Unsafe Abortion – Facts and Figures

Half of all abortions are unsafe.

- Between 1995 and 2008, the rate of unsafe abortion worldwide remained essentially unchanged, at 14 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44.
- During the same period, the proportion of all abortions that were unsafe increased from 44% to 49%.

The overwhelming majority of unsafe abortions occur in the developing world.

- Almost all abortion-related deaths occur in developing countries, with the highest number occurring in Africa. 62% of all deaths (29,000) due to unsafe abortion occurred in the Africa Region.
- In 2008, more than 97% of abortions in Africa were unsafe. Southern Africa is the sub-region with the lowest proportion of unsafe abortions (58%). Close to 90% of women in the sub-region live in South Africa, where abortion was liberalized in 1997.
- In Latin America, 95% of abortions were unsafe, a proportion that did not change between 1995 and 2008. Nearly all safe abortions occurred in the Caribbean, primarily in Cuba and several other countries where the law is liberal and safe abortions are accessible.

All women have the right to decide if and when they want to have children. We need to expand access to all reproductive health services, including safe and legal abortion and contraception.

- Women are likely to resort to an unsafe abortion when faced with an unplanned pregnancy and provisions for safe abortions are restricted, unavailable or inaccessible.
- In developing countries, poor women have the least access to family planning services and the fewest resources to pay for safe abortion procedures; they are also the most likely to experience complications related to unsafe abortion.
- 222 million women in the developing world – 1 in 4 women of reproductive age-- have an unmet need for modern contraceptives, meaning they want to avoid a pregnancy but lack modern contraception. An increase in the use of effective contraceptive methods reduces unintended pregnancies and, consequently abortions. It is estimated that three out of four induced abortions could be eliminated if the need for family planning were fully met by expanding and improving family planning services and choices.

Women who resort to unsafe abortions often require urgent medical attention to treat complications. Making post-abortion care widely available to women could save the lives and improve the health of millions of women, especially in developing countries.
Unsafe abortion is a significant cause of ill-health among women in the developing world. Estimates for 2005 indicate that 8.5 million women annually experience complications from unsafe abortion that require medical attention, and three million do not receive the care they need.

As agreed by countries at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), services should be provided for the management of complications due to unsafe abortion and in circumstances where not against the law, abortion should be safe. Making post-abortion care available to women with complications could save the lives of many and improve the health of millions of women, especially in developing country regions.

Treating medical complications from unsafe abortion places a significant financial burden on public health care systems in the developing world. According to a 2009 study, the minimum annual estimated cost of providing post-abortion care in the developing world is $341 million.

The effects of unsafe abortion extend beyond health

Complications from unsafe abortion accounted for an estimated 13% of all maternal deaths worldwide between 2003 and 2008.

In the United States, legal induced abortion results in 0.6 deaths per 100,000 procedures. Worldwide, unsafe abortion accounts for a death rate that is 350 times higher (220 per 100,000), and, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the rate is 800 times higher, at 460 per 100,000.

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A 2013 study by the Guttmacher Institute in Uganda found that the majority of women treated for complications from an unsafe abortion experience some adverse economic effect. Of the women surveyed, 73% reported that they had lost wages, 60% that their children had less to eat, were unable to attend school or both, and 34% experienced a decline in the economic stability of their household.

Other Resources

- New Study Finds That in Uganda, Unsafe Abortion Takes a Financial Toll On Women, Their Children And Their Households: [http://www.guttmacher.org/media/nr/2013/12/05/](http://www.guttmacher.org/media/nr/2013/12/05/)
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