

WOMEN AND HEALTH

There is scarcely any need to prove that woman's concern with health, on an individual or a general level, has always been one of her chief occupations. As a wife and mother, as a nurse, midwife or social worker, she has always had the responsibility of caring for the husband's and the child's physical well-being, for the sick in her home and in hospitals, and for the wounded on battlefields.

According to medical history, women, since the earliest times, have practiced medicine as herb doctors or trained physicians. In spite of men's competition, they continued this practice through medieval and modern times. Nowadays medicine is one of the most popular professions for women. In Russia their number exceeds that of male doctors, and in the Arab countries, according to an article published by *Al-Majal*¹, they form, together with women engineers, 23 per cent of the entire total of physicians and engineers in Egypt, Syria and Morocco.

"Most health care workers are women, from head cooks to bottle providers, they are the largest group users of health services."

These lines were quoted by *WIN NEWS*², from an article reviewing "Women and Medicine" by Joyce Leeson and Judith Gray, published in the *British Medical Journal*, Feb. 17, 1979.

In many parts of the world, especially in Third World countries, children suffer from malnutrition and are threatened by death before 5 years of age. (See the article by Zafrullah Chowdhury on "The Mother and Child in Bangladesh", in *Asian Women*)³. Protecting children from malnutrition and starvation requires the protection of the family and, first of all, the mother, from poverty, ignorance and fear. It means providing women with education, employment and social security. It also means training them in family planning and securing their cooperation in preventing the population explosion which mainly threatens the Third World.

If the United Nations have lately been emphasizing the need for an evolution in women's role and for their wider participation in national development, it is in the all-important field of family planning that the need is most felt. Only a proper knowledge and practice of family planning can allow women enough time and energy for work and achievement outside their homes and for an adequate participation in national development.

1. *Al-Majal*, No. 8, Nov. 1978.

2. *WIN NEWS*, vol. 5, no. 2, p. 51.

3. May 1979, p. 1ff.