

Reproductive health and public health ethics

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Abstract

Individuals' reproductive choices are private matters, but sexual conduct and pregnancy impose significant public health burdens. Ethical principles of public health are distinguishable from principles applied in modern bioethics. Bioethical principles have been developed at the clinical or microethical level, affecting relations among individuals, whereas public health ethics applies at the population-based or macroethical level. Resolution of issues, for instance of consent to healthcare interventions and preservation of privacy, is different in public health practice from in clinical medicine. Public health aspects of human reproduction concern reduction of maternal mortality and morbidity, particularly in resource-poor countries, and the contribution to high rates of each of unsafe abortion, most prevalent where abortion laws are restrictive. Further aspects of public health ethics concern limited access to contraceptive services, the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV, causes of infertility, especially due to STIs, and responses to each of these concerns.

Keywords:

Public health ethics; Reproductive health; Maternal mortality and morbidity; Ethics; Unsafe abortion; Contraception; Infertility