September 28, Global Day of Action for Access to Safe and Legal Abortion

#BustTheMyths

Fight #AbortionStigma & Discrimination!

How does abortion stigma work?

Abortion-related stigma is one of the primary factors that places safe, legal and accessible abortion care and services out of reach for individuals worldwide,[1] particularly in the Global South and particularly for young, poor, and unmarried women. Moreover, while socio-cultural factors entail that abortion stigma may take different forms in different places, [2] abortion stigma is a global issue, demonstrated by the rise and continuance of legal and policy restrictions in places as diverse as the United States, Spain, Lithuania, Nigeria, and El Salvador, among others.

Why is abortion stigma so pervasive?

It largely draws its strength from gender stereotypes used to deny individuals access to abortion, particularly the stereotype ascribing women to the role of motherhood. This stereotype implies that women “should prioritize childbearing and childrearing over all other roles they might perform or choose. [...] nothing should be more important for women than the bearing and rearing of children.”[3] As a result, abortion stigma and gender stereotypes, which in some cases are exacerbated by religious fundamentalism, negatively impact the way a given society perceives abortion, as well as those who seek or have had an abortion, those who work in abortion care, and those who actively support abortion rights.

- Limits access to safe abortion services;
- Forces women and other pregnant individuals to seek clandestine and unsafe procedures, which place their health and lives at risk;
- Criminalizes women who seek abortions as well as abortion service providers; and/or
- Forces individuals to carry unwanted pregnancies against their will, among other negative consequences.

At the legal and/or policy level, in turn, abortion stigma plays out in justifying restrictive laws or total bans, and in preventing politicians or government representatives from speaking out on abortion rights, for fear of being perceived as too “radical” or “controversial,” and losing popular support.
How does abortion stigma work?

In addition to intersecting with wrongful gender stereotypes, the stigma surrounding abortion intersects with pervasive power relations, patriarchal norms, and privileged identity markers, entailing that safe abortion services are rendered even less accessible for certain groups, among them adolescents, unmarried young women, individuals of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, and other groups living in vulnerable situations. As such, abortion stigma is both a cause and consequence of inequality, building off of and perpetuating existing forms of discrimination.[4]

In all of these ways...

In all of these ways, abortion stigma, wrongful gender stereotypes, and discrimination:

- Render safe and legal abortion care inaccessible;
- Fuel further discrimination against women and violate their human right to reproductive choice, as enshrined in article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and
- Infringe upon other human rights, among them the right to bodily and psychological integrity, the right to autonomy, the right to information, the right to health and the right to life free from harm.

Through CEDAW and other human rights instruments, States are obligated to end all forms of violence and discrimination against women, including the obligation to address gender stereotypes and related stigma.

This September 28, join us in fighting #AbortionStigma and discrimination, as we #BustTheMyths surrounding abortion, emphasize the importance of abortion as an essential social good and a human right, and demand that governments uphold their human rights commitments!