



SELF-CARE, GENDER, AND YOUTH

THE BIG PICTURE

Women, adolescents and youth, and gender-diverse people face several barriers that limit their access to essential health services and their ability to make informed decisions about their bodies.

- Key barriers include gender inequality, stigma and discrimination, health provider bias, violence, poverty, ageism, and restrictive laws and policies.
- Women spend 25% more time in their lives in “poor health” than men and face numerous gender-related health challenges.¹
 - » 218 million women and girls of reproductive age have an unmet need for modern methods of contraception.²
 - » In low- and middle-income countries, adolescents aged 15-19 years had an estimated 21 million pregnancies each year, half of which were unintended.³
 - » Every two minutes, a woman dies due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth.⁴
 - » Women and girls account for nearly two-thirds of all new HIV infections in sub-Saharan Africa.⁵
 - » Of 73 million induced abortions globally each year, 45% are unsafe, contributing to maternal mortality and long-term health issues.⁶
- Health disparities are further exacerbated for individuals who experience additional marginalization due to factors such as disability, displacement, poverty, racial or ethnic identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV status, among others.

THE ROLE OF SELF-CARE

Self-care is a powerful approach to advancing health, rights, and equity. It brings services closer to those who need them, enhances autonomy, and helps overcome barriers to accessing traditional care, especially for women, adolescents and youth, and gender-diverse individuals.

- When integrated into health systems, self-care interventions expand the autonomy and agency of women, adolescents and young people, and other marginalized groups, and improve access to essential health services.
- Self-care addresses gender-related barriers to accessing healthcare. Many self-care options are private, convenient, and home- or community-based, reducing stigma, provider bias, and logistical burdens like cost and travel.
- Examples of evidence-based, transformative self-care interventions for women, youth, and gender-diverse people include:

- » At-home pregnancy tests
- » Self-monitoring of blood sugar and blood pressure during pregnancy
- » Self-administered contraception (injectable contraceptives, oral contraceptive pills, male and female condoms, and emergency contraception)
- » HIV self-testing and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) sample collection.
- » Digital tools for mental health and comprehensive sexuality education
- » Self-managed medication abortion

THE CALL TO ACTION

Join the [Self-Care Trailblazer Group \(SCTG\)](#) in promoting health and rights for all and accelerating access to self-care for women, youth, and gender-diverse people.

- Advocate for national self-care policies and guidelines that include a focus on gender, youth and other marginalized groups.
- Ensure gender policies incorporate evidence-based, intersectional self-care approaches that address the diverse needs of women, adolescents and youth, and gender-diverse individuals.
- Leverage assistive technologies to enhance self-care access and engagement, especially for women and girls, youth, and other marginalized groups.
- Train women, youth, and gender diverse advocates in self-care, policy analysis, and advocacy skills.
- Partner with organizations focused on gender equality, youth empowerment, disability rights, and health.
- Advocate for legal, policy, and regulatory reforms to expand access to self-care interventions for women, youth, and gender-diverse people.
- Regularly evaluate and strengthen gender specific self-care approaches.

DIG DEEPER

Consult these resources to learn more about self-care, gender, and youth.

- [Self-care interventions for women's health and well-being](#)
- [Why self-care is essential for sexual and reproductive health and rights](#)
- [Self-care: Young people taking control!](#)
- [Self-care and You\(th\) webinar recording](#)
- [What is self-care](#)

REFERENCES

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