

Why Focus on Second Trimester Abortions

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What is “early” abortion?

- **In the old days, early abortion meant 9-12 weeks of pregnancy except in a few countries like the Netherlands where they did aspiration abortions from 7 weeks of pregnancy.**
- **With the advent of medical abortion, early abortion can now take place as soon as a woman’s period is late and pregnancy is confirmed. Medical abortion from 9-13 weeks of pregnancy is now described as “late” first trimester abortion.**

What is “late” abortion?

- **Some people think all abortions after the first trimester are “late”.**
- **How late in pregnancy abortions should be permitted and carried out is a matter of great controversy among almost everyone – except the women who need them.**
- **There will always be a few women who seek abortion at 20-22-24-26-28 weeks, and in a very few cases even later, with the numbers diminishing greatly as pregnancy advances.**

How late is “late”?

- **In Britain, one of the many times the anti-abortion movement tried to lower the abortion time limit to 20 or 22 weeks, we used this slogan to oppose them:
“As Early as Possible, As Late as Necessary”**
- **This led some people to accuse us of wanting to do abortions up to birth, thus entirely missing the point.**
- **I invite you to contemplate this slogan over the next few days and its relationship to the meaning of “a woman’s right to choose abortion”.**

All abortions are stigmatised.

**Late abortions,
the women who have them and the
providers who do them
are
especially stigmatised.**

Consequences of stigma

- **The number of providers willing to carry out abortions drops rapidly after 12–16 weeks of pregnancy and diminishes even further as pregnancy advances beyond 20 weeks.**
- **Many abortion laws do not permit second trimester abortion at all, except perhaps to save the life of the woman. Those which do mention second trimester abortion usually have highly restricted grounds and bureaucratic approval processes.**
- **Deaths from these abortions are often hidden in the statistics on maternal deaths (Walker et al).**

Late abortions: the barriers

- **Women seeking late abortion are often in a precarious position personally (e.g. they are very young) and also as regards finding someone to do the abortion.**
- **Because of legal restrictions, many women are forced to travel, including to other countries, and/or pay for the abortion,.**
- **When it is difficult to find someone to do a late abortion, the abortion becomes even later.**

Legally restricted settings: barriers

- **In legally restricted settings, morbidity and mortality are greater from complications of second trimester abortion than first trimester. The reasons are often due not just to the lateness of the pregnancy but to greater risks from self-medication, the conditions in which the abortion is performed, lack of access to training in best practice for providers, less safe methods used and lack of access to timely, skilled follow-up care in case of complications.**

Reasons for 2nd trimester abortion

- **Confronting the fact of an unwanted pregnancy is not easy and deciding to terminate it not always straightforward.**
- **Services aren't as good as they should be, or as accessible – delays (not just 3 days or 2 weeks but as many as 6, 8, 10 weeks) are often endemic.**
- **Second trimester abortions cost more, and finding the money may be hard and time-consuming.**
- **Fetal indications are mostly not identified until 16, 18, 20, 22 weeks.**

Abortion for fetal indications

- **Normally, when we talk about (first trimester) abortion, we assume the pregnancy is unwanted.**
- **When the abortion is for fetal indications, the opposite is likely to be true.**
- **Where abortion for fetal indications is legal, many of the barriers women otherwise face don't occur. Indeed, abortion may be encouraged.**
- **Where it is not legal, women may be forced to continue pregnancies and deliver even though the baby will certainly die soon after birth.**
(Ferreira da Costa LL, et al.)

Why focus on second trimester abortions?

- **They happen.**
- **Almost no one wants to think about them.**
- **Almost no one wants to do them.**
- **Women need them – often the most vulnerable women.**

Confronting the controversy

- **As we move into the agenda, I urge you not to get bogged down, e.g. in arguing that abortions at 22 weeks are OK but at 24 or 25 weeks are not.**
- **This meeting will put a lot of complex issues on the table regarding methods, ethics, values, stigma, the burden of service delivery on providers and the reality of women's lives.**
- **Keep in mind that we are here to start a process of developing guidance on second trimester abortion that is not punitive and that will help to make these abortions, as well as first trimester abortions, legal and safe.**

References

1. Walker D, Campero L, Espinoza H, et al. Deaths from complications of unsafe abortion: misclassified second trimester deaths. *Abortion Law, Policy and Practice in Transition. Reproductive Health Matters* 2004;12(24 Supplement):27-38.
2. Ferreira da Costa LL, Hardy E, Duarte Osis MJ, Faúndes A. Termination of pregnancy for fetal abnormality incompatible with life: women's experiences in Brazil. *Reproductive Health Matters* 2005;13(26):139-46.