We have a global epidemic: women’s lack of sexual rights and subsequent lack of access to sexual reproductive health. Additionally, it is the world’s most vulnerable women - young girls and refugees - who are the most affected. These women and girls are trapped in cultures of misogyny which is exacerbated by the West’s hesitancy to provide financial aid and refugee hosting support, including family planning services. Consequently, women with no reproductive autonomy are pouring out of crisis and conflict zones and into overwhelmed and heavily burdened host countries.

This article’s intent and purpose is to be a voice for women and girls who have none. Many of them undergo genital mutilation (FGM) with no anaesthesia starting around age 6 due to old archaic customs. Currently, 200 million girls and women have had their genitals mutilated. It is time to discuss these women and their sexual reproductive rights in the open.

One in four girls is married as a child, 130 million girls receive no schooling and 71% of human trafficking victims are female. One in three women will experience violence from their partner, and currently 214 million women of reproductive age in developing countries cannot use any contraceptive method to avoid pregnancy.
Due to the current explosion of the refugee crisis, it is particularly important that the issue of contraceptives and family planning be addressed. At the end of 2016 the number of forcibly displaced people stood at 65.6 million.

There is little awareness that women’s reproductive rights are synonymous with global stability. Considering the bulk of the refugee crisis, COMES from areas in crisis and conflict - with exploding and unstable populations - ignoring the contraceptive needs of women only adds to the continuing explosion of the poor. (3, 4,5)

Muslim majority nations can no longer have the luxury of labelling women’s contraception as ‘taboo.’ Christian nations can no longer force a ‘faith-based approach’ to family planning. Our decisions must be grounded in evidence: Global stability depends on it. Furthermore, governments cannot sit idly while women around the world are being raped, abused, condemned to a life of violence and poverty, and forced to bear children they - nor the society they are born into - can support.

The refugee crisis is fuelled by systematic and unchecked population booms in crisis and conflict zones. For instance, in Niger, the population is estimated to increase from 21 million in 2017 to over 192 million in 2100. Currently, half of their population is under the age of 15. Adolescent birth rates are among the highest in the world, and the overwhelming majority of the population (80 percent) are living in poverty. Since the landlocked nation is largely desert with only 12 percent of arable land which is shrinking due to climate change, the population increase proves even more problematic. At current growth rates, the population is set to double in 17 years. (6)

These so-called “time bombs” of high population growth in crisis and conflict zones are taking place in a number of other countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan, Ethiopia, the United Republic of Tanzania, Angola, Burundi, Niger, Somalia, and Zambia—all countries rocked by conflict and humanitarian crises. (7) In addition, these are all areas where women have few human rights, and lack of access to sexual reproductive health. The unaddressed need for women’s contraception exacerbates the explosion in population, stressing these fragile states to points of chaos and contributes to the growing refugee crisis. (8)

At an event held during September at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, UNFPA’s Acting Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem, explained how an aid worker’s focus is primarily to find food, shelter, and access to immediate medical care rather than to family planning. Furthermore, areas affected by conflict receive 50 percent less funding for reproductive services compared to non-conflict zones, (17) and while conflict areas are the most neglected, they are among the most important: “The risks [women and girls] face are disproportionately high, and the services and support available to them are disproportionately low,” Kanem adds. (8, 9, 10,11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18) Conflicts and their aftermath can have dire consequences for reproductive health since:

a. the preponderance of political emergencies occurs in the world’s poorest nations where the population’s pre-conflict health is often already lacking.

b. as health systems collapse and people flee in search of safety, access to health facilities becomes limited, or completely obliterated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Population, average annual increment and growth rate, for the world, development groups and major areas, selected years and periods (medium variant)</th>
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<td>Population (millions)</td>
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*Source: World Population Prospects – 2017 Revision: Global population*
In many—even most—cases, women may be unable to access family planning during a time when few would have chosen to become pregnant. (12)

Also, in conflict zones, rape acts as a weapon of war and sexual assault toward women in EXTREMELY high. “Women and girls are attacked while on the run, while they seek protection, while they fetch water, when they fetch food, even while they use the latrines in the camps where they are seeking protection,” explains Mark Lowcock, head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (13)

According to Amnesty International, rape is so commonplace among refugee women that they often receive contraception ahead of their journeys. (14) Typically, these shots are illegal and are provided by the people smugglers. The consequences can be fatal, (15) but considering that 60% of maternal death occurs in crisis or humanitarian settings, (16) another choice can be as equally deadly.

Safe abortion is usually impossible.

**CHALLENGES TO PROVIDING FAMILY PLANNING IN THESE COMMUNITIES**

Zarlasht Halaimzai, the Executive Director for Refugee Trauma Initiative who runs a group for pregnant Syrian refugees in Greece, tells WIT they are seeing alarming levels of postpartum depression among refugee women: “There are a lot of women who are suicidal. Some already have small children and don’t know how they will care for more.” She explains that many of the women would like to have the choice not to have any more children, but they have no access to contraception not even condoms.” (23)

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1. Contraception Is Neglected In Host Settings

Halaimzai explains there is not much to do in the camps, and that while women would like to avoid pregnancy, they would also like to keep their marriages alive. So what do they do? They have sex (yes, sex) with their husbands. And with no access to - or insufficient information about how to access - contraception, they become pregnant. The need for contraception is very high. Across diverse contexts, 30 to 40 percent of women experiencing displacement did not want to become pregnant in the next two years, and 12 to 35 percent wanted to limit their number of pregnancies. (22) However, few have the choice. For example, nearly three quarters of pregnant Syrian refugee women and couples surveyed in Lebanon wished to prevent future pregnancy, and more than half did not plan their current pregnancy. (22) Taking all of this into consideration, it is puzzling that why condoms are not distributed in the camps or contraception not always included in refugees ‘dignity kits’ upon arrival into host countries.

