

Fact Sheet

Q&A: REDUCING ABORTION BY RESTRICTING ACCESS

ABORTION
LAW
REFORM
ASSOCIATION
NEW ZEALAND

PO Box 28-008 Wellington 6150, New Zealand | safeandlegal@gmail.com | www.alranz.org

Question

Does making abortions harder to get result in fewer abortions?

Answer

No. Making it harder for women to access safe and legal abortion does not reduce the number of abortions.

Facts

The best way to reduce abortions is to reduce unintended pregnancies through comprehensive sexuality education, prevention of gender-based violence, and access to woman-centred and effective contraception.

Restricting access to safe abortion only increases women's risk for unsafe abortion. When women decide to terminate an unwanted pregnancy and do not have access to safe, legal abortion services provided by well-trained medical providers, they are forced to either self-induce or seek clandestine abortions, often provided by unqualified medical providers under unhygienic conditions. Countries with permissive abortion laws, primarily developed countries, do not have increased rates of abortion whereas countries with highly restrictive abortion laws — primarily developing countries — do have high unsafe abortion rates (Sedgh et al. 2007).

A 2009 Guttmacher Institute survey of 197 countries found that restricting access to legal abortion does not reduce the number of women trying to end unwanted pregnancies (Singh et al. 2009). Abortion rates are roughly equal when comparing world regions, regardless of what the law permits. An estimated 70,000 women and girls die worldwide each year as a result of unsafe abortion, and millions suffer severe complications (WHO 2007). Of all unsafe abortions in 2003, 97 percent occurred in developing countries with restrictive abortion laws. Where abortion is severely restricted, it often costs women their health and lives (Singh et al. 2009).

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Background

Rigorous, well-conducted studies demonstrate that providing women and men with information about and access to contraception is the best way to reduce unplanned pregnancies and abortions. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), the United States' leading professional association providing health care for women, found that reducing unplanned pregnancies clearly contributes to lowering both rates of unsafe abortion and the overall level of abortion (ACOG 2009).

In New Zealand, ALRANZ recommends that strategies to reduce unwanted pregnancies include:

- Education in human relationships taught in all schools including the social, ethical and physical aspects of sexuality.
- Easy access to birth control facilities providing a full range of methods and pregnancy testing.
- Prescribed contraceptives available free of charge.
- Sterilisation for men and women readily available in public hospitals or clinics free of charge.
- More research into improved methods of fertility control.

For More Information:

Guttmacher Institute: www.guttmacher.org