Access to safe abortion: building choices for women living with HIV and AIDS

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Description:
In many areas of the world where HIV prevalence is high, rates of unintended pregnancy and unsafe abortion have also been shown to be high. Of all pregnancies worldwide in 2008, 41% were reported as unintended or unplanned, and approximately 50% of these ended in abortion. Of the estimated 21.6 million unsafe abortions occurring worldwide in 2008 (around one in 10 pregnancies), approximately 21.2 million occurred in developing countries, often due to restrictive abortion laws and leading to an estimated 47,000 maternal deaths and untold numbers of women who will suffer long-term health consequences. Despite this context, little research has focused on decisions about and experiences of women living with HIV with regard to terminating a pregnancy, although this should form part of comprehensive promotion of sexual and reproductive health rights. In this paper, we explore the existing evidence related to global and country-specific barriers to safe abortion for all women, with an emphasis on research gaps around the right of women living with HIV to choose safe abortion services as an option for dealing with unwanted pregnancies. The main focus is on the situation for women living with HIV in Brazil, Namibia and South Africa as examples of three countries with different conditions regarding women’s access to safe legal abortions: a very restrictive setting, a setting with several indications for legal abortion but non-implementation of the law, and a rather liberal setting. Similarities and differences are discussed, and we further outline global and country-specific barriers to safe abortion for all women, ending with recommendations for policy makers and researchers.

Links:
Access to safe abortion: building choices for women living with HIV and AIDS [1]

Themes:
Key populations [2]

Regions:
Americas and the Caribbean [3]
Brazil [4]
Africa [5]
Namibia [6]
South Africa [7]

Populations:
People living with HIV [8]

Resource types:
Case studies and research papers [9]

Keywords:
abortion [10]
legislation [11]
mortality [12]
people living with HIV [13]
pregnancy [14]
sexual and reproductive health [15]
women [16]

Languages:
English [17]

Record created by:
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Links
[1] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3253672/pdf/1758-2652-14-54.pdf
[2] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/theme/key-populations
[3] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/region/americas-and-caribbean
[4] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/region/brazil
[5] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/region/africa
[6] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/region/namibia
[7] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/region/south-africa
[8] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/population/people-living-hiv
[9] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/type/case-studies-and-research-papers
[10] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/keyword/abortion
[11] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/keyword/legislation
[12] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/keyword/mortality
[13] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/keyword/people-living-hiv
[14] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/keyword/pregnancy
[15] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/keyword/sexual-and-reproductive-health
[16] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/keyword/women
[17] https://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/library/search/_all_/language/english