

Ipas

at a glance

Unsafe abortion: a global tragedy

For the world's most vulnerable women, the inability to access safe abortion services can mean a death sentence. Faced with no better option, nearly 40 women every minute risk their lives and health by undergoing unsafe abortions — terminations of an unintended pregnancy either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking the minimal medical standards, or both. Millions of these women are permanently injured from the procedures, which can result in long-term disability and compromised fertility.

Nearly 67,000 women — almost entirely poor women from developing countries — die every year from unsafe abortion, devastating the children, families and communities for whom they are caretakers. These women are the core of their families and communities, and promoting their well-being is central to global health and stability. Their deaths are all the more tragic because they can be prevented.

Women's reproductive health worldwide

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that more than 500,000 women die every year from pregnancy-related causes. At least 13 percent of these deaths — and countless injuries — result from unsafe abortion. The toll of unsafe abortion is especially high in the world's poorest countries, where almost all of the 19 million unsafe abortions that take place each year occur. Without access to quality medical care, these women, and the communities and families who depend on them, remain the most at risk.

Ipas: Protecting the reproductive health and rights of the world's most vulnerable women

For more than three decades, Ipas has worked to stop the senseless deaths and injuries of women from unsafe abortion. Ipas believes that women everywhere must have the opportunity to determine their futures, care for their families and manage their fertility. When women are deprived of this opportunity, their families and communities also suffer needlessly.



Ipas is the only organization working in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America dedicated entirely to ending preventable deaths and disabilities from unsafe abortion. We train health-care providers, work with program managers to improve health-service delivery, conduct research and evaluation aimed at improving abortion-related services and policies, promote appropriate reproductive health technologies, and work with policymakers and advocates to improve health policies and practices. Our reach extends to five continents, with multidisciplinary professional staff based in 14 countries. Through local, national and global partnerships, Ipas works to ensure that women can obtain safe, respectful and comprehensive abortion care, including counseling and family planning to prevent future unintended pregnancies.

Research and evaluation

Abortion-related research has been relatively neglected in global sexual and reproductive health research. However, research can play an especially important role in paving the way for more informed dialogue on the nature of unsafe abortion and in facilitating changes in programs and policies. As an organization with a comprehensive mission to reduce the number of maternal deaths from unsafe abortion and to advance women's reproductive rights, Ipas has made a strong commitment to research and evaluation.

Ipas's research and evaluation team — based in the United States and in several of our offices in Africa, Asia and Latin America — focuses on improving our understanding of sexual and reproductive health and producing practical findings that can influence abortion-related policies and practices, while also stressing methodological rigor and high ethical standards. We work across disciplines, with researchers and staff who are trained in medicine, public health and epidemiology, as well as the social sciences — sociology, demography and anthropology.

Our research and evaluation program has several objectives:

- to assess innovative service-delivery approaches to improve the quality, accessibility, cost, sustainability and acceptability of abortion-related services;
- to shed light on abortion-related issues in reproductive health research and evaluation globally;
- to explore the linkages between abortion and other reproductive health issues, including maternal health, adolescent sexual and reproductive health, sexual violence and HIV/AIDS;
- to disseminate research and evaluation findings, best practices and lessons learned to a broad range of stakeholders, through peer-reviewed journals and publications of Ipas and other reproductive health organizations.

A key principle of Ipas's research is our commitment to strong partnerships with major stakeholders at every stage, from project design through dissemination. Such partnerships have facilitated dissemination and use of the findings to strengthen programs, overcoming the long distance that often exists between research and action. To this end, we have developed active relationships with a range of local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), universities and schools, professional societies, multilateral agencies and governmental institutions. As part of these collaborations, Ipas researchers have fostered the growth of in-country research expertise. Our research and evaluation program is supported by private foundations, bilateral donors and multilateral organizations.

Policy and advocacy

Ipas supports the right of each woman to control her own sexuality, fertility, health and well-being. To enable women to make these personal decisions, Ipas works with advocates and policymakers around the world to implement laws and policies that support that right. Where laws restrict termination of pregnancy or where services are limited, women often risk their lives to end unwanted pregnancies.