2. Birth control has a bad reputation in Muslim communities

On the other hand, not everyone thinks birth control is a blessing. Let’s consider Pakistan, where the population is rising faster than was expected and has surged to over 207.7 million, making it the world’s fifth most populous country. With 60 percent of the population under 30, and high rates of poverty and illiteracy, this is being referred to as “a disaster in the making.” In spite of this catastrophe occurring before our eyes, only a third of women are using any modern contraception.

In some of Pakistan’s communities they perceive birth control as a foreign plot to sterilize Muslims. Furthermore, in January, a proposal was submitted by WHOM to parliament to raise the legal minimum age of marriage to 18 for females and introduce harsher penalties for child marriage. However, efforts to protect these girls were struck down after strong pressure from the Council of Islamic Ideology for being “anti-Islamic” and “blasphemous.”
In Nigeria, where Boko Haram, a Jihadist group that terrorizes the North-East (25) of the country, deems artificial contraception as a product of infidel learning, and therefore it is forbidden. Nigeria has the fastest growing population in the world along with a growing refugee crisis, but Nigerian women are having an average of five and a half children, many of whom will die from starvation.

Additionally, the countries ideologues believe that women should avoid school, marry young, and have lots of babies. In these areas of Jihadist control, women have no other choice.

3. Sex is often used as a bargaining chip and a means to survive

Often, marrying and reproducing in armed conflict is a matter of survival. While young women are generally portrayed as passive victims during periods of conflict, there are also reports of incredible strength and resilience. For instance, these young girls use their sexuality to bargain themselves into “domestic units” in the context of military groups, and in doing so, ensure their survival. Hence, women often resort to using their sexuality when few other choices and resources are available. (12)

In Northern Uganda, transactional sex was used as a survival strategy when farming was not viable. Although they are typically considered risk factors during times of stability and peace, early marriage along with transactional sex may temporarily protect women in certain conflict situations by ensuring survival and protecting them from rape.

However, changes in sexual attitudes and behavior during conflict can have long-term consequences for social norms.

For instance, in the case of Northern Uganda, forced marriages and transactional sex were reported to have continued after the conflict ended. Likewise, focus group discussions with youth attending school in Liberia revealed that transactional sex had become widespread during the country’s civil war and remained common in the post-conflict period. Such relationships were said to be frequently encouraged by parents and used to secure material goods and reduce school fees.

Even in refugee camps, systems for the distribution of food and other essentials are often controlled by male-dominated committees who demand sex in return for goods and services.

Some evidence suggests that life in refugee camps increases the risk of early marriage. (12) There are even reports of humanitarian aid workers engaging in transactional sex with or sexually abusing vulnerable refugees with the most recent reports of alleged sexual exploitation by UNHCR workers against women in Ethiopia.

4. Religious and cultural beliefs impact contraceptive availability

While a culture of misogyny in Islam and Muslim majority nations contributes to challenges in women accessing reproductive health, religious and cultural values which exist in the West are equally

**POPULATION GROWTH DEVELOPED VS. DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

*Source: UN Population Division, World Population Prospects.*
detrimental contributing lack of contraception access. For instance, the United States government - through its governmental HIV/AIDS initiative PEPFAR - funds “faith-based” abstinence-only programs—which researchers have found to be completely ineffective (26). Furthermore, funding for anyone referring an abortion has been cut through the expansion of the Mexico City Policy. (27) Some White House officials wrote that they intend to slash federal funding to the U.S. Agency for International Development’s family-planning budget and require “equal funding” for fertility awareness. The memo further specifies that fertility planning should be the sole birth control method made available to young girls. Fertility planning, also known as “rhythm method,” has the highest rates of failure of any family-planning method.

As a result, we are forcing the world’s most vulnerable women to carry pregnancies they cannot support. This human right of “choice” although protected by international law is clearly ignored. (28, 29) When the reproductive needs of refugee women entering host countries in Europe are ignored, EU member states are also denying these women this human right. Furthermore, by not making sexual reproductive health a top priority, Europe is directly contributing to this refugee crisis which they are hosting. They are ignoring the opportunity to resolve the refugee crisis.

**CASE STUDY: GREECE**

A protest broke out Moria migrant detention center on the northeastern Greek island of Lesbos. Protesters, mainly unaccompanied teenagers, set fires and riot police were on standby. File April 2016

Greece is at a breaking point. On picturesque Greek shores, refugees are trapped in hideous conditions. Although the islands are completely overwhelmed, refugees keep pouring in. Addressing the Greek parliament, Migration Minister Yiannis Mouzalas cited a “noticeable increase” in refugee arrivals. This surge of new arrivals has resulted in worsening conditions on Greek Island. “On the eastern Aegean Islands, and particularly in the hotspots, the situation is alarming and the hosting capacity has been overwhelmed,” said Boris Cheshirkov, UNHCR’s Associate Communications Officer on the Greek Islands. He adds, “Tensions are rising and the risk of violence, including sexual violence, is increasing.” (2)

With 200 refugees arriving every day tensions are boiling over. Since the EU-Turkey deal was signed in March 2016, thousands have found themselves trapped in limbo on the small island of Chios. Men, women, and children who aspire to continue onto mainland Greece are housed in two overcrowded camps. One of the camps is Souda, a makeshift settlement that stands within an old fortress in Chios town. It is currently managed by Chios municipality and has little security apart from the presence of several NGOs. The other camp, Vial, was originally the official ‘hotspot camp’ or detention center on Chios. It is located in the mountains, around 20km from Chios Town. Gabrielle Tan, founder of Action from Switzerland, runs safe spaces for women on the outskirts of the Souda camp and describes egregious rates of gender-based violence for all the women. One victim said “The camp security did nothing, even though the man said in front of him that I was a whore and deserve to be raped that night, because the guard only understood Greek, and I couldn’t communicate what was happening,” (32). According to a report by Refugee Rights Data project, 82.4 percent of the women surveyed said “they never felt safe” or “don’t feel very safe.” Almost half (42.9 percent) had experienced some form of violence inside these two camps and generally did not feel safe when using showers and similar facilities as there is no gender segregation and locks are often broken on toilets. The environment is infested with alcohol, fights, drugs and many angry, frustrated men.

