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

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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?
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
  o Cultivate journalist/editor relationships, develop trainings and guides

• Pitch/write pieces that broaden the frame
  o Highlight public health impact, create alternative hooks, drive on-going attention

• Elevate new voices
  o Involve women, providers, activists (including from other issue areas)

• Utilize social and other forms of media
  o Reach broader audiences, including outside of the news cycle
Questions? Comments?
Thank you