

PRESS RELEASE

CAC Conclave calls for strengthening of safe abortion services

New Delhi, July 11: Ten women die every day in India as a result of unsafe abortion. Approximately 30,200 abortions are expected to take place everyday of which 15,000 are estimated to be unsafe. Low levels of awareness about abortion legality and availability, coupled with lack of access to services. It is estimated that of these 3,600 develop complications resulting in morbidity and mortality.

Keeping this scenario in mind, speakers at a Conclave on 'Expanding the Discourse on Comprehensive Care (CAC) in India' on July 10 and 11, 2017 said there was an urgent need to strengthen safe abortion services by increasing the provider base and creating awareness on availability of comprehensive abortion care services across the country.

Unsafe abortion is the third leading cause of maternal deaths in India, contributing to eight percent of all maternal deaths annually. To facilitate faster decline in the overall maternal mortality in India, it is imperative that access to safe abortion services is made available at all levels of health facilities.

Women's ability to exercise their reproductive choices is integral to the success of maternal health and family planning interventions at the national and state level. However, the challenge of repeated unintended pregnancies and unwanted births or abortions remains largely unattended due to either lack of services coupled with myths and misconceptions associated with it.

Studies reveal that 90% of the maternal mortality related to unsafe abortions could be averted by use of contraceptives in the post-abortion period. Also, the unmet need for family planning in the post-abortion period is very high which, if bridged, can save many young mothers.

Mr. Vinod Manning, Executive Director, IDF said close to 10,000 doctors in the public sector in 13 States have been trained for providing safe abortion services to women. He said the first CAC guidelines issued in 2010 was a significant landmark in national commitment to making abortion safer. This has been followed by other progressive policy moves including a mass media campaign. However, delay in the passage of amendments to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy, 1971 that would allow mid-level health workers to provide safe abortion services, and implementation challenges in light of laws such as Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994 and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 need to be addressed on priority.

Dr Atul Ganatra of the Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecological Society of India (FOGSI) said conflict in laws and lack of clarity about laws resulted in denial of safe abortion services to girls below the age of 18 for the fear of prosecution. He suggested there was a need to educate everyone about the abortion law, including the law makers and law implementers. He said the 20 week deadline for medical termination of pregnancy needed to be changed since not all women could rush to Supreme Court for relief. There have been numerous instances where providers have refused services and seekers have moved the Apex Court.

Expressing concern over the variance in sale of medical abortion drugs in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, Mr Shanker Narayan, PSI India Private Limited, said the price control of the drugs had impacted the availability of the

drugs used for abortion since many pharmaceutical companies had stopped manufacturing these drugs as it was no more profitable.

Dr. Suchitra Pandit, FOGSI representative highlighted the need for client centered counseling and service provision for women from all strata and age groups. This would be a key step in increasing women's access to safe abortion and preventing them from seeking services from untrained providers. Chakshu Roy of PRS Legislative Services urged the participants to engage with law makers to keep them informed about the subject and challenges faced by women for more effective laws and policies. There is a need to involve a larger group of stakeholders beyond activists, lawyers, doctors for creating an enabling environment for abortion access in India.

Organized by Ipas Development Foundation (IDF) the two-day Conclave was part of a series of events to create a favorable environment for making comprehensive abortion care services available to women in India. The purpose of this event was to create a wider community of advocates for CAC in India.

The CAC Conclave brought together lawyers, civil society, service providers, researchers, academicians along with other experts to enable sharing and leveraging of synergies at various levels. The key themes of discussion were the role of communication in increasing awareness about CAC, unraveling medical abortion-use in India and leveraging its potential for women, breaking the cycle of unwanted pregnancies, and abortion and law.

About IDF:

Ipas Development Foundation (IDF) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to preventing and managing unwanted pregnancies, and works closely with national and state governments to ensure the provision of high-quality CAC services through the training of eligible providers and by providing continued mentoring and support to them, as well as by reaching out to the community with information on availability of services.
