**Women and sexual and reproductive health**

Since October 2019, following the increase in the price of gasoline in Iran, which is a very effective commodity in increasing the price of other goods and services, women in the lower and middle class have faced many problems in all matters of life that following the outbreak of Covid-19, these issues have become more prominent. Rising domestic violence and rising prices for reproductive and sexual health services are such issues. The [Iranian Parliamentary Research Center](https://www.dw.com/fa-ir/%D9%85%D8%B1%DA%A9%D8%B2-%D9%BE%DA%98%D9%88%D9%87%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%DA%A9%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7-%DB%B2-%D8%AA%D8%A7-%DB%B6-%D9%85%DB%8C%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%86%D9%81%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A8%DB%8C%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%85%DB%8C%DA%A9%D9%86%D8%AF/a-53273292) estimated two to six million of unemployment by the end of 2020, as a result of corona virus pandemic in Iran that would be more prevalent in lower socioeconomic classes.

In that study, the Parliamentary Research Center pointed out that the outbreak of coronavirus in Iran when the economy encountered a devastating obstacle. The decrease in the formation of fixed capital in the Iranian economy, according to the report of this center, has caused the potential production capacity of the economy to decrease and even it is so difficult even achieving the welfare and the level of prosperity nine years ago. High inflation rates for the past two years has reported and inflation forecasts above 25 percent for the current year have also reportedly caused "many firms to lose the ability to continue operating," a situation that has plunged Iran's economy into recession with uncertainty.

In the crisis-stricken economic structure, women are affected by more pressure, because women are first ones who lose their jobs or are more pressured by their husbands' unemployment. In either case, access to health services is reduced for them, or it reaches zero.

In this opportunity, we state some effects of Corona on the sexual and reproductive health between Iranian women and Afghan refugees.

**Corona and reduction of reproductive and sexual health services**

In Iran, health centers in cities, towns, and villages provide free reproductive and sexual health services or at relatively cheaper prices than other medical centers. However, due to the outbreak of covid 19 virus, many of these centers have been dedicated only to the diagnosis and treatment of Corona disease, so it can be claimed that with the onset of the crisis, women's reproductive and sexual health has been marginalized.

Population growth policies have been on the agenda of the Iranian government for several years, which has caused the Ministry of Health to provide only free Birth control pills and contraceptive pills in these centers and in the case of IUDs at a much lower price than government or non-government hospitals. (About 25 thousand Tomans[[1]](#footnote-1)) But it is not possible to use these services for all women, and other women must go to the pharmacy to buy these items and pay for it.

On the other hand, abortion is not free in Iran and with special conditions when the health of mother and child is in danger, a medical certificate is issued for abortion, in which case the amount of demand is higher than the amount of permission. Therefore, the risk of illegal and unsanitary abortions has increased

The cost of an illegal abortion by a gynecologist at home with the suction method is at least one million Tomans. Of course, this price may be lower if you use the pill, but in any case, the risk of not being a specialist and side effects after the abortion also falls on the woman. Under normal circumstances, according to the latest statistics in 2017, between 300,000 and 500,000 illegal abortions are reported annually in the country, meaning that according to official statistics from the Ministry of Health, 1,000 abortions are performed every day in the country, and only about ten are legal.

Also, ultrasound is only free for those who have insurance in some social security centers, but waiting for an ultrasound sometimes takes two weeks or more. In free centers, for normal ultrasounds such as uterine cyst control, the cost is between 150-200 thousand Tomans.

**Afghan Immigrant Women**

According to unofficial statistics, about three million Afghan refugees live in Iran. Some of these immigrants live legally in Iran with a registration card or passport, but a large group does not have an official residence permit and are considered illegal immigrants. Those who have an insurance card can be insured, but this insurance does not include full coverage. Groups who do not have a degree do not receive any medical support services.

Afghan migrant women have faced more health problems since the beginning of 1998, as rising prices put women's health at a later stage. But with the outbreak of the Quaid 19 crisis, the wives of these women have lost their jobs and many of them have been forced to give birth at home without access to any health services. Natural childbirth in Iran is free for Iranian women, but for Afghan women, this cost is between 4-5 million Tomans. Legal Afghan immigrants can use these services by paying the fee, but undocumented women cannot even use the charitable services which have provided.

On the other hand, Women give birth to their children in the hospital for at least 50 years, so there is almost no access to home midwives, and if there is a midwife, she is usually very old.

In the seven cities of Isfahan province which refugees have a residence permit, the population [of pregnant mothers](https://www.imna.ir/news/408711/%D8%B2%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%81%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%86) reaches about 17%, some of whom are illegal and generally do not go to health centers. Pregnant mothers of Afghan nationals with residence permit problems are at high risk and their lives may be threatened.

Contrary to the officials' claims that if a migrant who is the pregnant mother has problems issuing an [insurance card](https://www.imna.ir/news/408711/%D8%B2%D8%A7%DB%8C%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%81%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%86) for some problems related to the pregnancy time, the necessary permits will be obtained through the governor's office so that they can be issued maternity insurance and a residence card on a case-by-case basis while these rules do not apply They are not financially able to use the services and no license is issued to them.

