Let's Talk About Abortion: Using Communications to Increase Access to Safe and Legal Care

Alexandra Kendall, Vice President

Global Health Strategies
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
  o Globally, 25% of all pregnancies end in abortion

• Restricting access to legal care does not prevent abortions
  o Abortion rates are similar in countries where abortion is legal and illegal

• Abortion is a global health issue
  o There are ~25 million unsafe abortions a year; 8-11% of maternal mortality
  o 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
Our approach

• Analyze how the media is covering the issue, and what needs to change – hooks, spokespeople, bylines

• Believe that there are always important stories not being told

• Equip journalists and editors to cover the issue in new ways
What’s wrong with this picture?

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

• Coverage can drive inaccurate understanding of public opinion
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)

• Work with media to get critical information out

• Utilize social and other forms of media
Questions? Comments?
Thank you