The Guardian reported the story of a girl named Rasha in which she suddenly went missing. On this day, her peers described hanging out with the 20-year-old Syrian living in the Greek refugee detention camp as normal. Then she vanished. Later, her friend
Amira, only 15, received a flurry of images on her phone: Rasha was lying naked in bed with a man. Superimposed upon his head were grotesque cartoon faces and an accompanying message from the anonymous caller: “I promise I will kidnap you also.”

Souda has long been earmarked for closure, and the remainder of the refugees are set to be transferred to Vial. “While Souda Camp has never been a humane or suitable living environment for people, we are concerned that the remote location of Vial and a lack of sufficient transport provision will increase the isolation of displaced people and the detrimental impact of that, and limit residents’ abilities to access necessary support services: educational, medical, legal, psychosocial, and activity-based services available in Chios Town. The closure of any camp is only a positive step if living conditions and facilities are improved as a result and that is yet to be seen,” said William Heaney, Head of Operations at A Drop in the Ocean.

A study by Harvard University conducted earlier this year warned of a “growing epidemic” of sexual exploitation and abuse in Greece. “We had a case of a four-year-old girl who was raped,” a psychologist at a camp in Athens told researchers. Victims are trapped in camps with their abusers and are too frightened to go to the police or authorities who frequently lack interpreters and specialists. The report concluded that it found that “weak or non-existent” structures leave children at heightened danger.

Because the risk of sexual violence is extremely high in refugee camps and security is lacking, sexual choices for these women are often impossible. And while we may not be able to protect them from sexual assault, we must protect them from becoming pregnant as a result.

**NEW SOLUTIONS**

Governments and organizations are acutely aware of the plight of refugee women - which includes rampant sexual assault- yet, are still denying them their reproductive rights. Doctors of the World in Greece (Medicins du Monde), an international humanitarian movement, surveyed over 14,000 women who received care through their Mother & Child Programme following their arrival in Greece. The research results, published in October, reveals the significant challenges refugee and migrant women face across Europe when accessing reproductive healthcare: Less than 47 percent of refugee women have prior access to Doctors of the World Mother & Child Programme’s intervention.

Additionally, while injectable contraceptives have become a mainstay for women across the developing world. There are for example the leading form of contraception in Afganshta, Eritrea, and Somalia etc, but their import and sale is illegal in Greece. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is the largest provider of sexual and reproductive health services to refugees in the country and has tried—unsuccessfully—to lobby the Greek Ministry of Health to change this. “We now have a big community of refugee and migrant women who need these,” said Motska. MSF does promote IUD’s, but they need a medical procedure to be inserted and women have reservations about using them. Also, while access to health care for pregnant migrants

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Source: Refugee Rights Project

Source: UNHCR
and refugees varies between European countries, it has limitations and restrictions in all of them. (38) "Never before has there been such a universal convergence around the need to reshape how we engage in refugee crises, bringing tried and tested elements and new ones together in one framework." - Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, October third. (21)

To address this refugee crisis, we must prioritize the family planning needs of refugee women. Robust focus on women’s sexual reproductive health and adequate family planning must be part of the “new solutions.” We no longer have the luxury of labeling women’s contraception as ‘taboo, illegal or against religion.’ Neither governments nor religious leaders take on the responsibility of taking care of abused children.

**...we must prioritize the family planning needs of refugee women**

- Because armed conflict brings a unique set of challenges, it also requires a unique set of solutions. We need to recognize that when women receive an education, their children benefit. However, for women in crisis and conflict settings, school attendance can increase their risk of physical violence or abduction, therefore the top priority is the need for contraception. The best way to prevent a child from abuse of war, starvation and sexual abuse is to prevent them being born. Women need the right to choose particularly in conflict situations.

- All refugees (both men and women) must be given information on the benefits of small families and information about how to access family planning services. These must be provided in every applicable language as language barriers are an often reported challenge of refugees.

- If family planning goals are fulfilled, world population will be reduced by 1.26 billion by 2050 and unplanned births by 33 million per year. Furthermore, this also reduces the risk of unintended pregnancies among women living with HIV, resulting in fewer infected babies and orphans. (13) At the very least, condoms should be provided in the ‘dignity kits’ given to refugees upon arrival into host countries. Considering male and female condoms provide dual protection against unintended pregnancies and STIs—including HIV—it leaves one baffled as to why they are not included.

- All women - and especially those in crisis and conflict - must be able to access a safe abortion. And this need is more urgent than ever. Since the expansion of the Mexico City Policy, also known as ‘Global Gag Rule,’ NGO’s who even mention abortion lose access to United States funding. Since the United States is the largest contributor to foreign aid, the effects could be devastating. Last time this policy was enacted, illegal abortions spiked.

- Using the power of the media can be very beneficial to all concerned. Georgia Arnold with MTV’s Staying Alive Foundation has created a show called ‘Shuga’ which targets African millennials and focuses on contraception. With their two shows, 16 and Pregnant and Teen Mom, MTV has already demonstrated great success in reducing adolescent pregnancy rates in the United States.