Approximately 95 percent of unsafe abortions take place in developing countries where family-planning information and





services are limited, and where women often face economic, social, cultural and geographic barriers to reproductive health care. Women with financial means can usually terminate a pregnancy safely, regardless of the legal status of abortion. Thus, the crisis of unsafe abortion disproportionately harms women with the least access to resources, including poor women, adolescents, refugees, women living in rural areas and those who are otherwise marginalized.

Despite international commitments to protect reproductive health and rights, women's ability to determine their futures and exercise their fundamental rights is far from assured. As long as women continue to experience unwanted pregnancies, governments, health systems, advocates and communities must work to increase access to safe and legal abortion services as an essential element of women's health care.

Ipas's efforts to promote women's reproductive rights include:

- advocating for local, national and international policies that support each woman's ability to make safe reproductive choices;
- supporting efforts of local partners to improve or implement laws governing women's access to safe abortion care;
- addressing neglected women's rights issues and the rights of marginalized populations, such as women who are subject to sexual violence, adolescent women and women living with HIV/AIDS;
- developing and disseminating information on sexual and reproductive rights to mobilize policymakers, health-care providers, advocates, NGOs and communities;
- educating health-care providers about the importance of providing safe abortion services as a matter of public health and human rights.

Training and equipping health-care professionals

Ipas believes all women should be able to obtain safe abortion and postabortion care, when and where they need it. Access to high-quality, comprehensive reproductive health care depends largely on the prevalence of skilled health-care providers. In countries around the world, Ipas facilitates clinical and related training programs and support for health-care workers in partnership with public (governmental) health systems, providers in other health systems and private practitioners.

Ipas's performance-based approach supports women's health and rights through training and education, primarily with health-care workers, but increasingly, directly with women. Through learning and empowerment methods, Ipas strives to ensure that:

- women have access to safe, confidential, high-quality abortion and postabortion services and information;
- women can protect their health and prevent unprotected or unsafe sex, unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion;
- women are empowered at the individual, family, community and institutional levels to plan their families, control their fertility and exercise their reproductive rights.

Ipas's goal is to ensure there is an ongoing source of motivated, proficient health-care workers (trainees) who are available to provide women with high-quality services.

We work with local, national, regional and international partners to develop resources that build on existing capacity, resources and initiatives.



Our training and service-delivery initiatives are innovative, evidence based and in accordance with current clinical and program standards, as well as women's needs. Ipas's training and learning initiatives produce knowledgeable, competent, sensitive and motivated stakeholders, including clinicians, counselors, managers, trainers, policymakers and future health-care professionals (medical, nursing, midwifery and public-health students).

Ipas training and learning initiatives are designed to expand and improve service delivery, such as policy development, systems strengthening, information dissemination, performance and quality improvement, and community empowerment and mobilization.

Together, these core program components lead to important outcomes, such as:

- more women served;
- improved quality of care;
- more health-care providers delivering services to women using appropriate technologies and in accordance with current standards;
- more highly functioning service-delivery sites;
- more and stronger institutions and networks for reproductive health training and service delivery;
- policies that support women's health and rights;
- standards and guidelines that reflect evidence-based approaches to care;
- expanded health-care coverage by competent providers.

Technology

Increasing sustainable access to safe, effective reproductive health technologies is central to Ipas's work.

The organization was originally created to complete development and distribution of the revolutionary manual vacuum aspiration (MVA) technique for uterine evacuation. This initial focus has evolved to include objectives to increase access to medical abortion (also called medication abortion) technologies, as well.

MVA is an especially useful technique for rural or low-resource settings because it is simple, portable and does not rely on electricity. It is also a suitable back-up method for medical abortion methods. Through both donation and commercial sales, Ipas distributes MVA aspirators to more than 135 countries. After 30 years of manufacturing, distributing and training health-care providers in this important technique, Ipas recently introduced a new, more technologically advanced MVA system, which offers numerous benefits to both health-care providers and patients.

Both vacuum aspiration and medical abortion are safe and effective. The WHO recognizes that women's risk of complications is substantially higher with sharp curettage than with either vacuum aspiration or medical abortion. The availability of both vacuum aspiration and medical abortion increases women's options so that they are better able to choose the care that best suits their personal circumstances and needs. Ipas believes that both these important, complementary technologies should be available at all service-delivery sites offering reproductive health services to women.



*Protecting women's health
Advancing women's reproductive rights*

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