

Fact Sheet

Q&A: ABORTION AS BIRTH CONTROL

ABORTION
LAW
REFORM
ASSOCIATION
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Question

Do women use abortion as birth control?

Answer

No, not if they have information and access to reliable contraceptive methods.

Facts

Women who do not have information and access to reliable contraceptive methods face higher rates of unplanned pregnancy and may use abortion to terminate the pregnancy, regardless of the legality of abortion. There is a direct correlation between lack of access to contraceptives and elevated abortion rates. Approximately half of all unintended pregnancies worldwide end in abortion (Singh et al. 2009). A 2007 report showed that when contraceptives are not widely available or their use is not a culturally accepted practice, abortions are likely to occur at higher-than-average levels among women wishing to avoid or delay childbearing (Sedgh et al. 2007).

Evidence also shows that in developed countries with high abortion rates, the use of abortion quickly declines when a range of contraceptive methods becomes widely available and the methods are used effectively. Legalization of abortion and access to abortion services do not lead to increased reliance on abortion for fertility control in the long term (Marston and Cleland 2003, Henshaw et al. 1999).

Background:

Abortion rates rise in some countries following legalization partly because of the shift from unreported illegal abortions to reported legal abortions. Increases in abortion rates are a response to the demand for services, which often are made accessible and safe following legalization. In countries where couples practice contraception effectively to limit or space births, abortion declines to moderate levels. By comparison, in countries where contraceptive use remains low or ineffective and the motivation for small families and birth spacing is strong or increasing, abortion levels may increase (Guttmacher 1999).