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Improving Abortion Services for Women in Mexico

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Improving Abortion Services for Women in Mexico

ABORTION-RELATED MORTALITY and morbidity has long been an important public health problem in Mexico.

Between 1990 and 2005, abortion-related complications were the fifth leading cause of maternal mortality nationally, and the third leading cause in Mexico City (Schiavon, Polo, & Troncoso, 2007). In 2006, an estimated 149,700 women were hospitalized for complications from induced abortion, a 40% increase over the number hospitalized in 1990 (Juarez et al. 2008). A key factor underlying these statistics is that abortion was, until recently, a largely illegal practice in Mexico. As a result, women faced with

unintended pregnancies who wished to terminate them had to do so clandestinely often risking their health and lives.

This situation led to social inequalities because it was the poorest, the least educated, the youngest, and women from indigenous backgrounds who were at highest risk for unsafe abortions, while those who were more affluent could afford safe services (Sousa, Lozano, & Gakidou, 2010).

In 2007, the Mexico City legislature made a groundbreaking decision to legalize abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy. Not only was abortion legalized, steps were taken to make sure

that abortion services were accessible to all women regardless of their financial situation. The law stipulated that abortion services be provided in public sector institutions in Mexico City free of charge for Mexico City residents and on a sliding fee scale for residents of other states of Mexico (Sanchez-Fuentes, Paine, & Elliott-Buettner, 2008).

This abortion policy reform in Mexico City has great potential to transform abortion-related risks throughout Mexico if women begin to substitute safe and legal services for unsafe care. However, for this to occur, the new legal abortion services must be accessible and

acceptable to the women who need them. To date, there has been limited research on women's experiences with the new public sector legal abortion services in Mexico City.

In 2009, as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of California, San Francisco, I conducted a study to investigate women's experiences with public sector legal abortion care in Mexico City. I collaborated on this research with colleagues at Mexico's National Institute of Public Health, the Population Council, Mexico, and the Mexico City Ministry of Health. The goals of my research were to learn from women about their experiences accessing abortion care, their perceptions of the quality of the care they received, and their recommendations for how the services could be improved. The methodology was a survey and in-depth interviews. These were carried out with adult women who accessed legal abortion services at three public sector sites: a general hospital, a maternity hospital, and a primary health center. A total of 402 women participated in the survey, and 30 in an in-depth interview.

As a CSW Research Scholar, I have been working to analyze and disseminate findings from this study. My goal is to

disseminate the findings to both academic and policy audiences. I recently submitted abstracts to three academic conferences to present on different aspects of the study. I also submitted two manuscripts on the study to peer-reviewed journals. One of these has been accepted for publication and is forthcoming in the journal *Women's Health Issues*. In addition, in mid-March, with support from a CSW Tillie Olsen Research Scholar Grant, I will be traveling to Mexico City to present my results to the Mexico City Ministry of Health. I am looking forward to this opportunity to share my findings with the Ministry of Health and other key stakeholders in Mexico City, who may be able to use my research findings to improve abortion services.

David Becker has been a CSW Research Scholar since 2010. She received her Ph.D. from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in 2008 after completing a dissertation entitled "Clients' perceptions of the quality of family planning care: An exploration of differences by race, ethnicity and language." From 2008 to the present, she has been a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of California, San Francisco. Her research interests are the quality and accessibility of women's health care and health disparities. Some of her recent publications include two co-authored articles, "Women's perspectives on family planning service quality:

An exploration of differences by race, ethnicity and language" in *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* (2009) and "Reproductive health service preferences and perceptions of quality among low-income women: Racial, ethnic and language group differences" in *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* (2008).

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