



# Research Report

Commission on the Status of Women  
Ensuring Access to Safe and Legal  
Abortion and Birth Control

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Definition of Key Terms</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>General Overview</b>	<b>4</b>
Timeline of Key Events	5
Stakeholders	6
<b>Possible Solutions</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Further Readings</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Works Cited</b>	<b>9</b>

# Introduction

*"Women belong in all places where decisions are being made.*

*It shouldn't be that women are the exception."*

*- Ruth Bader Ginsburg, late Justice of the Supreme Court*

Access to safe and legal abortion, along with birth control, is a fundamental human right and a crucial component to (reproductive) health care. The lack therefore fosters a dangerous environment and threatens the life and **autonomy** of women worldwide. According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)** around 45% of abortions worldwide are done under unsafe and illicit conditions with nearly 13% of said abortions leading to maternal death (World Health Organization: WHO). However, maternal death is not the only outcome that victims of illegal abortion operations face. The health complications, along with the mental trauma, further scar the victims and feed into the stigmatisation and weight that an act of abortion carries.

But what does this stigmatisation stem from? Since the dawn of time women have found themselves in a **patriarchal** society, where the **autonomy** of their bodies has been stripped away from men in power. The act of abortion and the prescription of birth control medication are often looked down upon by many. Such reasoning is rooted in several aspects, including religion and morality, however the reasoning of others should not restrict someone from their basic healthcare—and at most important—human rights.

The criminalization of **reproductive healthcare** further contributes to the negative prejudice that people have, as outcomes of illegal abortion tend to result in gruesome health complications and mental health problems.

This is why, now more than ever, women should carry the ability of having **autonomy** over their bodies and have the access to safe, legal, and affordable **reproductive healthcare**.

# Definition of Key Terms

## Autonomy

The right or condition of self-government (*Oxford Languages and Google - English | Oxford Languages*); In the context of this report: meaning women get to choose and make decisions when it comes to their bodies and reproductive health

## Marginalized communities

Refers to groups of people who experience social, economic, and/or political exclusion or discrimination based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability, or religion. (The American College of Trust and Estate Counsel)

## Patriarchy

A system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it. (*Oxford Languages and Google - English | Oxford Languages*)

## Reproductive Healthcare

Reproductive health implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. (World Health Organization: WHO, *Reproductive Health*)

# General Overview

## Current situation & impacts of unsafe abortion

### Health complications

Providing safe conditions to abortion are crucial as they are a detrimental part of fundamental human rights. Stripping away the right of a woman to choose whether she undergoes abortions is not only restricting, but exceptionally dangerous. According to the **World Health Organization (WHO)** around 45% of abortions worldwide are done under unsafe and illicit conditions with nearly 13% of said abortions leading to maternal death (World Health Organization: WHO). As mentioned earlier, victims of unsafe and illicit abortion procedures often face a number of risks. These risks include life long injuries such as chronic pain, damage of internal organs and infertility (Migration, “Unsafe Abortion: Consequences, Facts & Statistics”). Along with the physical damage women face, they often have to bear with the disruption of their mental wellbeing as the process of having to undergo such an unsafe procedure is rather traumatic. Women should not have to carry neither the physical, nor mental damage. They deserve the right to determine their own future.

Along with the aforementioned consequences, abortion also appears to be an economic issue. As the procedures are often not accessible due to staggering health care prices in certain countries, the process of an abortion appears to be sometimes impossible to those with a lower income. This is why it is of great importance that abortion is not only legalized, but also made accessible and affordable—to all.

### Sex trafficking and organized crime

As 97% of unsafe abortions occur in countries of a lower income, the women fall victim to an issue of greater scale, namely sex trafficking and organized crime. Networks of organized crime

often exploit women in **marginalized** areas, in this case, performing unsafe abortion procedures in order to capitalize off of the vulnerability of the victims (“How Violence Against Women and Girls, Including Human Trafficking, Is Used as a Weapon of War”). Furthermore, women of **marginalized** communities that fall victim to sex trafficking and are forced to carry out their pregnancies because they do not have the right access to abortion should be taken into consideration. The economic aspect of this topic is a weighing issue that should be considered by member states in order to eradicate the problem altogether.

### Understanding the history

#### Roe v. Wade

A pivotal moment in the history of women's rights is the United States’ Supreme Court decision of the 1973 Roe v. Wade. This legal act gave women the **autonomy** to a constitutional right of privacy when it came to decision making regarding abortion. This act significantly influenced the global movement of abortion rights as it set the scene for other member states to follow the footsteps to a future of **reproductive** freedom for women. However, “nothing gold can stay”, as in 2022 the act of Roe v. Wade was overturned by the Supreme Court which changed the original policy to now only allowing states to determine the legal status of abortion. This moment was not only devastating to American women, but to women worldwide, as it showed that the world is still against the most basic human rights of women.

(The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica)

#### Abortion Act

Contrary to the United States, the United Kingdom has made a progressive step to **reproductive** freedom by establishing the Abortion Act in 1967. This act focuses on making abortion legal and accessible while taking the mother’s mental and physical wellbeing in consideration.

The striking difference between the decisions of the two nations when it comes to women's **autonomy** and fundamental rights shows how divided opinions can be on the topic.

## Stakeholders

### Women

Women are the ones experiencing the issue of unsafe abortion and the lack of access to a safe one first hand. Women worldwide face the stigma and prejudice people have against abortion. They have to bear the consequences of the possible endurance of an unsafe abortion procedure.

### World Health Organisation (WHO)

The World Health Organisation advocates for legal and safe abortion and has set a number of standards as to how a safe abortion should be performed.

### Legal frameworks

It comes down to legal frameworks when we talk about the legal state of abortion. Whether abortion is legalized and accessible or criminalized, it is due to the decision being made by a nation's legal sector.

# Possible Solutions

## **Providing accessible and affordable medical facilities**

The stabilization of healthcare facilities is crucial to ensure safe procedures can be carried out. Furthermore, the funding and providing said facilities is crucial especially to **marginalized** communities with, but not limited to, a lower income.

## **Legal reforms**

As abortion and birth control remain illegal and criminalized in several places around the world as previously mentioned, it is necessary to hold discussions about the reasoning of said criminalization in order to reform the legal frameworks that solely cause the issue of no access to safe **reproductive healthcare**.

## **Education**

When it comes to understanding the importance of safe abortion procedures, education holds an important role. The implementation of classes about intercourse and **reproductive healthcare** should be implemented in schools. The funding and strengthening of education institutes is also a prevailing issue for the aforementioned **marginalized** groups.

## **Destigmatisation**

Even if legal framework and government decisions change over time, personal beliefs of people and the overall stigma that abortion holds is something that cannot be easily lifted. This is not to say that people should not have their own personal beliefs, however harmful stigmatisation is one of the main catalysts to the criminalisation of abortion. Therefore, if member states work together to educate and inform their citizens on the importance of safe **reproductive healthcare**, it will strive for the complete wellbeing for all.



### **Support systems**

As the illegal practices of abortion carry out, many victims are left scarred with long term physical and mental health struggles. A way to help the victims would be through the implementation of support groups that focus on providing the individual and specific attention depending on the victim– let that be mental or physical attention.

### **Monitoring & data collection**

To ensure that legal and safe abortions are taking place, the collection of data and monitoring will provide member states with a clearer view of the undergoing issue. By doing this, unsafe practices will be abolished and the implementation of safe and legal ones.

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