Somayeh, one of this women, said of her home delivery: "My husband took me to several hospitals, but they said they could reduce the cost of the delivery a little and which was not enough for me." My wife is a worker and does not have much income. I gave myself to God and gave birth to my baby at home. Some of these women have given birth alone at home.

It seems that since the Ministry of Health has been following the new population growth policy for several years, it has included vulnerable populations such as immigrants under this program, regardless of the harms of such a policy, and has developed a family planning program inappropriate to the situation of immigrants. On the other hand, due to the lack of insurance support for immigrant mothers and children, it has practically deprived them of health services.

**Women in crisis area**

Iran is a large country facing many natural crises, for example, there are only 120 dangerous faults in the whole of Iran. Iran's location on the earthquake belt is the cause of numerous earthquakes, and most of Iran's cities are located in areas where the risk of a high-magnitude earthquake is high. In recent years, earthquakes in the western and northwestern cities of Iran have created a difficult situation for women. Also, at the beginning of 2019, floods swept across large parts of Iran from the north, northwest, and west and northeast of Iran. Also in 2020, the eastern regions of Iran were flooded. Most of the women in these areas, as well as the women who have been displaced by the earthquake, live in tents and sometimes in shelters. With the outbreak of Covid 19, this condition has put their health conditions at greater risk. The aid of Red Crescent aid workers is usually thrown among the people. If it is also included sanitary packs, women are usually ashamed to take it in front of men. In the flood of 2019, after informing the NGOs about the need of women for sanitary pads and underwear, people started to provide these items, but the lack of a female rescuer prevents women from having access to these items. Also, in crisis areas, due to traditional and cultural prejudices, women do not spread their underwear to dry, and usually, because of the commuting of men in the area, they sometimes use wet underwear, and in these areas, fungal infections. Ignoring the needs of women in these areas has endangered the health of these women. On the other hand, in these areas, due to many reasons including deprivation and poverty, lack of access to contraceptives, low literacy, and religion, and non-contraception in traditional people, the birth rate is high, especially during the crisis, the demand for sex by men increases, and due to the lack of training for men and the lack of counselors to teach them some other ways to relieve stress, women would be pregnant and involved in situations that endanger their health and that of their child. There is no gynecologist in these areas and this causes serious harm to women.

On the other hand, because these areas are religious and traditional, women are sometimes ashamed to not be able to use toilets and public baths because they are exposed to men, and they use unsanitary holes for defecation, and this also leads to illness in genitals. Take a look at the common diseases of women that get worse with Corona disease

**Take a look at women disease that would be worse in the crisis**

Fungal infections are widespread in Iran, according to obstetricians and gynecologists, as well as the human papillomavirus, which has spread rapidly due to multiple male relationships. In addition Human papillomavirus infection is the most common sexually transmitted disease and one of the symptoms of this infection is genital warts. While the average global prevalence of this virus is between 9 and 13%, but there are no exact statistics on the prevalence of this disease in Iran. "According to [Dr. Mohraz,](https://www.bbc.com/persian/science-44440439) a well-known infectious disease specialist in Iran, a recent study on sex workers was conducted in one of the districts of Tehran, in which 31% of women were infected with HPV." On the other hand, according to the head of the cancer department of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, eight percent of Iranian women have HPV infection. In 2013, the president of the Scientific Association of Social Workers of Iran said: At least [one million Iranians](https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/366748/%D8%AA%D8%A3%D9%85%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%A2%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B1-%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D9%85%DB%8C%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%88%D9%86%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B2%DA%AF%DB%8C%D9%84-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%DB%8C) have been infected with genital warts. On the other hand, according to the head of the cancer department of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, eight percent of Iranian women have HPV infection.

It is worth mentioning that the cost of doing HPV in Iran is high and in 1998 this amount was 450 thousand Tomans. Also, the cost of colposcopy in Iran is high and is performed by obstetricians and gynecologists in the article. Be. Therefore, many women in the lower classes do not have access to this test, and in a situation where the corona has made economic conditions more difficult for women, middle-class women are less able to use these tests. Until recently, the vaccine against this virus (Gardasil) was one million Tomans, but it is not clear how much it costs now with the increase in the price of the dollar in Iran. And what percentage of people can afford it.

Also, unfortunately, there are no statistics on these fungal diseases of women or their infection with HPV. Lack of access to statistics, as well as failure to check the health status of women in these areas or other areas, prevents the provision of accurate statistics.

In addition to these issues, we should mention the high costs of tests, ultrasound, mammography, and the lack of these facilities in deprived areas, flooded and earthquake-stricken, along with the high cost of performing Corona testing and its drugs while women even have problems in the Being aware of own reproductive health and sexual health. So these issues are now of paramount importance.

Maryam Rahmani, Marzieh Shakiba

**"Digari**" is a website is related to Iranian feminist and women's rights activists.. Digari is the voluntary collective effort of women activists in Iran to try to reflect the voices of the unheard. The other is independent of the Iranian state and sovereignty and has nothing to do with the institutions of power and opposes their militaristic approach. Digari try to promote gender awareness and justice in Iran : <https://digari.org/>

1. Iran currency [↑](#footnote-ref-1)