

More than Words: The Role of Communications in Safe Abortion Care

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Global Health Strategies

US | India | Brazil | China | Kenya | South Africa | UK

Who we are

Global Health Strategies is a communications and advocacy consultancy. We work to:

Raise awareness of global health and development challenges

Build consensus around innovative solutions

Promote leadership and action



Abortion is common, inevitable and a health issue

- **Abortion is common**

- Globally, 25% of all pregnancies end in abortion

- **Restricting access to legal care does not prevent abortions**

- Abortion rates are similar in countries where abortion is legal and illegal

- **Abortion is a global health issue**

- There are ~25 million unsafe abortions a year; 8-11% of maternal mortality
- 97% of unsafe abortions occur in developing countries



Media shapes how we think and act

- Despite the facts, abortion remains stigmatized, controversial and siloed
- Lack of attention is not the issue
- The portrayal of abortion in the media impacts cultural, personal and political beliefs



What we did

- Analyzed how the media was covering the issue, and what needs to change
- Focused on top-tier media in Brazil, India, South Africa and globally from October 2016–March 2017
- Built on existing research on inaccuracies and stigmatizing language in reporting; looked specifically at news hooks, theses, spokespeople and bylines




What's wrong with this picture?

← → ↻ 🔒 Quartz Media LLC [US] | <https://qz.com/1153722/lancet-only-22-of-abortions-in-india-occur-at-healthcare-facilities/> 🔍 ☆ 🌐 📌 📺 📧

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NEW NORMAL

A health journal estimates India underreported almost 15 million abortions in a year



Language can reinforce stigma

- **Mother vs. woman**

[The Atlantic](#): “...they might declare that the procedure should be banned... unless the mother's health is threatened”

- **Baby vs. embryo/fetus**

[Newsweek](#): “Anti-Abortion Representative Wants His Mistress to Abort Their Baby”

- **Dangerous/harmful despite the evidence**



Skewed framing and limited voices tell a partial story

- **Framing:** Abortion covered as a political issue, not a health issue
- **Spokespeople:** Prevalence of (male) voices; very few first person accounts from women and providers
- **Champions:** Small circle of voices championing safe, legal abortion



We believe you can change the narrative

- Build a corps of interested, educated journalists
 - Cultivate journalist/editor relationships, develop trainings and guides
- Pitch/write pieces that broaden the frame
 - Highlight public health impact, create alternative hooks, drive on-going attention
- Elevate new voices
 - Involve women, providers, activists (including from other issue areas)
- Utilize social and other forms of media
 - Reach broader audiences, including outside of the news cycle



Questions? Comments?

Thank you