

# REMOTE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES DURING THE CORONA PERIOD AND THE BET OF THE HUMAN RIGHT TO MEDICINE IN MOROCCO

**<sup>1</sup>Ben Drioue Hamza**

<sup>1</sup>PhD researcher at Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University ,Executive within the national agency for the development of oasis areas and argan tree Morocco

<sup>1</sup>hamzabendrioue@gmail.com

## **ABSTRACT:**

This research examines the digitization of reproductive health services, which is the sum total associated with the health of women and infants, as well as birth control mechanisms. Humanity in various parts of the world has suffered as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, whether in the economic or social aspect, the latter of which health is an integral part, which led people to search for appropriate solutions to their health conditions, especially those related to digitization. Morocco has been experimenting with the digitization of administrative services in general and health in particular, not so long ago, and has enacted a set of legislation aimed at accelerating the pace of abolition of paper management. Due to the importance of reproductive health, Morocco has witnessed various and multiple experiences to provide its services, but according to the study, it is still insufficient, due to a set of obstacles. The study followed the descriptive and analytical approach, in addition to the inductive.

Keywords: Reproductive health-digitization-medicine-Corona-Morocco

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#### • Introduction

The effects of the new Corona virus have been suffered by segments of society, men and women, especially those related to reproductive health, the latter concerned with reproductive health problems in an integrated and comprehensive manner for men and women, as international laws, charters and global treaties guarantee every citizen the provision of reproductive health services, including safe births supplemented by nutrition services for pregnant women, disease prevention information, the provision of family planning methods and means of birth spacing, and facilitating access to them in health facilities and mobile clinics.

With the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, a range of health services have been partially or completely disrupted in several countries, including Morocco, mainly due to cancellation of scheduled treatment appointments, lack of available public transport, and staff shortages due to the reassignment of health workers to support COVID-19 services.

Reproductive health has not been immune to this disruption, which requires the development of plans and strategies to confront it, the most prominent of which is the adoption of telemedicine, or what is called digital reproductive health.

In view of the importance of reproductive health in the stability of families and society, the

Moroccan legislator guaranteed it a number of measures during the Corona crisis, in the context of modernizing health services and improving public facilities, despite a set of obstacles and constraints that hinder remote work, but there are good initiatives that serve this sector, especially during the Corona period.

The digital transformation in Morocco is one of the most important results of the developments in information and communication technology that have invaded all aspects of human life, and the Corona virus, with its consequences that led to the isolation of many in their homes and the disruption of the usual work practices of governments around the world, is the most important factor for the digitization of social services that are indispensable for individuals and on the basis of health, and therefore the issue of digital management of health services is an indicator of the maturity of government technology, and thus the continuity of the public facility to ensure that the needs of citizens are met smoothly and transparently. The importance of the research stems from its originality, as it did not receive attention from students, as it is often talked about management and service facilities in general.

Research Objectives:

- Define the concept of digitization of medical services and reproductive health
- Highlighting the impact of the administration's digitization in the face of the Corona crisis on its reproductive health aspect
- Standing on the prospects of some models of digitization of reproductive health services

- **Study Questions:**

This study came to show the importance of digital transformation in the Moroccan administration in the aspect related to medical and health services, especially since Al-Maghri issued a set of legislations and decrees aimed at accelerating the pace of digitization in public facilities, which explain the reality of these services in the Corona situation, while monitoring the overall challenges that hinder winning the bet of health security based on the digital transformation that the world is witnessing, in which some countries have made advanced strides. On this basis, we pose the following problem: Has the digital management of health services contributed to the response to the Corona crisis in Morocco in the aspect related to reproductive health services?

- Previous studies:

There are a number of studies that dealt with the subject of digitization in the health field, under different names, but the digitization of health in Morocco in general and its identification of the Corona period did not receive much attention from researchers, and we can refer to some studies on the subject as follows:

Study (Chaoui, 2022). The study dealt with a topic related to health digitization in the part related to medicine, as it presented to study the concept of telemedicine, a brief history of this type of medicine, in addition to mentioning a number of advantages and characteristics that distinguish it, and the conditions that should be respected. The study then mentioned the legislative framework for telemedicine represented by the decree issued in 2018. According to the study, telemedicine takes many forms according to Moroccan law. The study concluded that telemedicine in Morocco is still limited. The study (Echo, Khadar, 2020) revolves around the Corona pandemic and the question of digital transformation, which dealt with remote work, including medicine from Baden, monitoring the weakness of reception structures and the scarcity of resources in this context. In addition to other areas of economy and social services (education,