- Research indicated that these shows led to a 5.7 percent reduction in teen births, which accounts for around one-third of the overall decline in teen births in the year and a half following the show’s introduction in 2009. MTV will now be expanding their series, ‘Shuga’ to India, Egypt, and Nigeria.

- In Uganda, a new TV show is hoping to educate the country’s young people about sexual and reproductive health. (43) One issue Uganda faces is that despite the country’s high fertility rate and HIV prevalence, sex is still a taboo topic. However, this new show will allow puppets to say the things that people have trouble discussing. Furthermore, research led by PATH and Uganda’s Ministry of Health last year delivered promising results on self-injectable women’s contraception: “This pioneering research is important not only for the women of Uganda, but for all women,” says Professor Dr. Anthony K. Mbonye, Acting Director General, Health Services, Ministry of Health. And while injectable contraception is one method that is worth exploring, we must remember there is no blanket approach to tackling women’s lack of access to contraception. Women - from opposite ends of the economic spectrum - all share the same dilemma which require different approaches. Thus, governments around the world must listen to the specific needs of women from across diverse contexts and implement what works best for all of us. It is our human right.

- Probably the most important element to tackling these issues is we must have more women in government, running for...
Probably the most important element to tackling these issues is we must have more women in government, running for office, and leadership positions. Privileged women in the west must be the ones to advocate for these women, because while there are many good men who defend women and stand up for their rights, there are simply not enough of them.

…not only about human rights...[but] also about global stability...

Lastly, we must also remember that providing adequate family planning services to these women is not only about human rights; it is also about global stability and a way to tackle this refugee crisis at a root cause. If we make contraception a top priority we can reduce these population booms, in unstable places, which drive many of the issues causing the refugee crisis in the first place.

Author: Jessica Williamson

SOURCES


13. “Leaders Urge Access to Reproductive Health Supplies in Crisis Set-


HEALTH & THE ENVIRONMENT

Unveiling The Environmental Causes Of Developmental Disabilities In Children

LEONARDO TRASANDE MD MPP

(Presented at the 25th conference on Health and Environment: Global Partners for Global Solutions - United Nations)

1. Introduction: Greatest Concern about Children

- Pond for pond, drink more water, eat more food and breathe in more air
- Less well able to detoxify or eliminate chemicals from their bodies
- Developing organ systems are more susceptible
- Greater years of life in which chronic conditions can occur as a result of early life exposures.

2. Increasing Evidence For The Role Of Chemical Exposures

Population studies quantify strong and consistent associations with chemical exposures.
- US National Academy of Science: 28% of developmental disabilities at least in part due to environment.
- Benzene and 1,3-butadiene associated with childhood cancer
- Outdoor air pollutants are well documented to worsen and may increase risk of development of asthma. (Trasande et al, Dec 2011, Health Affairs)

3. Chemical And Environmental Agents Of The Endocrine System

Endocrine disruptors (EDs) are chemicals that have the capacity to interfere with hormonal signaling systems.
- Mya mimic, block, or modulate the synthesis, release, transport, metabolism, binding, or elimination of natural hormones
- May temporally or permanently alter feedback loops in the brain, pituitary, gonads, thyroid, and other components of the endocrine system.

4. Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals (EDCs)

Highly heterogeneous groups of molecules.
- Industrial solvents/lubricants and their byproducts [polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), polybrominated biphenyls (PBBs), dioxins], plastics [bisphenol A (BPA)]
- Plasticizers (phthalates)
- Pesticides [methoxychlor, chlorpyrifos, dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT)]
- Fungicides ( vinclozolin)
- Pharmaceutical agents [diethylstilbestrol (DES)]

5. Endocrine Disruption And The Developing Brain

Thyroid hormone has long been known to be critical to early brain development

development
- Predictable outcomes of its disruption include global IQ deficits, as well as neurodevelopmental disabilities such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Interference with sex steroid and other hormonal modes of action may also adversely impair early brain development.

6. Organophosphate Pesticides

Principal mode of action of chlorpyrifos is through acetyl cholinesterase (AChE) inhibition, though many reports indicate neurotoxicological effects independent of AChE inhibition
- Developmental exposure of mice to levels of chlorpyrifos that had no effect on AChE activity adversely affected thyroid hormone levels
- Thyroid signalling also impaired (De Angelis et al Toxicological sciences 2009; Jeong et al Toxicology 2006; Levin et al Neurotoxicology and teratology 2002).
- Consistent dose/response relationships of organophosphate pesticide exposures in pregnancy with intellectual quotient across two carefully conducted longitudinal birth cohorts (Bouchard et al EHP 2011; Engel et al EHP 2011)
- Prenatal OP exposure has been associated with magnetic resonance imaging findings in children including frontal and parietal cortical thinning (Raun et al PNAS 2012).

7. Flame Retardants

In 1970s, flame retardant called brominated tris was added to children's pajamas to prevent burns in children. In California, 1975 law required furniture makers to inject flame retardant chemicals into all furniture sold in the state which became national standard
- Found to cause cancer in animals, banned by CPSC. Same with chlorinated tris.
- Tris substitution with brominated chemicals called PBDEs
- PBDEs may also affect the metabolism of thyroid hormone (Shimizu et al, Toxicology 2013).
- Flame retardants still used by many furniture producers and in electronics.

