

Why are these diseases not addressed?

Women are usually too shy and unwilling to talk about problems such as abnormal vaginal discharge and genital ulcers. They have been taught to silently suffer problems related to sex. There is also a fear that if a woman is found to have RTIs, especially STDs, she will be labelled a 'loose woman'. There is a reluctance to seek medical treatment because of inadequate sex education and less access to medical care. The 'decision-makers' at home, like the mother-in-law, would allow a woman to be taken to a health worker if she suffers from pregnancy-related problems or infertility, but not for seemingly 'trivial' symptoms like excessive vaginal discharge. Even our health system does not adequately respond to these needs.

RTIs have been badly neglected because they do not kill the person directly. They usually remain inside a woman's body, giving her chronic abdominal and back pain or making her infertile. Many women keep on suffering and remain silent.

Symptoms of RTIs

In woman

- Abnormal vaginal discharge, which has bad smell and more quantity than usual
- Ulcers or sores over the external genitals
- Lower abdominal pain because of pelvic infection

In man

- Discharge from the penis
- Ulcers

The presence of RTIs/STIs could also be indicated in men and women by the presence of:

- Pain or bleeding during intercourse
- Painful swelling in the groin
- Burning pain on passing urine
- Itching around the genitals

Unless treated early, RTIs/STIs can lead to several complications, ranging from pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and infertility, to increased risk of HIV infections, ectopic pregnancy, cancer of the cervix and death. There can be pregnancy-related complications like premature deliveries, low