

Regional Conference



The University of Oklahoma

# SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CONFERENCE 2023

BREAKING STIGMAS, BUILDING FUTURES



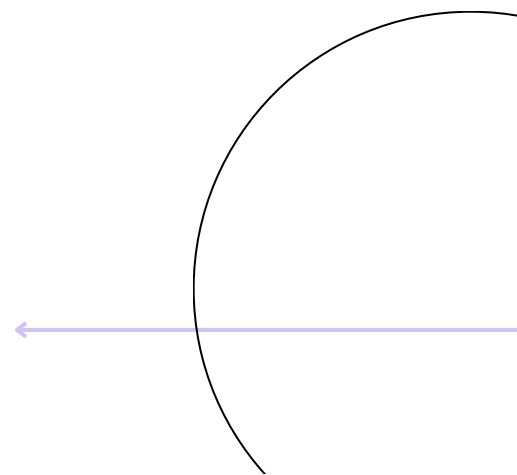
SEARO/ WPRO GUIDE

Conference made-easy for you.



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# Regional Introduction

## DEAR PROSPECTIVE DELEGATES AND ESTEEMED COLLEAGUES

The Western Pacific and Southeast Asia regions consist of 48 member countries, spanning seven different time zones and home to over one-fourth of the world's population. As a result of the diverse range of countries within these regions, there are varying cultural, social, and political landscapes that affect the reproductive rights and healthcare access of its citizens.

The advancement of sexual and reproductive rights has made some strides in recent years, with certain nations enhancing access to contraception, comprehensive sex education, and family planning services. Notwithstanding these efforts, significant hurdles remain. Conservative cultural and religious beliefs, as well as inadequate healthcare infrastructure and disparities in the availability of reproductive healthcare services, continue to hinder progress toward reproductive rights. These challenges serve as a reminder that much work still needs to be done to ensure that women have access to the reproductive healthcare they require.

This guide provides a comprehensive overview of the factors that affect sexual and reproductive health. It aims to promote a better understanding of the challenges and encourage discussions on potential solutions.

# Sexual and Reproductive Health Education

Sexual and reproductive health education is a complex issue in the Western Pacific (WPRO) and Southeast Asia (SEARO) regions. In some countries in these regions, comprehensive sex education programs are not well-developed, and cultural, religious, and societal norms can create barriers to effective education. One such country is the Philippines, where sexual and reproductive health education is facing substantial challenges. Being a predominantly Catholic country, conservative religious attitudes have influenced the lack of a comprehensive sex education curriculum. The government has struggled to implement effective sex education programs in schools due to opposition from religious groups. As a result, many Filipino youth lack access to accurate and age-appropriate information on sexual and reproductive health, which contributes to issues such as high rates of teenage pregnancies and limited knowledge about contraception and sexually transmitted infections.

## Case Study: Comprehensive Sexual Education in Thailand

In Southeast Asia, a comprehensive sex education program has been developed in Thailand that includes information on sexual health, contraception, and relationships. The program is delivered in schools and through community initiatives to give students the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their reproductive health. These efforts have contributed to a decrease in teenage pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections in Thailand, demonstrating the positive impact of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education programs when effectively implemented. However, challenges persist in ensuring that such programs reach all population segments, and disparities in access to quality sexual and reproductive health education may still exist across different regions within these countries.

UNFPA, UNESCO, WHO. (2015). UNFPA ASIAPACIFIC. asiapacific. <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Assessment.pdf>  
Jiin Kim, Jin Huh, Sung-Sang Yoo,  
Implementation of reproductive health education in a Filipino city: A case study,  
International Journal of Educational Development, Volume 100, 2023,  
102778, ISSN 0738-0593, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102778>.  
(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0738059323000548>)

# Reproductive Rights

Reproductive rights, encompassing aspects such as abortion, contraception, and data privacy, are complex issues in the Southeast Asia (SEARO) and Western Pacific (WPRO) regions. While progress has been made in some areas, significant challenges persist. Access to safe and legal abortion services remains limited in several countries due to strict laws, cultural stigma, and a lack of healthcare infrastructure. Contraception, while more widely available, can still face barriers related to affordability, awareness, and cultural beliefs. Additionally, data privacy is a growing concern in these regions, as the collection and sharing of sensitive reproductive health information may raise ethical and legal issues. Striking a balance between protecting individuals' privacy and providing necessary healthcare services and data for research is an ongoing challenge.

