

Revisiting Induced Abortion Regulations

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The global abortion rate of around 25% has remained unchanged over time. Awareness and education amongst women are instrumental towards avoiding the episodes of induced abortions for unintended pregnancies all over the world. Plethora of literature is constantly accumulating in the mainstream of anti-abortion laws/regulations and there is unanimous agreement over the fact that the contemporary laws made for curbing the illegal abortions is being debated for their failures all over the world. The joint report of the World Health Organization and Guttmacher Institute, USA (2016) [1,2] is alarming and perhaps focus the need of revisiting and defining the effective anti-abortion laws all over the world. The report says that the abortion rates are low in the developed countries with remarkable dropdown of over 40% in the past two and half decades. However, in developing world, the abortion rates are almost unchanged.

Surprisingly, in countries where abortion is completely regulated and declared illegal or contextually permitted only to safeguard the life of the pregnant woman, there, the average annual abortion rate is at 37 per 1,000 women, and ironically the countries where abortion is legally permitted in most of the cases, the rate is at 34 per 1,000 women [3]. Somewhat similar trend is observed in Latin America: the so called hub of strongest anti-abortion laws of the world, there, the rate of abortion is 32%, which is highest of all other regions. This clearly shows that criminalization of abortion practices is not an effective measure in curbing the induced abortion practices. The other philosophical interpretation of the current state-of-the-art is that criminalizing abortion has ill effects which perhaps motivates women for seeking illegal abortion practices. As a part of analysing the discourse of why abortion rates are high in legally equipped anti-abortion Nations, the part of answer lies in the fact that the access of contraception, sex education/awareness, and effective implementation of family-planning programmes are lacking to a greater extent.

The progressive falls of abortion rates in developed countries is mostly attributed with sex education, health awareness, easy access and usage of modern contraceptives. However, in developing nations, family planning services and programmes do not seem to be in concert with the increasing desire for smaller families. Therefore, over 80% of unintended pregnancies are experienced by women owing to lack of modern methods of contraception, lack of education, poverty etc. In the present situation, the legal frame of the abortion regulating laws in many developing countries like India is not able to solve the critical abortion cases, for example on February 28, 2017, the Supreme Court of India has denied the plea of woman requesting the abortion of her 26-week-old foetus that was diagnosed as a Down syndrome (a congenital disorder that impairs the intellectual potential). The court gave a verdict that the child may suffer from physical and mental abnormalities and their hands are tied by law.

There is also a depressed voice from different parts of the world that started getting higher amplitude in favour of getting access of legally guaranteed safe abortion services, quality post-abortion care and counselling irrespective of the marital status of women. Therefore, this is high time for WHO and for the member countries of the world to revisit and redefine the anti-abortions laws which preferentially prioritize the guidelines ensuring the easy access of affordable modern contraceptives, contemporary sexual and reproductive health education, effective implementation of family programmes etc. Such steps may help in alleviating women from the drudgery of induced abortions [4-6].

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