CONCLUSIONS

a. The Increasingly Global Chemical Picture:

OECD estimates that in 2020, industrial nations will account for 33% of global chemical demand and 31% of production.
- Compared with 23 percent and 21 percent, respectively, in 1995
- Industrializing nations are expected to lead in the manufacture of
of high production volume chemicals
- Occurs against a backdrop on insufficient infrastructure to protect public health and the environment

b. Failing to Prevent is Costly:

- Environmentally attributed costs of lead poisoning, methylmercury toxicity, asthma, autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, childhood cancer, intellectual disability is at $76.6 billion (Trasande and Lui Health Affairs, 2011).
- Global cost of lead exposure in developing countries is about $992 billion (1.0% of GDP), and $227 billion (2.0% of GDP) in China (At-tina and Trasande EHP 2013)

c. Prevention Works and Saves Money:

Global Benefits of Phasing Out Lead from Gasoline
- Range from $1 - $6 trillion/year, with a best estimate of $2.45 trillion/year. These benefits may also be expressed as 4% of global GDP.

**SUMMARY**

**Safe and Simple Steps to Limit Pesticide Exposures**

Before the US Environmental Protection Agency (USPA)’s phase out of diazoin and chlorpyrifos, which resulted from FQPA, these two pesticides were frequently detected in the cord blood of NYC children
- Also, associated with decrements in birth weight and length
- After phase outs, the pesticides and association with predictors of cognitive potential were no longer detected. (Whyatt RM et al EHP 2004)

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**Suspected Environmental Neurotoxicants**

An alarming study released Wednesday found many baby food products test positive for arsenic, including 80% of infant formulas. And, that's not the only dangerous contaminate found.

The Clean Label Project, a nonprofit advocating for transparent labeling, tested baby food, infant formulas, toddler drinks and snacks purchased within the past 5 months. The group looked at top-selling formulas and baby food using Nielsen data, and also included emerging national brands. After about 530 baby food products were tested, researchers found 65% of products tested positive for arsenic, 36% for lead, 58% for cadmium and 10% for acrylamide. All of these chemicals pose potential dangers to developing infants.

Jennifer Lowry, pediatrician and toxicologist at Children’s Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, Mo., who is not affiliated with the research, said these chemicals can affect fine motor skills and cognition.

Mainstream brands including Gerber, Enfamil, Plum Organics and Sprout were among the worst offenders — scoring two out of five in the Clean Label Project’s report card for toxic metals. Plus, 60% of products claiming to be “BPA free” tested positive for the industrial chemical bisphenol A. The quantities of contaminants range, but some products tested positive for up to 600 parts of arsenic per billion. That’s far more than just trace amounts.

Arsenic was the most common contaminate spotted in the Clean Label Project study. Nearly 80% of infant formula samples tested positive for arsenic. The toxin is associated with developmental defects, cardiovascular disease, neurotoxicity, diabetes and even cancer, according to the World Health Organization.

Jaclyn Bowen, executive director of Clean Label Project and a food safety scientist, said rice-based baby food such as snack puffs had some of the highest levels of arsenic.

In 2016, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration proposed a limit of 100 parts per billion of arsenic in infant rice cereal, but isn’t enforcing that limit. Rice often absorbs arsenic from contaminated soil as it grows in the environment.

“It is important for consumers to understand that some contaminants, such as heavy metals like lead or arsenic, are in the environment and cannot simply be removed from food,” Peter Cassell, a FDA spokesperson.

Lead, also found in food tested by the Clean Label Project, has been found in baby food before. Just a few months ago, the Environmental Defense Fund found 20% of 2,164 baby food samples tested contained lead. No amount of lead is safe, but it’s not regulated.

Low levels of lead in children’s blood have been connected to lower IQs, slowed growth, behavioral problems, hearing issues and anemia, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

The Clean Label Project posted a list of products it tested, along with a star-rating grade informed by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, on its website. Bowen said she hopes the data helps parents become better advocates for their children’s health, and creates change in the baby food business.

“The baby industry needs to do a better job in protecting America’s most vulnerable population,” Bowen said.

WE WEAR THE CAPE OF CIVILISATION, BUT OUR SOULS REMAIN IN THE STONE AGE
-Nizar Qabbani, Poet and Diplomat (21 March 1923-1998)
According to the most comprehensive global analysis to date, Pollution kills at least nine million people and costs trillions of dollars every year, “threatening the continuing survival of human societies”. The vast majority of the pollution deaths occur in poorer nations and in some, such as India, Chad and Madagascar, pollution causes a quarter of all deaths.

“Landrigan said his biggest concern was the unknown impact of the hundreds of industrial chemicals and pesticides already widely dispersed around the world: “I worry we have created a situation where people are exposed to chemicals that are eroding intelligence or impairing reproduction or weakening their immune system, but we have not yet been smart enough to make the connection between the exposure and the outcome, because it is subtle.” On Wednesday, a horrific plunge in the abundance of vital insects was reported, with pesticides a possible cause.

“Pollution has not received nearly as much attention as climate change, or Aids or malaria – it is the most underrated health problem in the world,” he said.


For more info on chemical pollution & brain development, see: http://www.chemtrust.org/brain/

“Sooner or later, we will have to recognise that the Earth has rights, too, to live without pollution. What mankind must know is that human beings cannot live without Mother Earth, but the planet can live without humans.

-Evo Morales
PROMOTING SDGs: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT LIBRARY FOR ALL

Hundreds of millions of people need equitable access to practical education and knowledge concerning sustainable development solutions for their lives. To empower every individual with a virtual knowledge base of the best Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) reference information available in the UN and international community, a personal SDG Library for each smart phone can be possible.

5000 publications of best and most practical UN SDG-related publications would represent about 5 million knowledge bits contained in 500,000 pages. This is about 4GB of information. 4GB is difficult to download in most developing countries. But it fits perfectly on a locally self-copyable USB stick, a phone memory, or low-cost reading device. It can be copied freely and locally through many channels and outlets.

These 5000 publications are published and available from UN and development agencies in open source, or for free dissemination for non-profit distribution. The downside is that these are mostly PDF publications. When these 5000 selected publications are transformed into XML we can tag every knowledge bit with several meetings, and organise them with open source software. These knowledge bits then become a pro-active personal SDG knowledge library. The SDG Library for All will adapt and organise itself to the level, needs and interests of each user, increasing the personal learning experience and retention efficacy.

