



Comité économique et social européen  
European Economic and Social Committee

# ***A Life-Course Approach to the Health of Women and their Families***

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***Celebrating 21 Years of Setting the Agenda in Women's Health***



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"Inequalities experienced in earlier life in access to *education, employment and health care* as well as those based on *gender and cultural background* can have a **critical bearing on the health status of people throughout their lives**. The combination of poverty with other vulnerabilities such as *childhood or old age, disability or minority background* further increases health risks and vice-versa, ill health can lead to poverty and/or social exclusion."

*European Parliament Report on Reducing Health Inequalities in the EU*  
Committee on the Environment,  
Public Health, and Food Safety (2011)

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# What's Women's Health?



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- Women's health is more than reproductive health—it is health across the life-span.
- The incidence and prevalence of certain diseases are higher among women.
  - E.g. breast cancer, osteoporosis, auto-immune diseases, eating disorders.
- Others affect men and women differently.
  - E.g. lung cancer, diabetes, depression, cardiovascular disease

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# Why Women's Health?



- Women outlive men by an average of **6 years**, however difference in **healthy** life expectancy is only **18 months**
  - Sex/gender impacts on susceptibility, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of chronic disease
- Research, practice, programming and healthcare systems must better respond to sex and gender-differences
- UN Sustainable Development Goals
  - 3: Good health and well-being
  - 5: Gender equality
  - 10: Reducing inequalities

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# Health Behaviours



- The frequency and level of alcohol and tobacco consumption among women, narrow the gap in avoidable illness and death
  - Beginning in the 1990s, young girls started **outsmoking** young boys in Europe
- Women have special **nutrients** needs that shift for each stage of a women's life.
- Differences in exercise behaviours and rising obesity
  - Men in the EU are 1.6 times more likely to be sufficiently **physically active** in a week compared to women

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# Chronic Disease



- Chronic disease is responsible for large part of ill health, disability and mortality in the EU in both sexes
  - Leads to increasingly costly health and long-term care if not treated and managed effectively
- CVD is the leading cause of death among EU women
  - Women experience CVD differently, which can delay diagnosis and impact treatment effectiveness
- Diabetes
  - Rise of diabetes in women
  - Gestational diabetes

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# Cancer

- Cancer is responsible for  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the deaths in the EU.
  - Cancer is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death in EU women.
  - The most common cancers among women are: breast (29%), colorectal (14%), uterian (9%) and lung (7%).
- Breast cancer is the most common cancer among EU women.
  - The breast cancer incidence (29%) is rising and death rate (17%) is falling across the EU
- Colorectal cancer is the second most common cause of cancer in the EU.
- Rising toll of lung cancer.

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# Menstruation

- Impact of menstruation
  - 1/5 of women suffer pain that interferes with daily activities
  - 1/4 experience heavy menstrual bleeding
- Menstrual pain can have a significant impact on academic and employment participation
  - 1/3 to 1/2 young women miss school/work at least once per cycle
  - Women with adverse menstrual symptoms report having a significantly lower quality of life than others of similar age
- Significant impact on women's health but largely absent from publications and policy
  - Implications for gender equality





# Socioeconomic Factors



- Socioeconomic, educational, cultural and ethnicity differences impact behaviour and access to resources
  - Sex and gender inequities like violence against women, lack of decision-making power, and unfair work divisions all impact
- Women as the managers of the health of their families
- Women major caring role in Europe
- Women have less financial resources than men
  - Exacerbate existing inequalities
  - Lower paid, less secure and informal occupations than do men
  - Women earn on average 16% less than do men
  - Women on average receiving pensions that are 40% lower than men

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# Policy Briefs



- ***Newest brief: Women and Breast Cancer in EU***
- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Pregnancy and Smoking
- Safe Use of Medicines during Pregnancy and Lactation
- Vaccination
- Asthma
- Cardiovascular Disease
- Diabetes
- HIV/AIDS
- Cervical Cancer
- Lung Cancer
- Healthcare Professional Education
- Medicines Regulation

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# Upcoming Policy Briefs



- Women and menstruation
- Women and dementia
- Women and incontinence
- Women and nutrition
- Women and ovarian cancer
- Women and autoimmune disease
- Women and gynecological issues
- Sex and gender in health promotion and disease prevention
- Sex and gender in research

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# Panellists



- ***Dr. Isabel de la Mata, DG SANTE***
- ***Paula Mee, Consultant Dietitian***
- ***Professor Marc Bardou, CHU de Dijon, INSERM***
- ***Dr. Paul De Raeve, Secretary General of the European Federation of Nurses Associations***

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