

Campaigning for Safe Abortion Awareness

Project coordinator: Manoj Kumar

Funder: Ipas

Dates: 2009–2011

Background

Of the 6,700,000 induced abortions performed annually throughout India today, an estimated 4 million are unsafe, and 12,000 women die from the procedure. Indian women seek abortions primarily because they have too many children already and because their children are too closely spaced. However, abortion still carries a stigma, and many women are not aware that safe abortions are legally available. Therefore, they often seek help from an unqualified source and are unlikely to visit a health center until they are beyond help.

Scope of the Project

In 2009, following the conduct of a baseline survey, Ipas provided IDF with a grant to introduce safe abortion awareness programs in 266 villages spread over five blocks—Danapur, Phulwari Sharif, Maner, Bihta, and Sampatchak—in the Patna district, targeting 45,000 women between the ages of 15 and 40.

Goal

The overall goals of the project were to enable rural women to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights by educating them about the availability and legality of safe abortion, and to increase the number of rural abortion facilities.

Objectives

- To increase safe abortions in primary health care facilities by 25 percent.
- To increase the number of women undergoing safe abortions instead of unsafe procedures by 25 percent.
- To increase use of effective contraceptive methods to prevent future abortions.

Activities

Meetings

Meetings with village women, which were the primary vehicle for conveying the message of this intervention, were held twice each month in all 266 villages. Some initial resistance from male members of the community was overcome once the relevance of the issue was openly discussed, and the men soon became active in disseminating information in their communities. At the meetings women first told stories about their own abortion experiences and then played simple games to learn basic information about the circumstances in which abortion is and is not

Integrated Development Foundation

Maurya Path, Khajpura, Patna - 800014, India

Phone: +91 (0)612 258-8682 / 258-1553, 326-4089 • Email: idfpatna@idfngo.org

legal and about the different termination techniques available up to the 7th, 12th, and 20th weeks of pregnancy respectively. Information on different contraceptive techniques was also provided.

Nukkad natak

A *nukkad natak* (street performance) with a simple but engaging script was staged in all five blocks to attract the maximum audience and spread the word about safe abortions throughout the community beyond the immediate target population.

Wall painting

Wall paintings, one of the most effective ways of disseminating a simple message to the entire community, were placed at strategic locations in all villages to reinforce the information conveyed in meetings.

Block-level workshop

Based on field observations, workshops were organized for the women as well as for community health and social workers in each of the five blocks covered by the project. These workshops were designed to strengthen the women's capacity to make their own decisions about their reproductive lives. Many of the local Anganwadi (government health center) workers (AWWs) and accredited social health activists (ASHAs) were themselves previously uninformed about the distinctions between legal and illegal abortions.

Outcomes

Following is a selected list of outcomes of the intervention for the reported years:

- 259 AWWs received training in safe abortion criteria.
- 237 ASHAs received training in safe abortion criteria.
- 174 self-help groups (SHGs) received training in safe abortion criteria.
- 2,211 SHG members received training in safe abortion criteria.
- 198 auxiliary nurse midwives received training in safe abortion criteria.

Achievements and Challenges

Regular and consistent interaction with the community overcame the initial barrier to discussing the sensitive topic of abortion and related personal issues. Adolescent girls and newly married females came forward to participate in the intervention without any hesitation, and were eager to spread the information they received throughout their villages. The project was clearly effective in communicating the basic message that abortion is not a social stigma to be handled out of sight by unqualified people, but rather a personal choice to be exercised safely and freely. However, there remained some confusion among the program participants about the different stages of pregnancy when different abortion techniques are indicated, and more work needs to be done to reinforce this specific information.

Case Study

Information leads one woman to safe abortion

After the link worker/block coordinator finished giving women participants information regarding safe abortion and its legal and illegal aspects during a meeting in the village of Mokimpur in the Sampatchak block of Patna district, Shobha Devi and her husband, Sri Pramod Ram, told the coordinator that she was two months pregnant. The couple already had two children, aged two and four, whose needs they could hardly meet. They asked where Shobha could go for a safe abortion. The coordinator suggested they visit their primary health center for this purpose, but due to the unavailability of facilities there, the doctor told them to come to the private clinic instead, where a trained doctor performed a safe abortion for Shobha.