The XML bits can be translated by Google translation or read aloud with a software app. This makes the information and courses accessible to illiterate or disabled people and other groups currently discriminated against with regard to access to quality education. As every publication has many images, search results could also be organised around images. This will increase absorption rate and assist illiterate, intelligent persons to start learning and reading, with SDG-centered solutions as the core basis and motivator.

Therefore, a personal quality SDG library to every individual for personal participation on each smart phone is possible, so everyone can find SDG solutions for themselves and their communities. Currently only 50,000 of UN and related publications have been transformed or digitized.

UNESCO sponsored NZDL and Human Info/WIT to develop the free and open source Greenstone software accredited by UNESCO as its digital library software. Currently Human Info/WIT developed with, and for, the World Health Organization a powerful version of this open source software for an Essential Medicines and Health Products Information Portal, http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/en/. The software has an elaborate back-office, collaboration and validation function. Therefore, the open source software, accredited by UNESCO, tailored to provide the solutions needed and to create a global free personal SDG resource, is available. It allows unlimited free redistribution and any open adaptation.

Source: Human Info NGO (mloots@humaninfo.org)


SDPI Research and News Bulletin 2017

Dr Mahmood A.Khwaja, SDPI senior adviser, Chemicals and Sustainable Industrial Development emphasized the need for expediting support to developing countries, through capacity building, technical assistance and technology transfer for sound chemicals’ (including mercury) management so as to safeguard public health. He was speaking at the first Conference of Parties (COP 1) on behalf of Zero Mercury Working Group (ZMWG) and Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), in Geneva.

NEW DELHI More than 73% of household decorative paints, were found containing exceedingly high levels of lead content in a recent study conducted by Toxic Links — a Delhi-based NGO in association with International POPS Elimination Network (IPEN). Overall, 11 out of 15 paints from 13 different brands that were analysed, contained exceedingly high lead levels. Exposure to lead is known to harm a child’s brain development and cause behavioral changes. Health impacts of lead exposure on young children’s intelligence are lifelong, irreversible and untreatable.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has set the mandatory lead limits of 90 ppm in household paints which will come into effect next month. The main victims of violations are children who ingest or inhale lead through exposure to dust or soil contaminated with lead-based paint.

Source: IPEN Network (ipennetwork@npogroups.org)

GREENPEACE CALLS TO PROTECT CRITICALLY ENDANGERED WHALES FROM OIL DRILLING

When you think “ocean life” you may picture the iconic blue whale, frolicking dolphins, or even majestic sea turtles gliding through the water. Greenpeace has undertaken a huge campaign for the United States Congress to protect the North American critically endangered right whales, from oil drilling by the billion-dollar oil corporations.

The North Atlantic right whales don’t get a lot of notice — probably because there are so few of them, and are one of the most endangered large whales in the world.

P.S. If fossil fuel CEOs don’t have the conscience to stop themselves from making a profit at the risk of further threatening endangered wildlife, we’ll have to band together and stop them ourselves.

Film: ‘A Plastic Ocean’ Changing Attitudes on Plastic

In the film A Plastic Ocean, an international team of explorers, researchers, and ocean ambassadors go on a mission around the globe to uncover the shocking truth in the depths of the sea. This project was a four-year production, with more than 20 locations around the world. It documents the global effects of plastic pollution, while introducing workable technology and policy solutions that can change things for the better. It’s very important to note that problems such as plastic pollution in the oceans have changed our entire ecosystem. Unfortunately, there’s still not enough public information or scientific studies available to rise awareness on this issue.

“The proliferation of plastic in the last years has been extraordinary. Quite simply, we cannot live without it anymore. We are now producing nearly 300 million tons of plastic every year and 8 million tons of plastic are dumped into our oceans. Plastic is cheap and incredibly versatile, with properties that make it ideal for many uses. However, these qualities have also resulted in an environmental issue because approximately 50% of plastic is used just once and thrown away”.

Plastic is a problem, so we need to regulate it with laws and policies. It’s our job to make people aware of this global reality. That’s why we have to work on the education of children, because they are the future of this planet. Not only should all schools should see this documentary; everyone in the world should see it to be aware of this problem.
1. COP23 - United Nations Conference on Climate Change

The 23rd annual session of the Conference of the Parties to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, will be held in Bonn, Germany, from the 6th to the 17th of November, 2017.

2. Towards a Pollution Free Planet - United Nations Environment Assembly

The third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly will take place in Nairobi from 4 to 6 December 2017 under the theme “Towards a Pollution-Free Planet”.

In the run-up to the Assembly, UN Environment is leading a global campaign to #BeatPollution. This campaign aims to inspire people, civil society organisations, governments and the private sector to reduce their pollution footprint and call for leaders to take decisive action on pollution.

Civil Society is critical to driving this message. As part of your commitment to avoid and reduce pollution, we invite you to engage in this campaign, adapting it to your national and regional context and using it to tackle pollution around the world.

“Urgent action is our responsibility... Our goal, collectively, must be a pollution-free planet” (Dr. Edgar E. Gutiérrez-Espeleta, Minister).

How civil society organisations can support the #BeatPollution campaign

UNEP suggest 10 WAYS TO ENGAGE

1. Publicize your commitment to #BeatPollution at http://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/your-commitment/. All commitments will be presented to the world at the UN Environment Assembly as part of the document “Voluntary commitments to contribute to a pollution free planet”.

2. Call on your members to sign the #BeatPollution pledge at www.beatpollution.org and to present commitments through the link above.

