

Actualités du Pharo 2021 – Session 1

Sexual and reproductive health rights: genealogy of a concept and current challenges

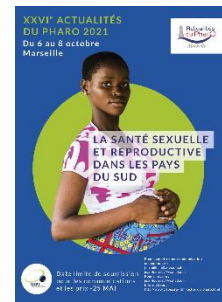
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Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are "the rights of all people to make free, informed and responsible decisions and to have full control over the basic aspects of their private lives - their bodies, their sexuality, their health, their relationships with others, their freedom to marry or not to marry, to have children or not to have children, and where appropriate, to choose a time and a partner - free of discrimination, stigmatisation, coercion or violence. This includes the right to enjoy and express one's own sexuality, to be free from interference by others in making decisions about sexuality and reproduction, and to have access to sexual and reproductive health information, education and services".¹ The concept of SRHR, which is widely used today, was formalised from the last quarter of the 20th century onwards, under the influence of a number of actors driven by feminist, health and political concerns. Breaking away from population control approaches and going beyond the exclusive framework of maternal health, it finally endorsed the possibility of dissociation between sexuality and fertility. From a public health point of view, the SRHR consider the individual in his or her life cycle, looking at a range of issues (from maternity to gynaecological cancers, including HIV prevention and the treatment of infertility) from the angle of both access to care and access to information, with sexuality education being an important element. But the SRHRs focus on human rights and make visible the links between health and gender inequalities in our patriarchal societies. Reclaimed as an international standard, notably through the 1994 Cairo Programme of Action and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, SRHR have since been appropriated or misappropriated, defended or fought for. More than 25 years after the establishment of these international roadmaps, where do we stand in their implementation? What is the place of women's demands and feminist thinking in the field of health? Why is it still legitimate to ask the question: "Who owns women's bodies? What are the contours of this questioning in regions such as Francophone West Africa? Why is it crucial to integrate more strongly the enunciations of feminist movements on these issues in order to renew approaches to the promotion of SRHR?

1 Definition of SRHR by the ICPD High Level Task Force, 2013