

Unsafe Abortion: A Forgotten Emergency

What is unsafe abortion?

Unsafe abortion is a termination of pregnancy:

- by persons lacking the necessary skills
- in an environment that does not conform to minimal medical standards

Examples include ingesting toxic substances, using traditional herbs, and inserting foreign objects into the body.

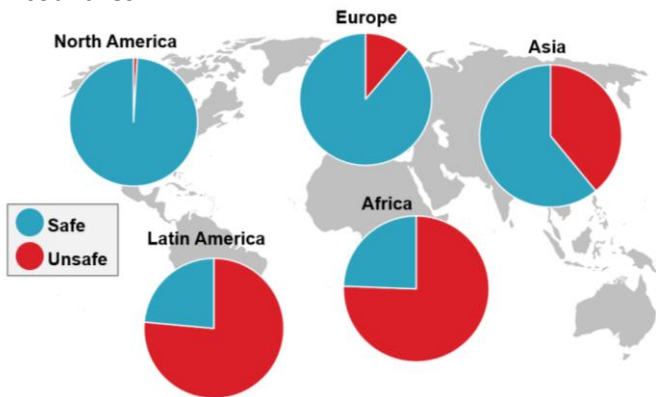
What are the complications of unsafe abortion?

Unsafe abortion is **one of the main causes of maternal mortality**. In some contexts, up to 30% of maternal deaths are due to unsafe abortion.

Unsafe abortion can also lead to **life-threatening complications** and **lasting consequences** such as heavy bleeding, infection, infertility, and injury to the genital tract and internal organs.

Where does unsafe abortion happen?

97% of unsafe abortions occur in developing countries.



What is the global impact?

Around 25 million unsafe abortions take place every year. This is almost

50 unsafe abortions per minute.

Every year unsafe abortion leads to



At least
22 800 deaths

7 million hospitalizations

Who has abortions?

Women around the world of all ages, religions, nationalities, and social classes have abortions.

1 in 4 pregnancies end in induced abortion.

Who is at risk?

Any woman with an unwanted pregnancy who cannot access safe abortion care is at risk of unsafe abortion.

Barriers to safe abortion include restrictive laws, poor availability of services, high cost, stigma, and unnecessary requirements.

Women living in low-income countries and poor women are more likely to have an unsafe abortion.

In Africa and Latin America, 3 out of 4 abortions are unsafe.

Safe Abortion Care

What is safe abortion care?

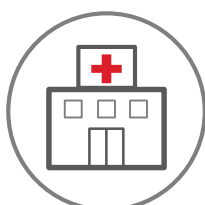
Abortions are safe if the person providing or supporting the abortion is **trained** and they are done by **1 of 2 methods** recommended by the World Health Organization:

Abortion Pills



Outpatient Procedure

e.g. Manual Vacuum Aspiration



How do abortion pills work?

There are two medications involved in safe abortion care: **mifepristone** and **misoprostol**. These two medications work together to induce a miscarriage and can be taken at home or in a health care facility.

How safe are abortion pills?

- Abortion pills are over 95% effective.
- The risk of severe complication from a safe abortion with pills is less than 1%.
- Abortion pills are
 - ✓ safer than an injection of penicillin
 - ✓ safer than a tooth extraction

Every safe abortion provided is an unsafe abortion prevented.

Every day, in maternity wards and emergency rooms around the world, MSF teams witness first-hand the complications from unsafe abortion. In 2018, MSF teams provided over **24 400 patients with post abortion care** (treatment for complications related to abortion).

What is MSF's aim?

As a medical humanitarian organization, MSF aims to reduce mortality, prevent morbidity, and alleviate suffering. Therefore MSF is committed to addressing all the main causes of maternal death and suffering – including unsafe abortion.

What is MSF's approach?

In order to reduce maternal death and suffering from unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion, MSF provides a comprehensive package of health care that includes:



In 2018, MSF provided:

338 543 consultations for contraception
and
11 015 safe abortions.



Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), or Doctors Without Borders, is an international medical humanitarian organization.

For over 45 years, MSF has provided medical and humanitarian assistance to populations in distress, to victims of natural or man-made disasters, and to victims of armed conflict. They do so irrespective of race, religion, creed, or political convictions. MSF observes neutrality and impartiality in the name of universal medical ethics and the right to humanitarian assistance and claims full and unhindered freedom in the exercise of its functions. MSF teams deliver emergency medical aid in over 70 countries around the world.



In 2017 MSF passed a resolution stating:

*Safe abortion care, including termination of pregnancy, is part of MSF medical care and aimed to reduce the mortality and suffering resulting from unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion.
MSF should ensure that MSF staff do not deny termination of pregnancy to women and girls who request it.*



safe abortion care
is health care

**For more information,
go to safeabortioncare.msf.org or email safe-abortion-care@msf.org**