3. Announce your organisation’s pollution-beating commitments to the public and media in the run-up to the Assembly.

4. Submit stories related to pollution to national newspapers, written under the name of your organisation.

5. Mobilize your communities to act on pollution, engage with local authorities.

6. Use social media to drive engagement. Conduct photo competitions on Instagram or Facebook; host Twitter or Facebook chats on pollution; post videos that showcase pollution-beating actions; or bicycle days or clean-ups. Share all your activities using the #BeatPollution hashtag.

7. Support media eld trips that highlight pollution issues and arrange interviews and briefings on pollution issues.

8. Convene meetings in which citizens have the chance to tell lawmakers how pollution is affecting their lives.

9. Join the UN Environment’s campaigns on air pollution, marine pollution, and lead in paint. (Find more details below.)

10. ShareallyourachievementswithUN Environment’s Communication Division, so that we can announce and showcase them.
ROME, ITALY A UN technical committee has determined that Dicofol, an outdated DDT-contaminated pesticide should be eliminated globally under the Stockholm Convention, an international treaty that bans the world’s most hazardous chemical pollutants. The expert committee tackled a recommendation for adding PFOA to the treaty, including possible exemptions for continued uses. PFOA is known as the ‘Teflon chemical’ or C8 and has widely polluted drinking water throughout the world. The Committee began evaluation of the industry’s fluorinated substitute, PFHxS, which has been widely used as an alternative for PFOS. PFOA has been used not only to make non-stick cookware, but also for the manufacture of semi-conductors, textiles such as Goretex, photographic paper, medical devices, firefighting foams and even in ski waxes. The Committee concluded that PFOA was linked to, “high cholesterol, ulcerative colitis, thyroid disease, testicular cancer, kidney cancer and pregnancy-induced hypertension” and “presumed to be an immune hazard to humans.” PFOA does not degrade in the environment, is transported over long distances, and biomagnifies in animals, threatening the food chain, and noted that, “a ‘safe’ concentration in the environment cannot be established.”

Patrick Breyssse, director of the National Centre for Environmental Health at the US Centers for Disease Control, described the fluorinated chemicals in firefighting foam as “one of the most seminal public health challenges for the next decades.” “Around the world, PFOA has contaminated the drinking water of millions of people. As a result, thousands of residents, including their children, have very high PFOA levels that pose lifelong threats to health and well-being, said Dr. Mariann Lloyd-Smith, Senior Advisor, IPEN and National Toxics Network.

Regrettable Substitutes

Perfluorohexane sulfonate (PFHxS) is used in textiles, carpet protectors, leather, paper-making, pesticides, electroplating, oilfield, firefighting foams, photosensitive material and some synthetic materials. PFHxS is extremely persistent, does not break down in the environment, and stays in the human body far longer than PFOS and PFOA. It is found in blood, breast milk and umbilical cord blood. PFHxS has been detected in air, soil, sewage sludge and in many species, including in polar cod, glaucous gull, ringed seals and polar bears in the Arctic. The industry urged using PFHxS in place of PFOS. “The industry replaced one bad chemical, PFOS, with another bad chemical, PFHxS,” said Ms. Pamela Miller, IPEN Co-Chair and a principal investigator of the National Institutes of Health-funded community-based research project on health effects in Indigenous communities in the Arctic.

Recommendation for a global ban of Dicofol

After a 5-year assessment, the outdated DDT-contaminated pesticide has finally been recommended for a global ban. While many countries had already taken action to rid their agriculture of this old persistent toxic pesticide, some, like Australia, still have many current registrations for its use. Dicofol is a pesticide that uses DDT in its production and is found in milk, baby formula, eggs, fruits, vegetables, human breast milk, and blood. Dicofol is very toxic to aquatic animals and causes reproductive damage in birds. It is an endocrine disruptor and suspected human carcinogen.

The Persistent Organic Pollutants Review Committee (POPRC) is a subsidiary body to the Stockholm Convention established for reviewing chemicals proposed for listing under the Treaty. The POPRC conducts a review process for proposed chemicals and makes critical decisions on whether chemicals are likely, as a result of their long-range environmental transport, to lead to significant adverse human health and/or environmental effects such that global action is warranted. Members of the POPRC are government-designated experts in chemical assessment or management.

Source: IPEN is an international NGO comprised of over 500 organizations in 116 countries that work to reduce and eliminate hazardous, toxic substances internationally and within their own countries. IPEN has been actively involved in the POPRC process for thirteen years.
Ivory Crush in New York City's Central Park

On August 3rd, 2017, nearly two tons of ivory (trinkets, statues and jewelry) crafted from the tusks of at least 100 slaughtered elephants were destroyed in a rock crusher in Central Park to demonstrate New York state's commitment to smashing the illegal ivory trade.

Since August 2014, New York State has laws in place to prohibit the sale, purchase, trade or distribution of anything made from elephant or rhino horns except in limited situations with state approval. The enforcement effort has focused in New York City, the largest port of entry of illegal wildlife goods as reported by state officials.

These ivories confiscated over the years from illegal dealers in New York state is sending a message to poachers around the world that these ivory is now worthless, and the Ivory crush is aimed to discourage poaching around the world. The artifacts as seen in the images included piles of golf ball-sized Japanese sculptures, called netsuke, intricately carved into monkeys, rabbits and other fanciful designs.

The ivory pieces sent to the crusher included more than $4.5 million worth seized by undercover investigators from Metropolitan Fine Arts & Antiques in New York City in 2015. In pleading guilty last week to illegally selling ivory, the store's owners agreed to donate $100,000 each to the World Wildlife Fund and Wild Tomorrow Fund for their endangered species protection projects. Wild Tomorrow Fund is using part of its donation to pay for DNA analysis of the ivory artifacts to determine their age and what parts of Africa they came from.

