ACCESS TO SAFE AND LEGAL ABORTION IS A HUMAN RIGHT, GROUNDED IN NUMEROUS HUMAN RIGHTS RECOGNIZED AND PROTECTED UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW, INCLUDING THE RIGHTS TO BODILY INTEGRITY, AUTONOMY IN REPRODUCTIVE DECISION-MAKING, AND PRIVACY, AMONG OTHERS.

What’s the Problem?

Abortion Stigma >>>

Abortion Stigma continues to play a critical role in the social, medical, and legal marginalization of abortion care worldwide, constituting one of the main obstacles towards the availability, accessibility and decriminalization/legalization of comprehensive abortion information, care and drugs; as well as the implementation of existing safe and legal abortion guidelines.

Central to challenging the stigma which restricts access to safe and legal abortion services, is challenging the gender stereotypes which feed abortion-related stigma, as well as the socially constructed ideas of what “type” of individuals would have an abortion.

Abortion stigma “is linked to ideals of womanhood such as female sexuality being solely for the purpose of procreation, that women are not ‘real women’ until they are mothers, and the idea that all women at all times wish to be mothers.” Kumar (2013): e329.

Gender Stereotypes >>>

Gender Stereotyping is one of the main contributors to abortion-related stigma, particularly the stereotype conflating womanhood with motherhood. Informed by patriarchal and narrow views of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity,’ as well as overlapping norms and taboos surrounding female sexuality, this socially constructed idea 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.” In some cases these ideas are exacerbated by religious fundamentalisms, where women may be considered “as the custodians of family norms and honour, thus, their bodies and sexualities become the first sites of fundamentalist control.”

2016

LET'S CHALLENGE #ABORTIONSTIGMA & #GENDERStereotypes!

Step into Our Shoes

#StepintoOurShoes
What are the Consequences of Stigma and Gender Stereotypes?

As a result, abortion stigma and associated gender stereotypes negatively impact the way a given society perceives abortion by linking this medical procedure to notions of “abnormality,” “immorality,” or “deviancy.” In turn, they stigmatize:

• Those who seek or have had an abortion, as “irresponsible,” “immature,” “selfish,” “unnatural,” or “promiscuous”;
• Those who stand with abortion seekers, such as supportive partners, guardians, and family members;
• Those who work in abortion care, and/or those who actively support or advocate for abortion rights.

This then contributes to further stigmatization and discrimination, in turn:

• Limiting access to safe abortion services;
• Forcing women and other pregnant individuals to seek clandestine and unsafe procedures, which place their health and lives at risk;
• And in some cases criminalizing individuals who have had or are suspected of having abortion, as well as abortion service providers; among other negative consequences.

But what if others – leaders and policy makers, friends and community members – were asked to “step into the shoes” of those who have had an abortion, or support access to safe and legal abortion? How could this help challenge gender stereotypes, illustrate the range of reasons and diverse backgrounds of those who have had an abortion, and in turn shift attitudes towards abortion and those who seek abortion services?

This September 28, the Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) together with Love Matters, invite members, partners, and allies worldwide to join us in calling on the global community to #StepIntoOurShoes, by sharing varied experiences, realities, circumstances, stories, and storytelling initiatives of those of us who have had an abortion, and/or are supporters of the right to access safe and legal abortion.

Through these stories and actions from both restrictive and non-restrictive settings, let’s spur conversations, counter gender stereotypes and shift the narrative surrounding abortion, emphasizing:

• How abortion is a common experience during women’s sexual and reproductive lives, as well as for trans-men, gender queer, gender-non-conforming individuals and others of diverse gender identity who can and do get pregnant;
• The centrality of upholding individuals’ human rights, including the rights to self-determination, agency, and bodily autonomy, in order to achieve reproductive justice; and
• The resulting imperative of ensuring universal access to safe and legal abortion services, as a fundamental part of upholding individuals’ rights and achieving the necessary enabling conditions in their communities.

The Change Our Campaign Will Bring

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This year we want to create as much buzz as possible around our campaign and increase visibility, both online and offline, through stories, user generated content, media, events, and social media. These are the four main areas we will be working on:

1. **Story-Telling**
2. **Mobilize & Engage**
3. **Organize an Event**
4. **Online**

\*Feel free to choose any shoes, boots, sandals, or footwear that you wish – you can even go barefoot!\*

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**THIS SEPTEMBER 28, JOIN US IN CALLING ON GOVERNMENTS, POLICY MAKERS, AND THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY TO #STEPINTOOURSHOES THROUGH DIVERSE ABORTION STORIES FROM ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD, AND IN TURN RECOGNIZE ACCESS TO SAFE AND LEGAL ABORTION FOR WHAT IT IS: A NECESSARY SOCIAL GOOD AND A HUMAN RIGHT!**

