

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. Why is it important to speak out about unsafe abortions?

- A. Every two hours, a woman in India dies as a result of abortion related causes. In many cases these are the women who are the caretakers in their families and communities in addition to being valued citizens of the country. Abortion is legal in India for a broad range of indications and largely in line with the standards advocated by global organizations such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization as a necessary part of women's reproductive health care.

Yet, in India today, thousands of women are dying from unsafe abortion because of lack of trained abortion providers, lack of knowledge about the legality of abortion and availability of safe services, compounded by social stigma surrounding abortion. Not speaking out or taking action only adds to the stigma and does not address the barriers to safe abortion services. Unsafe abortion is not a matter of morality—it's a matter of women getting the reproductive health care they are afforded by law and that is a globally recognized human right. It is important to stand up as an advocate for preventing the needless deaths of young Indian women as a result of abortion-related causes when globally, abortion is among the safest medical procedures.

Q. If abortion is liberalized, won't that increase the number of abortions?

- A. No. The legal status of abortion has no effect on a woman's need for an abortion, but it dramatically affects her access to safe abortion (WHO 2012). Countries with liberal abortion laws do not have increased rates of abortion. Abortion rates are roughly equal when comparing world regions, regardless of what the law permits. Whether abortion is legally restricted or available on request, a woman's likelihood of having an unintended pregnancy or seeking an abortion is about the same (WHO 2012). What happens when abortion laws are highly restrictive, however, is that rates of unsafe abortion increase.

Q. Aren't most, if not all, abortions in India about sex selection?

- A. No. But as incidents in a few states in the country have shown, the distinction between two public policy issues – gender biased sex selection and safe abortion – have become extremely blurred. Estimates indicate that two to four percent of all abortions in the country are son selective abortions (Lancet, 2011). A 2006 study in the International Family Planning Perspectives journal on sex selection and abortion in India concluded that unintended pregnancy, rather than the sex of the previous child, underlies demand for abortion in India.

In India, 80-90 percent of reported abortions take place in the first trimester. While sex selection is largely an issue in the second trimester, not all second trimester abortions are sex selective. In India, most women delay pregnancy termination until they are in the second trimester for reasons other than sex selection. Poor, young and unmarried women in particular are more likely to delay abortion because they are often poorly informed on many fronts: they may not understand the signs of pregnancy, possibility or legality of obtaining an abortion (in the first trimester) and the location of safe services.

Q. If all women had access to contraception, wouldn't that eliminate the need for abortion?

- A. Once again, the answer is "no." Unwanted pregnancy and abortion is a normal experience for women during their reproductive years. The World Health Organization states that an estimated 33 million contraceptive users worldwide are expected to experience accidental pregnancy annually while using contraception. This is one reason that abortion, one of the world's oldest medical practices, will always be necessary.