

Sexual, reproductive health declining

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The World Health Organization in Switzerland says inadequate attention to sexual and reproductive health has caused an increase in disabilities and death.

The report to appear in the British medical journal Lancet shows there has been declining financial support, increased political interference and an overall reluctance to tackle threats to sexual and reproductive health.

The study says the findings reveal a picture of growing unmet needs and neglect and a decline in money spent on education, family planning and preventive measures.

WHO said despite increased access to contraception an estimated 80 million women have unintended or unwanted pregnancies each year and 45 million end in abortion. Half a million women die in childbirth or from pregnancy complications yearly. There are at least 68,000 deaths and millions of injuries and permanent disabilities from unsafe abortions.

"These statistics represent an appalling catalogue of human tragedy," says WHO's Joy Phumaphi. "Far from making progress we seem to have been going backwards since ... 1994."

The survey of data from 59 countries showed that there was no "one size fits all" solution to the problems, the report said. It said there needed to be greater effort to address sexual health together with the problems of poverty, gender inequality and indifference.

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