trade...) the study concluded that the health emergency measures implemented in Morocco were a contributing factor in accelerating the pace of digitization of large aspects, including the economy and health. There is a study (Bouzidi, 2021), which dealt with the topic in its general context, that is, what is related to digital management in light of the Corona crisis as a model, identifying the nature of digital management and the Moroccan experience, and the challenges that hinder progress in it. As an application of digitization in its administrative aspect, it focused on the aspect of higher education and remote courts in the Corona period. As for the study (Dehbi, Azami, Ghazi, Sedrati, 2021), this study monitored the most important actions that Morocco has done to contain Corona in terms of digital health, such as testing, diagnosis, genomic surveillance, remote care for suspected and chronic patients, as well as the contact tracing system, in addition to information systems related to medical materials laboratories, collection of biological samples and others, and smart data processing at the national level, with a set of experiences during the Corona crisis.

## **1. The nature of reproductive health and its reality in Morocco**

### **1.1. The reality of reproductive health in Morocco**

Reproductive health is defined in the ABCs of health sciences as: whenever a woman intercepts during her fertile period from the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, isolation and birth control (Al-Salibi, 2007, p. 5).

The world has alerted to the importance of reproductive health for African women in particular, given the prevailing political and economic conditions in Africa, and from this point of view, decision-makers realized the importance of reproduction and the provision of full health care for African and Moroccan women in particular, reproductive health according to the World Health Organization (2014), means the ability of people to have a responsible, satisfying and safer sex life, and to be able to have children and have the freedom to choose when and how to do so, and also include that Men and women are aware of safe, effective, affordable and acceptable birth control methods; access to appropriate sexual and reproductive health care services; and health education programs to ensure that a safe pregnancy and delivery provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy child.

Paulson (2004) stated that reproductive health means that people are able to have a responsible, satisfying and safer sex life, be able to have children and have the freedom to choose when and how to do so, and also includes that men and women are aware of safe, effective, affordable and acceptable birth control methods; On a healthy baby.

Reproductive health is a way of life because it affects both men and women from childhood to old age. This includes challenges that people face at different times of their lives such as family planning, services that prevent sexually transmitted diseases, and early diagnosis and treatment of reproductive health diseases (Salibi, 2007, p. 49).

Given the imbalances in the African health sectors in general, studies have recorded the importance of respecting countries and increasing their commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially in times of crisis such as the coronavirus crisis (Okonofua, 2022).

Despite the challenges to reproductive health in Morocco, the Moroccan Ministry of Health has made significant progress in strengthening basic and hospital health institutions as well as maternal reproductive health, and child and adolescent health, especially by improving health indicators related to low mortality rates. During 26 years (1996-2018). The maternal mortality rate decreased by 77.46 per cent, from 332 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1992 to 72.6 deaths

per 100,000 live births in 2018, while the neonatal mortality rate decreased from 21 per 1,000 live births in 2011 to 13.56 per 1,000 live births in 2018. (Ministry of Health, 2023).

In fact, the reality of reproductive health in Morocco is due to the fact that digitization is a national and global strategy, which is why Morocco created the Digital Development Agency, by issuing Law 61.16, as well as laws related to the right to information, especially after the issuance of Law 31.31.

The simplification of administrative procedures according to the Moroccan government (2021) is an example of the trend towards digitization related to services, so the Ministry of Health has worked to develop the health system under the name of the integrated health system, in the framework of alleviating the suffering of health professionals from the problems of the lack of information documentation and paths of treatment and treatment related to patients.

In this context, WHO has also tended to stimulate developing and developing countries with a view to building human resources in order to adequately serve patients, including reproductive health providers. (Morrow 2000, p. 23).

. Digitizing reproductive health during the Corona crisis

### 2.1. Impact of coronavirus on reproductive health services in Morocco

UNFPA (2020) reported that coronavirus has shown omission of sexual and reproductive health and rights despite having severe impacts on the health and well-being of women and girls. In addition, crisis situations are known to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and neglect to take into account the needs of UNFPA already noting the public health emergency and the rights of the most marginalized.

During the coronavirus pandemic, supply chains for family planning and life-saving medicines, including antivirals and personal protective equipment, were disrupted due to transport restrictions between and within countries. In addition, UNFPA country offices recorded a sharp increase in contact with the GBV hotline and reports of intimate partner violence.

In Morocco and other Arab and African countries, as reported by the Office of Arab States (2020), countries in the Arab region are already suffering from the effects of disruption of stockpiling of family planning methods, and many family planning manufacturers in China have not returned to full capacity after the outbreak of the pandemic. The supply of raw materials, such as progesterone, and family planning hormones is also affected. Some companies are forced.

