

CHAPTER THREE

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE: CHANGES, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

ZHANG Kaining

Foreword

Reproductive health care plays an important role in helping people to maintain their reproductive health rights, in addition to protecting their reproductive health. In the form of a documentary retrospective review, this chapter covers some of the facets of sexual and reproductive health services in China. It explains the trajectory of major historical events and changes that took place over the past two to three decades in China, most notably following the milestone of the International Conference of Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994. Contributions from key players, such as various Chinese women's groups, are described and significant stages of development pertaining to Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and rural migrant populations are discussed. Finally, Yunnan Province is discussed as an example of how reproductive health concepts and theories have been introduced, innovated and widely applied in a frontier province of China. After carefully examining patterns in changes, the conclusion highlights the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in terms of improved reproductive health services in China.

1. Reproductive Health Services as a New Focus

Health services are one of the most important components that ensure people's health. In 1994, the ICPD underlined the widely shared concern and ambitious global mission to increase efforts to adopt new ideas, provide quality services for all, and address the diverse needs of various populations in reproductive health. These resolutions created a profound impact on the provision of reproductive

health services to one billion Chinese people and led to significant progressive changes.¹

The ICPD subsequently accepted the World Health Organization (WHO)'s definition of "reproductive health" and included it in the Cairo Program of Action. In terms of practice, reproductive health care consists of a wide range of services, such as screening diagnosis, and rehabilitation. It also covers services such as maternal and child health (MCH) care and family planning, as well as clinical services in gynecology, obstetrics, andriatics and pediatrics. In a broad sense, reproductive health care also includes health education, prevention, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and even some social services that go far beyond traditional medicine or health care.

According to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was ratified at the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) in 1995, reproductive health care includes various methods, technologies and services that foster people's well-being in reproductive health. This includes sexual health, by taking adequate precautions and addressing reproductive health issues. What is provided by reproductive health care services is much more than counseling and care related to reproduction and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), it includes: the enhancement of lives and personal relations; increases women's access to appropriate, affordable and quality care, as well as information and relevant services during the whole course of their life cycle; addresses gender equity clearly in all policies and programs; proactively adopts a gender-sensitive approach in tackling STIs, HIV/AIDS and other sexual and reproductive health issues; and provides funding to support non-governmental organizations (NGO) working on women's health and helps them to strengthen their networking with various health care stakeholders for better multi-sector coordination and cooperation.²

¹ The United Nations. "Program of Action of International Conference on Population and Development" International Conference on Population and Development in 1994. Cairo, 1994.

² The United Nations. "The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW)" Beijing, 1995.