences needed to improve women's health.

This capacity building process is done by implementing a lot of “workshops and trainings to increase the students skills” including communication and presentation skills, facilitation skills, advocacy and lobbying, and project management. They also are active in “conducting sessions, symposiums, and world day celebrations to provide the students the adequate knowledge” to support and work with their community. All of these capacity building activities are coordinated with the expertise of students. Examples of these efforts include:

- _advanced facilitation skills workshops;
- _family planning session;
- _female genital mutilation workshops; and
- _breast and cervical cancer symposium.

The second target group is the public community: these organizations held interventional health projects according to the health priority at the particular area where we conducted more than 30 health awareness campaigns concerning women's health. In our campaign outreach we used creative methods to attract the community and encourage their participation.

Secondly: Student participation in university initiatives and the external organizations concerned with women's health:

The medical students have clear participation with other external organizations like:

- _ The University of Gezira Initiative for Safe Motherhood and Childhood;
- _ Y_PEER Network; and
- _The Sudanese Family Planning Association.

The students participation with these organizations is part of the framework of their joint coordination for training workshops, conferences, health projects, awareness campaigns for the community, and conducting research.

Lastly the student's role in the faculty courses:

The Faculty of Medicine, University of Gezira curriculum is founded in community-based learning and community oriented so that the faculty have courses to help the students to engage with the community and promote the women's health initiatives.

In this faculty we have two courses:

- _ The Integrated Program of Field Training, Research, and Rural Development Course:

In this course we visit different villages around Gezira State where we stay for one week to do health activities and we hold health days to provide health education and empower the women in that area to take care of their health while working to eliminate social norms.

- The Primary Health Care Centers Practice and Family Medicine Course:

In this course every student is responsible for one family to complete a health survey and provide them with health education about their health problems. In addition, the student is responsible for

monitoring the family's health for two years to enable the students to promote health education to the female members of these families.

The work of the students to improve their community's health has a great impact on the health situation for women in Sudan. Students have great power and we should do all that we can to harness it.