The High Commission for Planning (2020) in Morocco revealed that the imposition of quarantine has a strong and negative impact on women's access to health services and said that "it is likely to affect them for many years to come, the national research on the impact of the Corona pandemic on families revealed that less than a third of women (27.3%) did not have access to maternal health care, and 20.8% of them did not have access to reproductive health services. Thus, according to the same organization, the percentage of access rises to 32.4% in rural areas compared to 22.6% in urban areas. Reproductive health services recorded disastrous figures. However, their impact may be medium-term or long-term.

According to the same delegation, the health crisis caused by the Corona epidemic has also affected children who have not yet reached the age of five, including what is related to the vaccination service to prevent the epidemic (Moroccan depth, 2022).

The research was carried out by the High Commission for Planning, an official institution, and during the pandemic, the report confirmed that a quarter of women (26.6%) were unable to benefit from care services during pregnancy and after childbirth, due to access difficulties, while 26.2%

of them were unable due to lack of financial means. On the other hand, for rural women, the research figures confirm that access difficulties are the main reason for not benefiting from services (35.9%), followed by lack of financial means (31.9%) and fear of contracting Covid-19 (15.8%). (High Commission for Planning, 2020, p. 31).

### 2.1. Digital reproductive health services in the Corona period

The Ministry of Health in Morocco has launched a set of free voluntary services aimed at developing reproductive health, especially among pregnant women, based on remote medical consultation through the electronic platform ([www.tbib24.com](http://www.tbib24.com)) in order to strengthen precautionary measures against the Covid-19 epidemic, and reduce access to health centers and public and private hospitals, more than 100 doctors from various specialties participate in the platform, most notably pregnancy and childbirth tracking, and diseases of the reproductive system, so women can take a meeting with specialists, and they can also choose between Physical counseling remotely or by visit (Dehbi, azami, ghazi, sedrati, 2021, p. 3).

In the same context, telehealth consultations have become widespread, as an alternative to face-to-face consultations, updated scoping reviews on telehealth consultations for children and adolescents, and developed a practical guide for health care professionals on how to plan telehealth consultations for children, infants and adolescents (WHO, 2021).

Psychiatry in reproductive health is an important basis during the Corona period, as Basu et al. (2020) stated that since the effects of the virus extended to the psychological aspect as well, in addition to the presence of different segments of Moroccan society in need of psychological care before and after the crisis, including women in pregnancy and lactation, psychiatric professionals and psychologists to confront the Corona virus and its psychological repercussions have developed several remote platforms to provide psychological support and counseling services to citizens suffering from Severe symptoms due to stress and tension, with priority given to frontline health workers. Many doctors have also resorted to creating digital platforms to provide services and consultations to patients that have turned into virtual clinics, but their impact is limited (Echo, Khadar, 2020).

The state of emergency declared by Morocco has been the biggest factor in the negative psychological impact on individuals, in terms of trauma that generates fears related to the general situation in the country, especially among women, children and adolescents (Ed Moulid, 2020). Bassou et al. (2020) stated that one of the most important examples of reproductive health care is the platform launched by Mohammed V University in Rabat, given its importance in overcoming the psychological difficulties faced by women, especially those with pregnancy and lactating women, in addition to young people and adolescents, by guiding them to deal with what hinders their sexual health. It is worth mentioning that this platform is staffed by more than twenty specialists from various associations and research centers in Morocco.

#### Conclusion:

After presenting the concepts of digital health as well as reproductive health, we talked about the major projects undertaken by the Kingdom of Morocco in order to improve health management and provide appropriate health services to many segments of Western society, including those directed mainly to the reproductive health aspect, that is, everything related to women and children in the event of pregnancy, contraceptives, as well as the period of lactation, sexual health...

During the Corona period, the whole world witnessed an imbalance in a set of behaviors related

to reproductive health, especially with the imposition of quarantine, so countries took a set of solutions, most notably the adoption of telemedicine.

Perhaps the most worth mentioning are the interventions carried out by the Moroccan Ministry of Health to overcome the problems that hinder the mental health of Moroccan men and women, whether by providing safety and care, as well as providing birth control methods, as well as teleconsultation services, whether at the level of monitoring pregnancy and childbirth, or tracking various diseases, especially communicable ones.

Despite the strides made in this context, there are a set of challenges facing the digitization of reproductive health services, including digital illiteracy, poor technological training of human resources, poor Internet throughput, and obstacles related to information security.

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