

ReproSex: A New Voice for Global Sexual and Reproductive Health

Sanath Lanerolle¹

¹Clinical Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, Castle Street Hospital for Women (Teaching), Colombo, Sri Lanka

Editorial

The conclusion of ReproSex-2024: The International Conference on Sexual and Reproductive Health marked more than the end of a successful event; it signalled the beginning of a lasting legacy. We are proud to launch ReproSex: International Journal on Sexual and Reproductive Health, Sri Lanka's first international journal dedicated exclusively to this critical field. Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) is central to human dignity, gender equality, and sustainable development. Yet across the globe, millions still face barriers to essential care; whether in access to contraception, safe childbirth, fertility services, or protection from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. The issues are as diverse as they are urgent, and they demand a platform that is both multidisciplinary and globally inclusive.

ReproSex: International Journal on Sexual and Reproductive Health aims to fill that

space. Covering topics from contraception, gynaecology, and obstetrics to subfertility, abortion, HIV/STIs, and sexuality, the journal will bring together perspectives from medicine, public health, sociology, behavioural sciences, and law. In doing so, it recognises that SRH cannot be understood or improved through any single lens. This journal is a collaboration between leading national and international institutions, professional bodies, and experts. Our commitment is to publish high-quality, evidence-based, and impactful work that informs clinical practice, shapes policy, and fosters innovation.

The SRH Landscape: Promise and Challenges

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are essential to both individual well-being and broader development goals [1]. In recent decades, the world has seen



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Corresponding Author: Sanath Lanerolle, slanerolle@hotmail.com

remarkable progress: global contraceptive use has expanded dramatically, with women using modern methods increasing from about 467 million in 1990 to 874 million in 2022 [2]. This expansion has contributed to declines in unintended pregnancies and maternal mortality. However, recent analyses underscore that progress is uneven and new challenges are emerging. For example, gains in maternal and newborn health have plateaued in many countries, and issues like infertility, adolescent pregnancy, and access to safe abortion persist as urgent concerns [3]. These trends remind us that the SRH agenda remains unfinished, and that innovation and evidence must continue to drive policy and programs.

In South Asia and in Sri Lanka specifically, demographic and SRH transitions are underway. Sri Lanka's total fertility rate has fallen close to replacement level, prompting research on the implications of an impending ultra-low fertility regime [4]. Contraceptive options have broadened, yet ensuring equitable access and informed choice remains a priority [5]. Attention to SRH education and services has grown: sexuality education in schools and improvements in menstrual hygiene management are now higher priorities for young people's health [6]. At the same time, legal and rights-based issues continue to shape the SRH landscape [3]. Gender norms, inequities, and the needs of vulnerable populations (such as sex workers or survivors of violence) remain critical frontiers [7, 8]. In short, South Asia is experiencing rapid change and urgent challenges in SRH, underscoring the need for localised evidence and solutions [3].

Emerging Frontiers in SRH Scholarship South Asia

The inaugural issue of *ReproSex: The International Conference on Sexual and Reproductive Health* acknowledges that

the region is at the forefront of both new challenges and new opportunities in SRH research. Technological and medical innovations, for example, new contraceptive methods, are expanding reproductive choices [5]. Simultaneously, legal and policy reforms are creating openings to advance sexual rights and gender equity [7,8]. The COVID-19 pandemic, while disrupting services, has also spurred new research on resilience and remote education strategies in SRH [9]. By emphasising "frontiers," we invite contributions that look beyond traditional boundaries: addressing topics like digital health in SRH, transgender health, climate vulnerability and SRH, or innovative program models [3]. Our goal is to foreground work that has both local relevance and broader global resonance. In this front, the articles in this inaugural issue exemplify the breadth and depth of emerging SRH scholarship. They address key themes such as fertility, contraception, education, hygiene, legal rights, and the health of vulnerable groups:

- 1) **Demographic Changes:** An original research article by De Silva estimates Sri Lanka's Total Fertility Rate using alternative methods and compares trends with South Korea. The findings suggest Sri Lanka may be entering an ultra-low fertility phase and discuss the social and policy implications of this demographic shift [4].
- 2) **Contraception and innovation:** The leading article, by John Cleland, offers a global framework for understanding the "contraceptive revolution," emphasising that contraception is a foundation of SRH. It reviews how demand, supply, and cost factors interact to shape contraceptive uptake worldwide [10]. Complementing this, a brief report introduces the single-rod subdermal contraceptive implant as a new family planning option for

women in South Asia, highlighting how innovation in contraceptive technology can expand reproductive choices regionally [5]. In addition, Dr. Sharadha Jayalath's evidence-based review on contraception in perimenopause draws attention to the unique needs of women in this transitional life stage. The review highlights both the importance of preventing unintended, high-risk pregnancies and the non-contraceptive benefits of modern methods, while emphasising the need for individualised counselling and method selection to safeguard women's autonomy and quality of life.

- 3) **Education and menstrual hygiene:** Two original studies focus on young people's health in Sri Lanka. One examines menstrual hygiene management practices among schoolgirls in the Northern Province, illustrating the connections between school sanitation, gender norms, and health outcomes [11]. The other analyses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sexual and reproductive health education in government schools, revealing how school closures and shifting priorities affected students' knowledge and access to information [9]. Together, these studies underscore the role of education and health systems in supporting adolescent SRH.
- 4) **Legal frameworks and rights:** This issue engages deeply with rights-based dimensions of SRH. A narrative review explores the legal environment and SRH challenges faced by female sex workers in Sri Lanka, a marginalised group often excluded from services [7]. Another article examines reproductive autonomy for survivors of sexual violence, comparing Sri Lankan laws and policies

on consent and abortion for rape survivors [8]. Both pieces underscore the importance of legal protections, policy reforms, and human rights for ensuring SRH needs are met among vulnerable populations.

- 5) **Cross-cutting issues:** The commentaries in this issue broaden the discussion. One commentary reports a recent rise in conceptions among girls under 18 in England and Wales, calling it a "wake-up call" that has lessons for low- and middle-income countries on adolescent pregnancy prevention [12]. Another commentary reflects on how patriarchal norms in medicine continue to impact SRH rights globally [13]. These contributions remind us that local research gains meaning when connected to global movements and that SRH challenges often transcend national borders.

Each contribution, while rooted in a specific context or method, speaks to broader trends and questions in SRH. Together, these articles showcase the interdisciplinary, inclusive, and rights-based scholarship that *ReproSex: International Journal on Sexual and Reproductive Health* seeks to foster. We extend our deep gratitude to all who made this inaugural issue possible. We thank our distinguished Editorial Board for their guidance and commitment to academic excellence. We acknowledge the Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka for its leadership and vision in founding *ReproSex: International Journal on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. We are also grateful to RFSU (Sweden's Association for Sexuality Education), whose support has been instrumental in launching the journal. Finally, we thank all of the contributing authors and peer reviewers for their rigorous work and scholarship; this issue would not be possible without their contributions.

Call to Action

The launch of ReproSex: International Journal on Sexual and Reproductive Health is a call to action for the SRH community. We encourage researchers to build on the studies in this issue and continue exploring the emerging SRH challenges in South Asia. We urge policymakers and program leaders to draw on this new evidence to inform national health and education programs, ensuring that policies are data-driven and rights-based. We

invite civil society and practitioners to use this open-access platform to disseminate findings, foster debate, and advocate for equitable SRH services. The challenges in sexual and reproductive health are far from solved, but with collective action, collaboration, and innovation, we can advance toward healthier, more equitable futures. ReproSex: International Journal on Sexual and Reproductive Health is now part of that journey, and we look forward to growing this community of scholarship together.

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