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Ipas in Pakistan

Amna Bibi did not want to have another abortion. When she discovered she was pregnant, the mother of four knew she could not afford to care for another child, yet medical providers refused to help her. Now Amna sits on a stained bed in the dingy room of a clandestine abortion clinic, waiting for a traditional midwife to perform the abortion. She is very afraid – but she is determined to protect the well-being of her family.

Background:

Unsafe abortion remains a neglected public health issue in Pakistan, even though thousands of women each year suffer, and sometimes die, from its consequences. Current evidence shows that the average Pakistani woman will have one abortion in her lifetime. Abortion is legal in Pakistan to save the woman's life or to provide "necessary treatment," however, it is highly stigmatized and safe abortion and postabortion care (PAC) services are often inaccessible.

Research by The Population Council suggests that 890,000 induced abortions are performed annually in Pakistan. Most are clandestinely performed by

midwives in clinics in urban areas and by traditional birth attendants in rural areas. In addition, the Guttmacher Institute reports that an estimated 197,000 women are treated each year for complications from unsafe abortion; a study in a large Karachi hospital found that 10 percent of women admitted for postabortion care died of serious complications.

The 2006-07 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey found that knowledge of contraception in Pakistan is nearly universal, but that the unmet need for family planning is 25 percent. According to the Guttmacher Institute, this indicates that induced abortion may be an important contributing factor in limiting fertility in Pakistan. Most women who come to the hospital for abortion complications are married with several children. Pakistani women, like women all over the world, are doing what they can to limit their fertility and protect the well-being of their families, even if it means turning to unsafe abortion.

Strategies:

Women's lack of access to safe, comprehensive reproductive health care leads to tragic consequences. Serious complications and morbidity from unsafe abortion have a substantial impact on women's health,

<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Data</i>
National population	174,578,558
Total fertility rate for women (aged 15-49)	4.1
Unmet need for contraception	25 percent
Induced abortions estimated per year	890,000



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the health-care system and society at large. Since 2007, Ipas has worked to decrease death and injury from unsafe abortion in Pakistan through socially and culturally sensitive interventions. Strategies include:

- Increasing access to, and improving the quality of, postabortion care services by training health-care providers;
- Increasing awareness among women and men in the community of their ability to manage unwanted pregnancy and the risks associated with unsafe abortion;
- Strengthening national alliances, task forces and partnerships in support of women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, with a focus on postabortion care;
- Supporting the sustainability of safe reproductive health technologies;
- Expanding awareness of abortion as a public health and human rights issue.

Partnerships:

To increase women's ability to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights and to help save women's lives, Ipas fosters strategic partnerships with national stakeholders. Building on prior achievements and programs in reproductive health in Pakistan, Ipas is developing a broad network of partners working together to improve women's access to better reproductive health care. Ipas works closely with the National Committee for Maternal and Neonatal Health (NCMNH), whose ultimate goal is to provide health care for every pregnant woman in the country. NCMNH and Ipas's reputation for high-quality PAC training has spread throughout Pakistan, creating a demand in both the public and private sectors for training in PAC and clinical certification of providers. Ipas is also a founding member of the Pakistan Alliance for Postabortion Care (PAPAC), which brings together national and international organizations working together to expand the availability and to improve the quality of PAC services throughout the country.

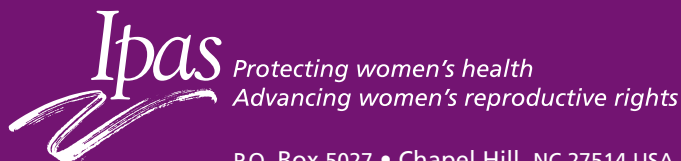
Resources:

IRIN News. 2009. Clandestine abortions threaten the health of millions, November 12.

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Vlassof, Michael, Susheela Singh, Gustavo Suarez and Sadiqua N. Jafarey. 2009. Abortion in Pakistan, *In Brief*, No. 2. New York, NY: Guttmacher Institute.



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