

International Seminar on

Incidence and Safety of Abortion: New Evidence and Improvements in Measurement

Organized by the Scientific Panel on Abortion Research of the IUSSP

and the Population Council-Ghana

Accra, Ghana, 3-5 December, 2018

Call for Papers

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 15 May 2018

Studies documenting abortion incidence are essential for a broad array of reasons: From a demographic perspective, abortion is a key component of fertility control that is inextricably tied to unintended pregnancy; from the perspective of gender inequity, abortion may influence sex ratios if sex-selective abortion is commonly practiced; from a service-provision perspective, in all legality contexts, abortion is an indicator of unmet need for contraception and for improved contraceptive services and in legally restrictive settings, it is in addition, an indicator of need for safe abortion services; and from the rights perspective, studies on abortion safety may point to need for broadening legality criteria and improved access to safe, legal services. In countries where abortion is highly restricted, studies on abortion incidence and safety remain challenging and require adapting and improving methodologies and research designs to take into account changing conditions under which women obtain abortion and to improve accuracy and reliability of estimates. It is also important to have accurate measures of the safety of abortion, as unsafe abortion continues to be an important contributor to maternal morbidity and mortality worldwide. In addition, accurate measurement of abortion incidence (safe and unsafe) and morbidity is needed to assess the impact of changes in abortion laws, regulations and service provision.

A number of factors reinforce the need for attention to measurement of induced abortion and its safety. Monitoring progress towards global and national reproductive health goals requires better measurement. In addition, new studies and improved methodologies are needed to assess the impact of changes in access to safer methods of abortion, particularly medication abortion; levels of contraceptive use have slowly increased as the level of unmet need has declined, particularly in Latin America and Asia, though less so in sub-Saharan Africa; at the same time, women and couples want smaller families, and as education becomes increasingly important for young women, the need to postpone the first birth is increasing; and in rapidly growing and changing cities, where women are increasingly in the labor force, the opportunity cost of unplanned births is increasing and in addition, abortion may be a more accessible option, through informal and formal providers. All of these factors may affect the incidence and safety of abortion, increasing the importance of assessing levels and trends in these outcomes.

The social and political sensitivity of the issue of abortion means that carrying out high quality research on abortion overall, including work on abortion incidence, is difficult. Underreporting is variable but often high, especially when the source is surveys of women, whose willingness to report on having an abortion is affected by stigma; where abortion is broadly legal, official data may also be incomplete and data collection systems of poor quality. As a result, there is need for better measurement and data collection in a wide variety of contexts, ranging from countries where abortion is broadly legal, to those where abortion is permitted only under narrow criteria.

Topics of interest to this seminar

This area of abortion research is high priority and is at a stage where it would benefit greatly from scientific exchange. The seminar will provide an opportunity to present new work on the incidence and safety of abortion, including empirical findings and results from testing different approaches for measuring incidence and safety. The objective of this seminar is to share empirical evidence and new research approaches, in order to stimulate and advance research on the measurement of abortion incidence and safety. This seminar will include papers on countries with a range of abortion law contexts, as well as variable levels of stigma and quality of health systems data.

This seminar will cover the following topics:

- Advances and innovations in indirect techniques for measuring abortion incidence, and results from application of such methodologies;
- Estimation of abortion incidence for subpopulations (for example, by age) and for sub-national areas (for example by region and state); estimation of abortion incidence and studies of conditions affecting safety for socio-economically vulnerable groups;
- New studies of abortion incidence, including contexts where incidence was not previously documented; studies documenting current levels and trends in abortion incidence and/or safety;
- Assessments of the impact of broadening of abortion laws and policies on the incidence of abortion, and on safety of abortion;
- Assessments of the quality of abortion data in countries that contribute a very large proportion to global abortion incidence, such as China, India, Russia and Vietnam;
- Innovative approaches for improving reporting of abortion in population-based surveys of women, and applications of such approaches; in addition to providing alternative measures of abortion incidence, such approaches have the potential to yield valuable data on the safety of abortion, and on the quality of access to safe abortion services;
- Empirical studies on use of misoprostol for abortion by women themselves in restrictive legal settings—including those that focus on safety of use of this method and those that draw out implications of widespread use for measuring abortion incidence and morbidity.

The seminar will provide an opportunity for researchers to present results from new studies, propose new approaches and methodologies, and assess the advantages and disadvantages of existing methodologies, with the goal of advancing and guiding future work in this area. The seminar will include studies on these topics in a range of legality contexts around the world. Additional aims of the seminar are to increase networking between researchers and to facilitate linkages and coordination across disciplines, countries and research institutions.

Papers may be country-specific or comparative, empirical or methodological. This seminar will bring together demographers, public health specialists, sociologists and anthropologists, as well as scholars from other related disciplines interested in exchanging the latest scientific knowledge on abortion incidence and safety.

Online Submissions:

The IUSSP Scientific Panel on Abortion Research invites researchers **submit online by 15 May 2018** a short 200-word abstract **AND** an extended abstract (2 to 4 pages, including tables) or a full unpublished paper for consideration. To submit an abstract please fill out the online submission form on the IUSSP website: <http://iussp.org/en/iussp-seminar-submissions>.

Abstracts and papers may be submitted in English, French or Spanish. However, the working language of the meeting is English, and presentations must be made in English.

The seminar will be limited to about 20 contributed papers.

Submission should be made by the author who will attend the seminar. If the paper is co-authored, please include the names of your co-authors in your submission form (in the appropriate order).

Applicants will be informed whether paper is accepted by 15 June 2018.
Participants must submit their complete paper by 31 October 2018.

In addition to dissemination through posting on the member-restricted portion of the IUSSP website, seminar organizers will explore possibilities for publishing the papers as an edited volume or a special issue of a journal. Papers submitted should be unpublished and, as for a journal or an edited book, authors, by submitting a paper, agree they will not propose it for publication to another editor until the committee makes a decision with regard to their possible publication.

Current funding for the seminar is limited and efforts are under way to raise additional funds but the outcome is at this point uncertain. Participants are therefore encouraged to seek their own funding to cover the cost of their participation in the seminar. If available, funding will be restricted to IUSSP members in good standing and will be contingent upon submission of a complete paper of acceptable quality by the deadline for papers.

For further information please contact Susheela Singh (ssingh@guttmacher.org).

IUSSP Scientific Panel on Abortion Research:

Chair: Susheela Singh (*Guttmacher Institute, United States*).

Members: Harriet Birungi (*Population Council- Nairobi, Kenya*); Ndola Prata (*School of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley, United States*) and Sabina Faiz Rashid (*James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, Bangladesh*).