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**1. Story-Telling >>**

This year we are using shoes in September 28 signature actions, as a symbol of agency and diversity. There are several ways you can contribute:

**ABORTION STORIES AS COMMON AND DIVERSE AS SHOES – Be part of the PHOTO-SHOE!**
Join the campaign and invite others to symbolically "step into our shoes," by sending a photo of your shoes together with your story of why you chose to have an abortion, or why you support access to safe abortion services. You can send your photo to sept28@wgnrr.org or via social media using the hashtag #StepIntoOurShoes. *Feel free to choose any shoes, boots, sandals, or footwear that you wish – you can even go barefoot!*

**SHARE SEPTEMBER 28 MATERIALS**
Including a series which features excerpts from diverse stories of individuals who have had an abortion. You can share our videos and other content, as well as that of our partners. This year let’s make empathy go viral!
2. Mobilize & Engage >>>

We want to create a splash and raise global and local awareness about access to safe abortion services. The goal is to pin a shoe related activity to a map and create a global map of action and get attention from your community, governments and media. You can do this in several ways:

MOBILIZE FOR A LOCAL SHOE-A-THON
Organize your local community network of reproductive justice activists for an artistic installation! Bring as many shoes as you can to a strategic location (public park, plaza, garden, etc). Try to create the longest line possible with the shoes, as a symbol of the number of people in your community who support access to safe abortion services. Or you can hang the shoes as a display, with abortion stories or testimonials placed inside them, for passersby to read. Alternatively, arrange your shoes into a visual display of the words “Sept 28”!

3. Organize an Event >>>

HOST AN AWARENESS RAISING ACTIVITY, EVENT, OR WORKSHOP to share stories and/or discuss how abortion stigma and related stereotypes restrict access to safe and legal abortion in your community. Let’s facilitate conversations to help point out and address commonalities and systemic issues surrounding safe and legal abortion, while also normalizing the experience.

4. Online >>>

POST, SHARE, TWEET, AND SNAP!
This year we want to reach as many people as possible with our diverse abortion stories from all parts of the world!

VISIT WWW.SEPTEMBER28.ORG AND CHECK OUT OUR SEPTEMBER 28 CAMPAIGN TOOLKIT FOR MORE SUGGESTED ACTIONS!

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September 28 has been a regional campaign for decriminalization of abortion in Latin America and Caribbean for nearly twenty years before being taken on by SRHR activists all over the world as a Global Day of Action for Access to Safe and Legal Abortion in 2011. WGNRR undertakes September 28 annual campaigning activities in collaboration with its members, partners, and allies around the world, and as a member of the International Campaign for Women’s Right to Safe Abortion.

(2) Gender stereotyping “refers to the practice of ascribing to an individual specific attributes, characteristics, or roles by reason only of their [self-identified or perceived] membership in the category of women or men. […] A gender stereotype is harmful when it limits women’s and men’s capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make choices about their lives and life plans” (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Gender Stereotypes/stereotyping). As noted by the OHCHR, “International human rights law places a legal obligation on States to eliminate discrimination against women and men in all areas of their lives. This obligation requires States to take measures to address gender stereotypes both in public and private life as well as to refrain from stereotyping.”


(6) Studies suggest that the sharing of abortion stories is likely to contribute to a positive shift in attitudes towards abortion. Public Health Watch (2014), New Research Brings Abortion Stigma Into the Spotlight.

(7) While we use the term ‘woman/women’ we do so with a critical reflexivity that recognizes the nuances and right to people’s unique sexual and gender identities and expressions. We also recognize that ‘women’ are not a monolithic group and that they have diverse identities that vary due to their social location and the socio-economic, political, and multicultural contexts in which their lives are embedded.

(8) Approximately 56 million pregnancies worldwide end in voluntary termination each year, occurring even in restrictive or illegal settings (Guttmacher Institute (2016), New Global Evidence on SRHR: Abortion Incidence and adolescent contraceptive needs). Globally, 1 in 4 women will have an abortion by the age of 45 (Guttmacher Institute, (2016), Induced Abortion Worldwide).

(9) WGNRR advocates for informed access to safe, affordable and legal abortion for all from the framework of reproductive justice. Reproductive Justice exists when all people have the social, political and economic power and resources to make healthy decisions about their gender, bodies, sexualities and families, both as individuals and as communities. (ACRJ, What is Reproductive Justice?). An integral part of attaining reproductive justice is ensuring governments uphold their obligations to protect women’s human rights, and create the enabling conditions needed in order for women to realize these rights (The Pro-Choice Public Education Project, “What is Reproductive Justice?”).