

Navigating restrictive environments in accessing safe abortion

The Harm reduction approach – supporting the health care provider

Presentation by PSI-Europe

Introduction:

There are various manifestations of abortion stigma in the health system; some of which are induced by the abortion provider who experiences stigma him/herself. Some examples are: the clinical practice of withholding pain management support during abortion, a community norm of reporting providers and abortion seekers to legal authorities, and an abortion provider being denied support for managing complications by colleagues unwilling to assist in abortion.¹ Stigma experienced by the health provider can also result in under-reporting of abortion cases. Where abortion is restricted, PSI trains health facility staff in a harm-reduction approach. Assisting abortion providers is one of the three pillars of PSI's harm reduction approach².



During the group work, we discussed the challenges in working with abortion providers in a restrictive environment. How do health care workers hinder women's access to safe abortion and what are the reasons for this?

Apart from working with health care workers/abortion providers directly by training them in health ethics, which includes values clarification exercises, the following possible strategies were discussed that can create a supportive and safe environment for the abortion providers:

- Create a local network ('safe space') of safe abortion supporters, where abortion providers can seek support and share experiences.
- Organize values clarification workshops with a mixed group of key actors (women, government representatives, the police and health care providers)
- Train the police. Best practices can be found in the field of HIV/AIDS related to working with injecting drug users.
- Explain the law on safe abortion in accessible language and identify opportunities that allow for a safe abortion, and inform women of their rights.
- Provide a separate logbook for safe abortion counselling within clinic or hospital, which will make the abortion provider more inclined to report a safe abortion.

¹ Inroads, International Network for the Reduction of Abortion Stigma and Discrimination (2016), *Abortion Stigma and Quality of Care, A Proposed Framework for Analysis and Integration*.

² The three pillars are: i) assisting providers; ii) guiding pharmacies; and iii) informing the client.