



# A Quick Guide on the Human Rights of Women

By Heidi Williamson      October 8, 2014

The terms reproductive health, reproductive rights, and reproductive justice are often used as interchangeable phrases to talk about either contraception or abortion. But these terms are in fact three very different concepts. Reproductive health refers to preventive care, family planning, and disease management, while reproductive rights include the legal protections and public supports that allow women to control their fertility, give birth as they choose, and protect their health so that they can fully participate in society. Reproductive justice, a 20-year old term, refers to the structural and social issues that effect women's ability to fully benefit from the law or health services and that allow her to be the person, mother, caregiver, and breadwinner she wants to be. This fact sheet provides an overview of each term.

---

## Reproductive health

Access to affordable, comprehensive, and appropriate health care and health insurance that allows access to the full range of legal medical services is essential to maintaining women's reproductive health. Crucial medical services include:

- Breast and cervical cancer screening
- HIV and STI tests
- Pregnancy tests
- Birth control
- Abortion services
- Infertility specialties
- Mental health services
- Maternity care
- Addiction counseling
- Culturally competent services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, or LGBT, people and women of color

## KEY FACTS

- **73 percent of women** ages 18 and older have had a pap test in the past three years.<sup>1</sup>
- It costs **\$16 billion dollars per year** to diagnose and treat STIs.<sup>2</sup>
- **99 percent of women** use contraception in their lifetime.<sup>3</sup>
- **61 percent of abortions** are had by women with children.<sup>4</sup>

---

## Reproductive rights

Laws and legal precedents that support women's self-determined decision making about their health. These include:

- Funding of the health coverage gap
- *Roe v. Wade*
- Buffer laws that allow clinics to protect women who choose abortion services
- Violence Against Women Act
- Affordable Care Act
- 19th Amendment
- Colorado's HB 13-1081 Comprehensive Human Sexuality Education
- Connecticut's General Statute 31-57r-31-57w on Paid Sick Leave

---

## Reproductive justice

This movement focuses on the social and political realities that affect women's ability to use their legal rights to have or not have a child; maintain their health; parent as they see fit; and fully benefit from their labor in the workforce. These realities include:

- Safe homes and neighborhoods
- Healthy relationships
- Affordable child care
- Full employment
- Parenting with dignity
- Freedom from violence
- Cultural inclusion
- Freedom of gender expression
- Food security
- Racial justice
- Economic security
- Voting rights

*Heidi Williamson is the Senior Policy Analyst for the Women's Health and Rights Program at American Progress.*

---

## Endnotes

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Pap test use" (2010), available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/pap-tests.htm>.

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Incidence, Prevalence, and Cost of Sexually Transmitted Infections in the United States" (2013), p. 1, available at <http://www.cdc.gov/std/stats/STI-Estimates-Fact-Sheet-Feb-2013.pdf>.

3 Guttmacher Institute, "Fact Sheet: Contraceptive Use in the United States" (2014), available at [http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb\\_contr\\_use.html](http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_contr_use.html).

4 Guttmacher Institute, "Fact Sheet: Induced Abortion in the United States" (2014), available at [http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb\\_induced\\_abortion.html](http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_induced_abortion.html).

5 Guttmacher Institute, "State Policies in Brief: Sex and HIV Education" (2014), available at [http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/spibs/spib\\_SE.pdf](http://www.guttmacher.org/statecenter/spibs/spib_SE.pdf).

6 Guttmacher Institute, "Twenty Million American Women In Need Of Publicly Funded Family Planning Services In 2012," Press release, August 12, 2014, available at <http://www.guttmacher.org/media/nr/2014/08/12/index.html>.

7 National Partnership for Women and Families, "Paid Family and Medical Leave: An Overview" (2012), available at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/paid-leave/paid-family-and-medical-leave.pdf>.

8 Domestic Violence Statistics, "Domestic Violence Statistics," available at <http://domesticviolencestatistics.org/domestic-violence-statistics/> (last accessed September 2014).

9 Elizabeth Miller and others, "Reproductive coercion: connecting the dots between partner violence and unintended pregnancy," *Contraception: An International Reproductive Health Journal* 81 (6) (2010): 457-459

10 Guttmacher Institute, "Fact Sheet: Unintended Pregnancy in the United States" (2013), available at <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/FB-Unintended-Pregnancy-US.html>.

11 National Women's Law Center, "No Improvement in Women's Poverty Rate; One in Seven Women Lives in Poverty, Says NWLC," Press release, September 16, 2014, available at <http://www.nwlc.org/press-release/no-improvement-women%E2%80%99s-poverty-rate-one-seven-women-lives-poverty-says-nwlc>.

12 Kidsdata.org, "Infants Born at Low Birthweight, by Race/Ethnicity," available at <http://www.kidsdata.org/topic/302/lowbirthweight-race/bar#fmt=92&loc=1&tf=67&pdist=73&h=7,11,8,10,9,939&sort=loc> (last accessed September 2014).

## KEY FACTS

- **22 states and the District of Columbia** mandate sex education in schools.<sup>5</sup>
- **20 million women** currently need publicly funded family planning services.<sup>6</sup>
- **Only 11 percent of workers** have paid leave to care for newborn, newly adopted child.<sup>7</sup>

## KEY FACTS

- Intimate partner violence costs the United States more than **\$5.8 billion a year** for direct medical care and productivity loss.<sup>8</sup>
- Unintended pregnancy rates are **two times higher** among women reporting partner violence.<sup>9</sup>
- The rate of unintended pregnancy among poor women increased by **56 percent** from 1994 to 2008.<sup>10</sup>
- **39 percent of women** who are heads of households live in poverty.<sup>11</sup>
- African American infants are **twice as likely** to have low birth weights as white infants.<sup>12</sup>