

Access to Comprehensive Abortion Care in Humanitarian Settings

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Context – Unsafe Abortion

- Is almost entirely preventable
- Abortion laws and practices vary widely
- Imposes heavy burdens on women and society

Context – Unsafe Abortion

- Almost 67,000 women die every year
- Globally accounts for 13% of maternal deaths
- Most gynecological hospital admissions are likely due to complications of unsafe abortions
 - Estimate 8.8/1000 (or 1.7 million women) for Africa in 2005 (Singh, 2006)

Singh, S. Hospital admissions resulting from unsafe abortion: estimates from 13 developing countries. *Lancet* 2006; 368: 1887-1892.

Abortion in Crisis Settings

- May want to delay childbearing during a crisis
- Disruption in contraceptive and other health services
- Lack of security
- High risk of sexual violence
- Unsafe abortion estimated to account for 25-50% of maternal mortality in refugee settings



Data → *Action Steps*

- Collect routine service data
- Include abortion in periodic surveys & studies
- Incorporate abortion indicators

IAFM, 2010, p. 72-73

If we don't measure it, we can't improve it...

International Obligations

- International agreements such as ICPD and ICPD + 5 recognise that:
 - Unsafe abortion is a major public health concern
 - Abortion should be safe and available to the full extent of the law
 - Health systems have a responsibility to provide these services, including those serving refugee/IDP women.

Legal Status of Abortion

- There are legal indications for abortion in almost all refugee/IDP host countries:
 - To save the woman's life – 97% of countries worldwide
 - To preserve physical and mental health
 - 67% and 64% of countries worldwide, respectively
 - In cases of rape or incest – 48% of countries worldwide

Legal Status → *Action Steps*

- Know the law
- Reframe thinking & terminology
 - Think/say “legal indications” rather than “illegal”

Saving the life of the woman has been broadly interpreted by providers and courts globally

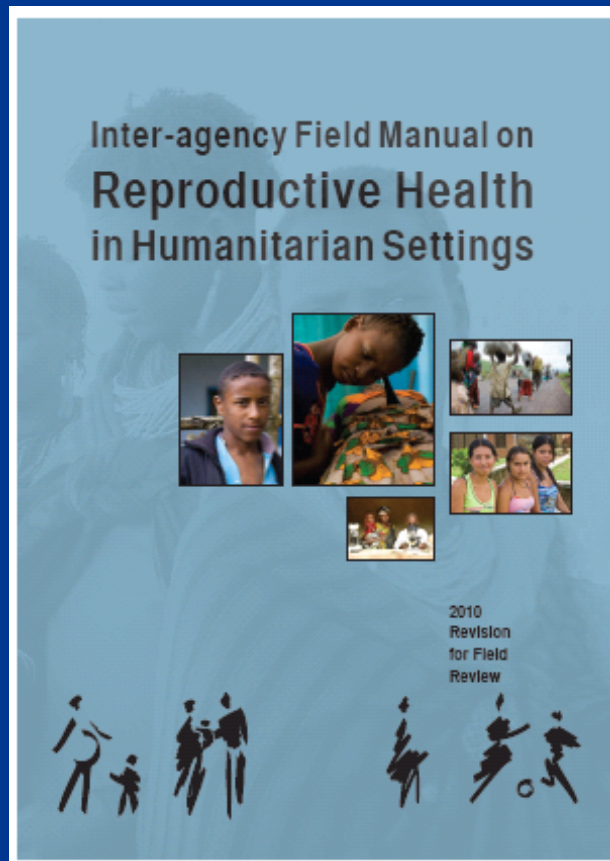
Provision of services

- “Making pregnancy safer includes the provision of or referral for safe abortion services to the full extent allowed by the applicable law and timely and appropriate management of unsafe and spontaneous abortion for all women.”

IAFM, 2010, p. 145.

Provision of Services - Guidance

IAWG



WHO



Provision of Services - Methods

Vacuum Aspiration

- Manual (MVA)
- Electric (EVA)

Medical Abortion

- Mifepristone + Misoprostol
- Misoprostol alone

Dilatation and curettage (sharp curettage) is not recommended and should be replaced with another method

Provision of Services → *Action Steps*

- Insure understanding of the local law...
- Train and equip...to provide...or refer
- Contraceptives offered on-site, immediately...
- Integrate with other RH services
- Address administrative and regulatory barriers...



IAFM, 2010, pp. 152-154

What are the benefits of safe abortion services in humanitarian settings?

- ✓ Fewer unsafe abortions and unwanted births
- ✓ A decrease in temporary and permanent morbidity and maternal mortality
- ✓ Savings in health and human resources
- ✓ An acknowledgment of the human rights of all women

Actions toward Safe Abortion Care in Humanitarian Settings

- ✓ Measure it
- ✓ Know the law
- ✓ Reframe terminology
- ✓ Train and equip
- ✓ Offer services (or establish referral)
- ✓ Establish concurrent contraceptive services and integration
- ✓ Address barriers

Thank You!

- “As members of the humanitarian community, we have a collective responsibility to uphold and realize the right to reproductive health for all women, men and adolescents in humanitarian settings.”

IAFM, 2010, forward

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