## Case Study: Reproductive Rights in South Korea

In South Korea, a country in East Asia, reproductive rights, including access to contraception and abortion, present a complex landscape. While contraception is widely available, and there is a relatively low prevalence of unsafe abortions, complexities remain. Abortion was essentially illegal in South Korea until a landmark decision in 2020 that legalized abortion under certain circumstances. However, barriers to accessing abortion services persist, such as a lack of facilities and healthcare providers willing to perform the procedure, in part due to cultural stigma. Comprehensive sex education can be uneven, leading to challenges in obtaining contraception and accurate sexual health information, particularly for young people facing societal and parental taboos surrounding sexual matters. These complexities underscore the intricate nature of reproductive rights in the East Asian context and the need for continued efforts to ensure access to safe and confidential reproductive healthcare while addressing cultural and societal factors.

Yoon, L. (2022, July 6). South Korea's constitutional right to abortion. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/09/south-koreas-constitutional-right-abortion>

Pressley, M. A. (2022, May 6). South Korea's Road to Reproductive Rights. Korea Economic Institute of America. <https://keia.org/the-peninsula/south-koreas-road-to-reproductive-rights/>

# Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

The Southeast Asia Regional Office (SEARO) and Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO) regions grapple with pervasive issues of domestic violence and sexual assault, casting shadows over the lives of countless individuals<sup>[1]</sup>. While cultural, social, and economic diversity characterize these regions, common threads of gender-based violence persist, necessitating a closer examination of the hidden realities faced by survivors.

In SEARO, countries like India witness alarming rates of domestic violence, with approximately 30% of ever-married women aged 15-49 reporting experiences of physical, sexual, or emotional violence by their spouses<sup>[2]</sup>. Bangladesh and Nepal also grapple with significant challenges, highlighting the complex interplay of cultural norms and socio-economic factors that contribute to the perpetuation of domestic violence<sup>[2]</sup>.

In the WPRO region, Papua New Guinea faces one of the highest rates of gender-based violence globally, with an estimated two-thirds of women experiencing domestic violence<sup>[2]</sup>. The prevalence of domestic violence in Fiji and the Solomon Islands underscores the need for comprehensive strategies that address societal norms and empower survivors<sup>[2]</sup>.

Efforts to combat domestic violence and sexual assault involve a multifaceted approach. Organizations like the National Commission for Women in India and the World Health Organization (WHO) in the WPRO region actively work towards supporting survivors and advocating for policy reforms<sup>[2]</sup>. However, challenges persist, including gaps in legal frameworks, cultural barriers, and the need for greater awareness to break the silence surrounding these issues.

<sup>[1]</sup>: SEARO - Southeast Asia Regional Office; WPRO - Western Pacific Regional Office.

<sup>[2]</sup>: National Family Health Survey (NFHS), World Health Organization (WHO), and various national surveys provide statistical insights into the prevalence of domestic violence and sexual assault in the mentioned regions.

# Queer Health

Queer health in the SEARO-WPRO regions is shaped by a nuanced interplay of cultural, social, and legal factors. In India, despite the milestone decriminalization of Section 377 in 2018, the queer community grapples with persistent stigma and discrimination, impacting mental health (Indian Journal of Psychiatry)[<sup>1</sup>]. Australia and New Zealand exemplify diverse approaches, with mental health challenges prevalent even in the wake of positive strides such as marriage equality (Australian Human Rights Commission)[<sup>2</sup>]. New Zealand, while recognizing diverse gender identities, faces challenges in providing comprehensive transgender healthcare (University of Waikato)[<sup>3</sup>].

Common challenges include stigma, limited LGBTQ+ affirming healthcare, and heightened mental health issues. Positive developments involve increasing advocacy, legal reforms, and awareness initiatives. However, there remains a need for comprehensive healthcare reforms, cultural sensitivity training for providers, and community-driven inclusivity.

## Case Study: Thailand's LGBTQ Community:

Thailand has emerged as a leader in LGBTQ+ rights in Southeast Asia, marked by significant legal progress, including gender recognition laws. While Bangkok offers gender-affirming healthcare, rural areas face healthcare disparities. Discrimination and societal stigma impact queer mental health, necessitating targeted support. Positive initiatives by community organizations and government campaigns contribute to fostering a supportive environment. To address ongoing challenges, healthcare training for providers on LGBTQ+ health is crucial, alongside strengthened community outreach in rural areas. Thailand's journey towards queer health inclusivity requires prioritizing education, healthcare reform, and community support

1. Indian Journal of Psychiatry. (2019). "Mental Health and Substance Use Problems in Sexual and Gender Minority Populations." [Link] (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6613090/>)

2. Australian Human Rights Commission. (2014). "Face the facts: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People." [Link] (<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/face-facts-lesbian-gay-bisexual-trans-and-intersex-people>)

3. University of Waikato. (2019). "Counting Ourselves: The Health and Wellbeing of Transgender New Zealanders." [Link] (<https://www.countingourselves.nz/>)



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