Cameroon Bans All Paints Containing More Than 90ppm Total Lead

In July 2017, a new report conducted by CREPD (Centre de recherche et d'Education pour le development) in partnership with IPEN, presented new data on the total lead content of solvent-based paints for home use available on the market in Cameroon. The report also prevents background information on why the use of lead paint is a source of serious concern, especially to children's health. Finally, it proposes action steps by different stakeholders to protect children and others from lead paint.

After a review of national policy frameworks that was in place to ban or restrict the manufacture, import, export, distribution, sale and use of lead paint, and provides a strong justification to adopt and enforce further regulatory controls in Cameroon, a regulation was enacted on September 21st, 2017 (Gilbert Kuepouo of CREPD Cameroon reported via ipennetwork on October 9th, 2017).


“Half of the harm that is done in this world is due to people who want to feel important. They don't mean to do harm, but the harm does not interest them.”

-T.S. Eliot, poet (26 Sep 1888-1965)
World Information Transfer, Inc., (WIT) is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization in General Consultative Status with the United Nations, promoting environmental health and literacy. In 1987, inspired by the Chornobyl (Ukrainian spelling) nuclear tragedy, in Ukraine, WIT was formed in recognition of the pressing need to provide accurate actionable information about our deteriorating global environment and its effect on human health. WIT exercises its mandate through:

- World Ecology Report (WER). Published since 1989, the World Ecology Report is a quarterly digest of critical issues in health and environment, produced in four languages and distributed to thousands of citizens throughout the developing and developed world.

- Health and environment conferences: Since 1992, WIT has convened annual conferences, held at United Nations headquarters on the growing clinical evidence supporting the link between environmental degradation and its effect on human health. The Conferences have been co-sponsored by UN member states and its organizations and has been convened as a parallel event to the annual meetings of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The scientific papers from the Conferences are available on our website.

- Internship. World Information Transfer (WIT) offers internships in New York City. Our goal is to assist future leaders understand what the world needs to be sustainable, encouraging them to learn about health and environment issues. Our interns spend the majority of their time at the United Nations Headquarters. There are 3 sessions, fall, spring and summer - all require applications.

- Health and Development CD ROM Library. This project consists of a library of CDs each of which focuses on a subject within the overall topic of Development and Health information. CD ROM Library consist of CD's developed by our partners HumanInfoNGO which address the digital divide. The project is continuous with future topics being developed.

- Humanitarian Aid. In conjunction with the K.Kovshevych Foundation, WIT provides humanitarian aid to schools, and orphanages in areas devastated by environmental degradation.

- Scholarship Program. WIT assists the K.Kovshevych Foundation, in finding intellectually gifted university students in need of financial assistance to continue their studies in areas related to health and environment.

- www.worldinfo.org WIT provides, through its website, science based information on the relationship between human health and the natural environment, including the papers from the WIT’s annual conferences, the archived World Ecology Reports, and our new Speaker’s Series.

“Every student needs someone who says, “You mean something. You count.”

-Tony Kushner, playwright (b. 16 Jul 1956)
POINT OF VIEW

Neither Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) nor the elimination of poverty will be achieved until the world addresses the issue of human rights (including sexual rights) for women and girls. Until then, the birth of children destined to a suffering existence of hunger, disease, lack of education, and sexual abuse will continue. Children who are used and abused turn to violence and crime against both themselves (drugs, alcohol, gambling, etc.) and others (murder, rape and abuse).

Since the advent of monotheistic religion, the position of women has been solidified to a second class status. Monotheism, indisputably brought about a male dominated world and for over two thousand years with very few exceptions, women had to accept their service-oriented position. Male dominance was and still is in many parts of the world preeminent and in most traditional societies women continue to be at a disadvantage.

Some of the answers to equality are democracy, human rights, opportunities in business, politics and responsibilities at home. The international court can look at aggression and violence against women when the individual governments refuse. Business development with the assistance of multi-national institutions can assist in integrating women into the workforce at every level.

Politically, it is necessary to enable women to promote their agenda including birth control. Since the advent of Information Communication Technology (ICT) women in many places have rapidly taken advantage of the Internet. Although the changes have been impressive in enabling women to communicate practical information on news, work personal relationships, entertainment and travel, the gender stereotypes still persist, particularly in governments where male dominance still prevails as does interference on many levels of the right of women to control their own bodies.

According to a recent LANCET report, there are some evident progress in some countries that need empowered women for economic and social cohesion. The Indian Supreme Court ruled that men who have sex with child brides (younger than 18 years) are guilty of rape, with the government describing the practice of child marriage as an obstacle to development.

Chile recently reformed its ban on abortion.

Formerly, abortion was illegal in all circumstances still the case in five other countries:

1. Dominican Republic,
2. El Salvador,
3. Malta,
4. Nicaragua, and
5. Vatican City

Now it is available for women who are raped, when the fetus is not viable, or the woman’s life is in danger. Women are particularly at risk of rape or sexual exploitation during and after conflict and natural disasters.

On Oct 11, the International Day of the Girl Child, the UN launched the campaign EmPOWER Girls: Before, During and After Emergencies. Also the World Trade Organisation members are working on a declaration on gender equality for their member states. Also, recently the Secretary General of the UN stated that we need to end the current long standing bureaucracy and move on with agendas that will achieve the SDG goals.

This can’t be achieved without women’s full participation in addressing the continuous population explosion! Governments, religions and agencies have the responsibility to implement addressing and resolving the problems of inequality of women.

As stated by Pope Francis:

“Some people think that - excuse my expression here - that in order to be good Catholics we have to be like rabbits. No. Parenthood is about being responsible. This is clear.”

-Pope Francis, 2015, Philippines

SOURCE: