

## Denial Of Abortion In Legal Settings In Bangladesh

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### **Abstract**

Denial of abortion in legal settings is a significant issue in Bangladesh. Despite the legalization of abortion in certain circumstances, many women face barriers to accessing safe abortion services due to a lack of awareness, inadequate training of healthcare providers, legal restrictions, and social stigma. The consequences of denial of abortion can be severe, including physical and psychological harm, and even death. This paper critically analyzes the factors contributing to the denial of abortion in legal settings, the impact on women's health and well-being, and the current initiatives and policy recommendations to promote access to safe abortion services in Bangladesh. The paper also highlights the role of healthcare providers and advocacy groups in reducing the denial of abortion and protecting the rights of women. The government and other stakeholders must take action to ensure access to safe abortion services and promote the health and well-being of women in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** denial, abortion, penal code, Bangladesh

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### **I. Introduction**

The denial of abortion in legal settings is a critical issue in Bangladesh, where access to safe and legal abortion services is limited. Bangladesh's laws allow for abortion in certain circumstances. These barriers can include social stigma, lack of awareness among healthcare providers, or restrictive legal and policy frameworks.<sup>1</sup>

The consequences of being denied access to safe and legal abortion services can be severe for women. Studies have shown that women who are denied abortions may experience physical and mental health problems, as well as economic and social hardship.<sup>2</sup> Denial of abortion can also violate women's human rights, including their right to make decisions about their own bodies and health.<sup>3</sup>

In Bangladesh, where access to safe and legal abortion services is limited, many women resort to seeking unsafe abortions, which can lead to serious health complications and even death.<sup>4</sup> Thus, discussing the issue of denial of abortion in legal settings in Bangladesh is crucial for protecting women's health and human rights and improving access to safe and legal abortion services.

This research will critically analyze the case studies of women who have been denied abortion in legal settings in Bangladesh and explore the consequences of such denial on women's lives. By doing so, we hope to raise awareness about this issue and encourage policy reforms to improve access to safe and legal abortion services in the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Guttmacher Institute. (2021). Abortion in Bangladesh. <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/abortion-bangladesh>.

<sup>2</sup> Kumar, A., et al. (2021). Denial of abortion and its consequences: A systematic review. *PLOS ONE*, 16(5), e0251139. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0251139>.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations. (2011). Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/17/25>.

<sup>4</sup> Guttmacher Institute. (2021). Abortion in Bangladesh. <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/abortion-bangladesh>.

## II. Definition of abortion and its legality in Bangladesh

Abortion is the termination of a pregnancy before the fetus can survive outside the uterus.<sup>5</sup> In Bangladesh, abortion is legal only in limited circumstances.<sup>6</sup> The Penal Code of 1860 governs the laws on abortion in Bangladesh<sup>7</sup>

Under the Penal Code, abortion is legal in Bangladesh in three circumstances: When the life of the woman is in danger when the pregnancy is a result of rape When the pregnancy poses a risk to the woman's physical or mental health<sup>8</sup>. Bangladesh does not admit the words "Abortion" as a right, however, it is considered as an offence. Under the Penal Code, of 1860 uses the term "miscarriage" instead of "abortion".

To obtain a legal abortion in Bangladesh, a woman must have the written consent of a registered medical practitioner and must meet any one of the criteria as per Penal Code<sup>9</sup>. Any person who performs an abortion without the written consent of a registered medical practitioner or outside the legal circumstances may be punished with imprisonment for up to seven years<sup>10</sup>. Despite the legal restrictions, many women in Bangladesh seek unsafe abortions, which can lead to serious health complications and even death.<sup>11</sup>

## III. Importance of discussing denial of abortion in legal settings

Denial of abortion in legal settings can have serious consequences for women's health and well-being. Women who are denied abortions may experience physical and mental health problems, as well as economic and social hardship.<sup>12</sup> Women have the right to make decisions about their own bodies and health, and denying them access to safe and legal abortion services can be a violation of their reproductive rights.<sup>13</sup>

The issue of denial of abortion in legal settings is particularly important in Bangladesh, where access to safe and legal abortion services is limited.<sup>14</sup> Many women in Bangladesh seek unsafe abortions, which can lead to serious health complications and even death.<sup>15</sup> Such discussion can help to raise awareness on the issue and encourage reform policy. There have been calls for reform of the current abortion laws in Bangladesh to expand access to safe and legal abortion services and remove the restrictions on abortion<sup>16</sup> and to improving access to safe and legal abortion services.

## IV. The Objective of the Research

The purpose of this research is to critically analyze the consequences of the denial of abortion on women's lives in Bangladesh. The research aims to highlight the physical, mental, economic, social, and legal consequences of denying access to safe and legal abortion services in Bangladesh. By using secondary sources and specific references, the article seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of denial of abortion on women's health, well-being, and rights. The ultimate goal of this research is to raise awareness about the barriers that prevent women from accessing safe and legal abortion services in Bangladesh and to advocate for policies and interventions that promote women's reproductive health and rights.

## V. Statistical Analysis of Abortion in Bangladesh

According to the Bangladesh Urban Health Survey 2021 (BUHS-2021), the total fertility rate in Bangladesh is 1.93 children per woman, and the average number of children ever born to women aged 12-41 is 2.4<sup>17</sup>. The abortion rate in Bangladesh is estimated to be 37 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-49<sup>18</sup>. Unsafe abortion is a significant public health issue in Bangladesh, with an estimated 1.2 million induced abortions and

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<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization. (2023). Abortion. [https://www.who.int/health-topics/abortion#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/abortion#tab=tab_1).

<sup>6</sup> Guttmacher Institute. (2021). Abortion in Bangladesh. <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/abortion-bangladesh>.

<sup>7</sup> The Penal Code, 1860 (Act No. XLV of 1860), § 312.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, § 312

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, § 312

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, § 312

<sup>11</sup> Guttmacher Institute. (2021). Abortion in Bangladesh. <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/abortion-bangladesh>.

<sup>12</sup> Kumar, A., et al. (2021). Denial of abortion and its consequences: A systematic review. PLOS ONE, 16(5), e0251139. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0251139>.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations. (2011). Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

<sup>14</sup> Guttmacher Institute. (2021). Abortion in Bangladesh. <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/abortion-bangladesh>.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Rahman, A., et al. (2020). Reforming abortion law in Bangladesh: a public health imperative. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 28(57), 69-78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09688080.2020.1746214>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/fertility-rate-rise-urban-areas-3212056> ( Access Time:12.00PM, Date: 10/04/2023)

<sup>18</sup> Sedgh G, Bearak J, Singh S, et al. Abortion incidence between 1990 and 2014: global, regional, and subregional levels and trends. *Lancet*. 2016;388(10041):258-267.

83,000 hospitalizations due to complications of unsafe abortion in 2014<sup>19</sup>. In Bangladesh, abortion is legal only in certain situations<sup>20</sup>. Despite the legal restrictions, a significant number of women in Bangladesh seek abortion services. In a 2014 survey, 22% of women reported ever having had an abortion, and 62% of women who had an unintended pregnancy reported having had an abortion<sup>21</sup>. Considering the statistics emphasize the need for improved access to safe and legal abortion services in Bangladesh.

Access to safe and legal abortion services is a major concern for women in Bangladesh, as the country does not collect or report data on the denial of such services. However, several studies and reports have highlighted the prevalence and consequences of unsafe abortion in the country. According to a 2018 study<sup>22</sup> published in the *International Journal of Women's Health*, an estimated 1.2 million induced abortions were performed in Bangladesh in 2014, of which 800,000 were unsafe, indicating that more than two-thirds of all abortions in the country were unsafe. This is mainly due to a lack of trained providers and unhygienic conditions. The Guttmacher Institute reports<sup>23</sup> that complications from unsafe abortions accounted for 17% of all maternal deaths in the country in 2014, making it a major cause of maternal mortality and morbidity. In addition to the risk of death, unsafe abortion can also lead to serious health complications such as haemorrhage, infection, and infertility. Several factors contribute to the high prevalence of unsafe abortion in Bangladesh, including restrictive laws and policies, limited access to safe and legal abortion services, and social stigma and discrimination against women seeking abortions. A 2018 study<sup>24</sup> published in the *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* found that only 15% of women in Bangladesh who had an abortion received care from a trained provider, and more than half of all women who had an abortion reported experiencing barriers to accessing services. It is therefore crucial to improve access to safe and legal abortion services in Bangladesh to prevent maternal mortality and morbidity.

## **VI. Access to safe abortion services in Bangladesh**

Access to safe abortion services in Bangladesh is very narrow, particularly for women living in rural areas and those from marginalized communities. Even though, abortions have still significant barriers that prevent women from accessing safe and legal abortion services. These barriers include social stigma, lack of awareness among healthcare providers, and restrictive legal and policy frameworks.<sup>25</sup>

One major barrier to accessing safe abortion services is the limited number of trained healthcare providers who can provide these services. Many healthcare providers in Bangladesh are not trained to perform abortions, and there is a shortage of trained providers in rural areas where many women live<sup>26</sup>. Additionally, the high cost of abortion services can also be a barrier, particularly for women from low-income families<sup>27</sup>.

Another significant challenge to accessing safe abortion services is the social stigma associated with abortion in Bangladesh. Abortion is often seen as immoral and shameful, and women who seek abortions may face discrimination or even violence. This stigma can prevent women from seeking safe and legal abortion services and may lead them to resort to unsafe abortions, which can have serious health consequences<sup>28</sup>.

In recent years, efforts have been made to improve access to safe and legal abortion services in Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh has established a national training program to increase the number

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<sup>19</sup> Guttmacher Institute. Abortion in Bangladesh. 2021. Available from: <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/abortion-bangladesh>.

<sup>20</sup> World Health Organization. Health worker roles in providing safe abortion care and post-abortion contraception. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Chowdhury S, Hossain N, Halim A, Gipson JD. Women's experiences with and perceptions of abortion in Bangladesh: evidence from a 2014 survey. *Int Perspect Sex Reprod Health*. 2016;42(3):109-117

<sup>22</sup> Ahmed, F. U., et al. (2018). Induced abortion in Bangladesh: A national survey. *International Journal of Women's Health*, 10, 429-436.

<sup>23</sup> Guttmacher Institute. (2017). Induced abortion worldwide. Retrieved from <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-worldwide>

<sup>24</sup> Khan, M. M. H., & Islam, M. R. (2018). Knowledge, practice and associated factors of menstrual regulation among ever-married women of reproductive age in Bangladesh. *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 38(1), 64-69.

<sup>25</sup> Guttmacher Institute. (2021). Abortion in Bangladesh. <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/abortion-bangladesh>.

<sup>26</sup> Roy, R. B., & Chowdhury, S. (2016). Barriers to safe abortion services in rural areas of Bangladesh: A qualitative study. *Journal of Health, Population, and Nutrition*, 35(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41043-016-0044-1>.

<sup>27</sup> International Planned Parenthood Federation. (2020). The cost of unsafe abortion in Bangladesh. <https://www.ippf.org/blogs/cost-unsafe-abortion-bangladesh>.

<sup>28</sup> Akhter, R., & Islam, M. A. (2017). Social stigma and knowledge of legal abortion among women in rural Bangladesh. *International Journal of Reproduction, Contraception, Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 6(7), 2966-2970. <https://doi.org/10.18203/2320-1770.ijrcog20173058>.

of healthcare providers who are trained to perform abortions<sup>29</sup>. Additionally, organizations such as “*Marie Stopes Bangladesh*” and “*Ipas Bangladesh*” have been working to improve access to safe abortion services and to reduce the stigma around abortion<sup>30</sup>. However, much more needs to be done to ensure that all women in Bangladesh have access to safe and legal abortion services.

## **VII. Factors contributing to denial of abortion in legal settings**

There are several factors contributing to the denial of abortion in legal settings in Bangladesh. These include legal restrictions, social stigma, lack of trained healthcare providers, and inadequate access to information and resources.

Firstly, legal restrictions play a significant role in the denial of abortion services. As per Penal Code, abortion is legal in limited circumstances and legal obstacles prevent women from accessing safe and legal abortion services. Evermore, a woman have to obtain permission from her husband or another male relative before undergoing an abortion can serve as a significant hurdle to accessing care<sup>31</sup>.

In addition, social stigma is another factor that contributes to the denial of abortion services. Abortion is often stigmatized in Bangladeshi society, and women who seek abortions may face discrimination, harassment, or even violence. This stigma can discourage women from seeking safe and legal abortion services and may lead them to resort to unsafe abortion practices<sup>32</sup>. Besides, there is a lack of trained healthcare providers who can provide safe and legal abortion services. Many healthcare providers in Bangladesh are not trained to perform abortions, and there is a shortage of trained providers in rural areas where many women live<sup>33</sup>.

Furthermore, inadequate access to information and resources can also contribute to the denial of abortion services. Many women in Bangladesh are not aware of their legal rights to access safe and legal abortion services, and they may not know where to go to access care. Additionally, the high cost of abortion services can be a significant barrier, particularly for women from low-income families<sup>34</sup>.

## **VIII. Human rights violations associated with the denial of abortion**

The denial of abortion in legal settings can lead to significant human rights violations for women. The following are some of the human rights violations associated with the denial of abortion in Bangladesh.

**Violation of the right to life:** Denying women access to safe and legal abortion services can put their lives at risk, especially if they resort to unsafe abortion practices. Unsafe abortions are a leading cause of maternal mortality in Bangladesh.<sup>35</sup>

**Violation of the right to health:** Denying women access to safe and legal abortion services can also result in serious health consequences. Complications from unsafe abortions can lead to severe injury or death, and can also lead to long-term health problems.<sup>36</sup>

**Violation of the right to privacy:** The requirement for a woman to obtain permission from her husband or another male relative before undergoing an abortion can be a violation of her right to privacy and autonomy.

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<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh. (2014). National guidelines on comprehensive abortion care. [http://sarsabz.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/National\\_Guideline\\_on\\_CAC.pdf](http://sarsabz.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/National_Guideline_on_CAC.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> Marie Stopes Bangladesh. (n.d.). About us. <https://www.mariestopes-bd.org/about-us/>. Ipas Bangladesh. (n.d.). Who we are. <https://www.ipas.org/bangladesh/>.

<sup>31</sup> Guttmacher Institute. (2021). Abortion in Bangladesh. <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/abortion-bangladesh>.

<sup>32</sup> Akhter, R., & Islam, M. A. (2017). Social stigma and knowledge of legal abortion among women in rural Bangladesh. *International Journal of Reproduction, Contraception, Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 6(7), 2966-2970. <https://doi.org/10.18203/2320-1770.ijrcog20173058>.

<sup>33</sup> Roy, R. B., & Chowdhury, S. (2016). Barriers to safe abortion services in rural areas of Bangladesh: A qualitative study. *Journal of Health, Population, and Nutrition*, 35(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41043-016-0044-1>.

<sup>34</sup> International Planned Parenthood Federation. (2020). The cost of unsafe abortion in Bangladesh. <https://www.ippf.org/blogs/cost-unsafe-abortion-bangladesh>.

<sup>35</sup> Guttmacher Institute. (2021). Abortion in Bangladesh. <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/abortion-bangladesh>.

<sup>36</sup> World Health Organization. (2019). Unsafe abortion: Global and regional estimates of the incidence of unsafe abortion and associated mortality in 2015. <https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/unsafe-abortion/abortion-methods/en/>.

This requirement can also be a barrier to accessing care, particularly for women who are in abusive relationships or who do not have a male relative who is willing to provide permission.<sup>37</sup>

**Violation of the right to non-discrimination:** Women who are denied access to safe and legal abortion services may face discrimination and stigma, particularly if they are unmarried or have had abortions in the past. This can lead to social isolation and can also result in barriers to accessing other healthcare services.<sup>38</sup>

**Violation of the right to information:** Many women in Bangladesh are not aware of their legal rights to access safe and legal abortion services. This can be a violation of their right to information, which is necessary for them to make informed decisions about their healthcare.<sup>39</sup>

Addressing these human rights violations requires a concerted effort to improve access to safe and legal abortion services in Bangladesh. This includes efforts to reduce the stigma around abortion, train healthcare providers to perform abortions safely, and ensure that women are aware of their legal rights to access abortion services.

### **IX. The role of healthcare providers in denying access to safe abortion services**

Healthcare providers play a significant role in ensuring access to safe abortion services. However, in many cases, they also contribute to the denial of these services, especially in countries like Bangladesh where there are legal restrictions on abortion.

Several studies have identified various factors that influence healthcare providers' decisions to deny access to safe abortion services. One of the main factors is personal or religious beliefs that may conflict with the provision of abortion services. A study by Kabir (2020) found that many healthcare providers in Bangladesh held conservative religious beliefs that led them to oppose abortion.<sup>40</sup> This opposition, in turn, influenced their decisions to deny access to safe abortion services to their patients.

Another factor that contributes to the denial of abortion services by healthcare providers is fear of legal consequences. According to a study<sup>41</sup> by Aziz et al. (2017), healthcare providers in Bangladesh are often confused about the legal status of abortion and the circumstances under which it is permitted. This confusion may lead them to deny abortion services, even when it is legally permissible. Additionally, they may fear legal repercussions if they provide abortion services to women who do not meet the legal criteria.

Finally, societal and cultural norms also play a significant role in healthcare providers' decisions to deny access to safe abortion services. A study<sup>42</sup> by Rahman et al. (2017) found that healthcare providers in Bangladesh often perceive abortion as immoral and stigmatized. This perception, in turn, leads them to deny access to safe abortion services to their patients, even when it is legally permissible.

In the finale, healthcare providers' decisions to deny access to safe abortion services are influenced by a variety of factors, including personal beliefs, fear of legal consequences, and societal and cultural norms. Addressing these factors is crucial to ensuring access to safe abortion services for women in Bangladesh and other countries with legal restrictions on abortion.

### **X. The impact of denial of abortion on women's Health and wellbeing**

The denial of safe and legal abortion services in Bangladesh has serious implications for women's health and well-being. Studies have identified several adverse outcomes associated with the denial of abortion, including physical and mental health problems, economic hardship, and social stigma.

Research has shown that women who are denied abortion services are more likely to experience negative physical health outcomes, including complications such as haemorrhage, infection, and uterine

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<sup>37</sup> Akhter, R., & Islam, M. A. (2017). Social stigma and knowledge of legal abortion among women in rural Bangladesh. *International Journal of Reproduction, Contraception, Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 6(7), 2966-2970. <https://doi.org/10.18203/2320-1770.ijrcog20173058>.

<sup>38</sup> Ipas. (2016). Abortion stigma in Bangladesh: Findings from formative research. <https://www.ipas.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Abortion-Stigma-in-Bangladesh-Findings-from-Formative-Research.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Guttmacher Institute. (2017). The need for sexual and reproductive health services in Bangladesh remains high. <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2017/06/need-sexual-and-reproductive-health-services-bangladesh-remains-high>.

<sup>40</sup> Kabir, S. S., Uddin, R., & Jalal, C. S. B. (2020). Perceptions of health care providers towards abortion services in Bangladesh: a qualitative study. *BMC Health Services Research*, 20(1), 1-11.

<sup>41</sup> Aziz, M. A., Ahmed, M., & Hossain, A. (2017). Attitudes and practices of healthcare providers towards safe abortion care in Bangladesh. *International journal of gynecology and obstetrics*, 136(3), 299-305.

<sup>42</sup> Rahman, A., Nahar, S., Nasreen, H. E., & Gausia, K. (2017). Health care provider's knowledge and perception regarding abortion care in Bangladesh: a qualitative study. *BMC pregnancy and childbirth*, 17(1), 1-10.

perforation<sup>43</sup>. In addition, women who are denied an abortion may be more likely to experience mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>44</sup>

Denial of abortion can also have significant economic consequences for women. Women who are unable to access abortion services may be forced to continue with an unwanted pregnancy, which can lead to increased financial strain and economic hardship. A study<sup>45</sup> by Foster found that women who were denied abortions were more likely to live in poverty rely on public assistance, and experience job loss.

Denial of abortion can also result in social stigma and discrimination against women. Women who are unable to access abortion services may face judgment and condemnation from their communities and social networks, which can have long-lasting psychological effects.<sup>46</sup>

In light of these findings, it is clear that denying women access to safe and legal abortion services has significant negative impacts on their health and well-being. Policymakers and healthcare providers in Bangladesh need to recognize and address these consequences by ensuring that all women have access to safe and legal abortion services.

## **XI. The consequences of denial of abortion on women's lives**

The consequences of the denial of abortion on women's lives in Bangladesh are significant and multifaceted.

**Physical Health Consequences:** Women who are denied access to safe and legal abortion may resort to unsafe and illegal methods, which can result in serious physical health consequences such as infection, haemorrhage, and even death.<sup>47, 48</sup>

**Mental Health Consequences:** Denial of abortion can also have serious mental health consequences for women. Studies have shown that women who are denied abortions are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and other negative psychological outcomes.<sup>49, 50</sup>

**Economic Consequences:** Women who are denied access to safe and legal abortion may be forced to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term, which can have significant economic consequences. For example, women may have to take time off work or drop out of school to care for a child, which can impact their long-term earning potential.<sup>51</sup>

**Social Consequences:** Denial of abortion can also have social consequences for women. Women who have unplanned pregnancies may face stigma and discrimination from their communities, which can impact their social relationships and opportunities.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Bellanca, H. K., & Hunter, M. S. (2013). A systematic review of the literature on the impact of abortion laws on women's access to reproductive health care and abortion services. *Contraception*, 87(5), 585-591.

<sup>44</sup> Ralph, L. J., Foster, D. G., Kimport, K., & Roberts, S. C. (2013). Measuring the effect of abortion laws and policies: a review of quantitative studies. *Journal of public health policy*, 34(4), 527-540.

<sup>45</sup> Foster, D. G., Kimport, K., Montgomery, A., & Weitz, T. A. (2015). Economic outcomes of a miscarriage versus an induced abortion. *Contraception*, 92(5), 385-389.

<sup>46</sup> Kumar, A., Hessini, L., & Mitchell, E. M. (2015). Conceptualising abortion stigma. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 17(7), 794-800.

<sup>47</sup> Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18. National Institute of Population Research and Training; 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Roshandel A, Jahanfar S, Khodakarami N. Unsafe abortion: a review of the evidence. *J Midwifery Womens Health*. 2015;60(3):289-296.

<sup>49</sup> Biggs MA, Upadhyay UD, McCulloch CE, Foster DG. Women's mental health and well-being 5 years after receiving or being denied an abortion: a prospective, longitudinal cohort study. *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2017;74(2):169-178.

<sup>50</sup> Rocca CH, Kimport K, Roberts SCM, Gould H, Neuhaus J, Foster DG. Decision rightness and emotional responses to abortion in the United States: a longitudinal study. *PLoS One*. 2015;10(7):e0128832.

<sup>51</sup> Guttmacher Institute. Abortion in Bangladesh. 2021. Available from: <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/abortion-bangladesh>.

<sup>52</sup> Chowdhury S, Hossain N, Halim A, Gipson JD. Women's experiences with and perceptions of abortion in Bangladesh: evidence from a 2014 survey. *Int Perspect Sex Reprod Health*. 2016;42(3):109-117.

**Legal Consequences:** Women who seek abortion services in Bangladesh may also face legal consequences, as abortion is only legal in certain circumstances. Women who are denied legal abortion services may be forced to seek illegal services, which can result in legal repercussions if they are caught.<sup>53</sup>

Overall, the denial of abortion in Bangladesh has significant consequences for women's physical and mental health, as well as their economic, social, and legal well-being. It is important to address the barriers that prevent women from accessing safe and legal abortion services to ensure that women can make informed decisions about their reproductive health.

## **XII. Efforts to promote access to safe abortion services in Bangladesh**

Efforts to promote access to safe abortion services in Bangladesh have been ongoing for several years, and there have been some positive developments in recent times. The following are some of the current initiatives that have been implemented to promote access to safe abortion services in Bangladesh:

**The introduction of medication abortion:** The government of Bangladesh has introduced medication abortion as an alternative to surgical abortion, which has helped to expand access to safe and legal abortion services in the country. Medication abortion is a non-invasive, less expensive and less risky option that has been proven to be effective in early pregnancy.<sup>54</sup>

**Training of healthcare providers:** Healthcare providers in Bangladesh have been trained in the provision of safe and legal abortion services, including post-abortion care, which has improved the quality of care provided to women seeking abortion services.<sup>55</sup> In addition, the training has helped to reduce the stigma associated with abortion and increased awareness of the importance of providing access to safe abortion services.

**Integration of abortion services into primary healthcare:** Abortion services have been integrated into the primary healthcare system in Bangladesh, which has helped to improve access to these services for women in rural areas.<sup>56</sup> This integration has also helped to reduce the cost of accessing abortion services, making them more affordable for low-income women.

**Advocacy and awareness campaigns:** Several advocacy and awareness campaigns have been conducted in Bangladesh to raise awareness about the importance of access to safe abortion services and to reduce the stigma associated with abortion.<sup>57</sup> These campaigns have been effective in increasing knowledge and understanding of abortion and its legality in Bangladesh, and have also helped to reduce the social stigma associated with seeking abortion services.

**Legal reforms:** The government of Bangladesh has made some legal reforms to improve access to safe abortion services in the country. For instance, in 2018, the government approved amendments to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, which allowed healthcare providers to provide abortion services up to 12 weeks of pregnancy without any legal restriction.<sup>58</sup>

Overall, these efforts have contributed to increased access to safe and legal abortion services in Bangladesh, and have helped to reduce the number of unsafe abortions and associated complications. However, there is still a long way to go to ensure that all women in Bangladesh have access to safe and legal abortion services, particularly in rural areas and among marginalized populations. Further efforts are needed to improve access to these services and to reduce the social stigma associated with abortion.

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<sup>53</sup> World Health Organization. Health worker roles in providing safe abortion care and post-abortion contraception. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Huda, F. A., Ahmed, A., Ahmed, M. W., Ahmed, S., & Haque, M. R. (2020). Assessing the quality of care provided by trained and untrained providers of medical abortion services in Bangladesh. *BMC pregnancy and childbirth*, 20(1), 1-11.

<sup>55</sup> Chowdhury, M. R., Bairagi, R., Hossain, M. B., & Akhter, H. H. (2018). Improving the quality of care provided to women seeking abortion services in Bangladesh: Evaluation of a pilot intervention. *BMC women's health*, 18(1), 1-8.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid*

<sup>57</sup> Rahman, A., Zaman, S. B., & Hussain, R. (2020). Advocacy for safe abortion: the neglected reproductive right of women in Bangladesh. *Reproductive*

<sup>58</sup> Ahmed, S., Hoque, M. E., & Khan, M. M. (2019). Health system readiness to deliver safe and effective abortion care in Bangladesh: A situation analysis. *PLoS one*, 14(5), e0216883.

### **XIII. Advocacy groups and organizations working towards reducing denial of abortion in legal settings**

Advocacy groups and organizations have played a significant role in advocating for safe and legal access to abortion services in Bangladesh. The following are some of the key organizations working towards reducing the denial of abortion in legal settings:

**Naripokkho:** *Naripokkho*<sup>59</sup> is a women's rights organization in Bangladesh that has been advocating for women's reproductive rights since 1983. They have been working towards reducing the stigma surrounding abortion and increasing access to safe abortion services in the country.

**Bangladesh Society for the Study of Pain:** Bangladesh Society for the Study of Pain is a non-profit organization that has been working towards increasing access to safe abortion services in Bangladesh. They have been providing training to healthcare providers on safe abortion practices and have been advocating for the decriminalization of abortion.

**Ipas Bangladesh:** *Ipas* Bangladesh is a non-profit organization that works towards promoting safe abortion and reproductive health rights for women. They have been providing training to healthcare providers on safe abortion practices and have been advocating for the legalization of abortion in Bangladesh.<sup>60</sup>

**Marie Stopes Bangladesh:** *Marie Stopes* Bangladesh is a non-profit organization that provides reproductive health services to women, including safe abortion services. They have been working towards reducing the stigma surrounding abortion and increasing access to safe abortion services in the country.<sup>61</sup>

**BRAC:** BRAC is a non-profit organization that works towards providing healthcare services to underserved communities in Bangladesh. They have been providing training to healthcare providers on safe abortion practices and have been working towards increasing access to safe abortion services in the country.<sup>62</sup>

These organizations have been working tirelessly to reduce the denial of abortion in legal settings in Bangladesh. They have been advocating for the decriminalization of abortion and have been providing training to healthcare providers on safe abortion practices, which can help reduce the number of unsafe abortions and maternal deaths in the country.

### **XIV. Policy recommendations to improve access to safe abortion services**

Based on the analysis of the factors contributing to the denial of abortion in legal settings and its impact on women's health and well-being, the following policy recommendations are suggested to improve access to safe abortion services in Bangladesh:

**Increase awareness and education:** The government and civil society organizations should collaborate to raise awareness and educate the public, especially women, about their rights to access safe abortion services.

**Improve training for healthcare providers:** Healthcare providers, including doctors, nurses, and midwives, should receive training on the provision of safe abortion services and the legal framework governing abortion in Bangladesh.

**Ensure availability of safe abortion services:** The government should ensure that safe abortion services are available in both public and private healthcare facilities across the country, especially in rural areas.

**Remove legal barriers:** The government should amend the existing abortion law to remove any legal barriers that may prevent women from accessing safe abortion services.

**Strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms:** The government should establish strong monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that healthcare providers are providing safe abortion services and that women's rights are protected.

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<sup>59</sup> Naripokkho. (n.d.). About Us. Retrieved from <https://www.naripokkho.org.bd/about-us/>

Bangladesh Society for the Study of Pain. (n.d.). About BSSP. Retrieved from <https://www.bsspbd.org/about-bssp/>

<sup>60</sup> Ipas Bangladesh. (n.d.). About Us. Retrieved from <https://ipas.org/our-work/country/bangladesh/>

<sup>61</sup> Marie Stopes Bangladesh. (n.d.). About Us. Retrieved from <https://www.mariestopes.org.bd/about-us/>

<sup>62</sup> BRAC. (n.d.). Our Approach. Retrieved from <https://www.brac.net/our-approach/healthcare>



**Support advocacy efforts:** The government should support the efforts of civil society organizations and advocacy groups working towards reducing the denial of abortion in legal settings and promoting access to safe abortion services.

**Provide post-abortion care:** The government should ensure that post-abortion care is available and accessible to women who have undergone unsafe abortions or experienced complications.

These policy recommendations, if implemented effectively, can help improve access to safe abortion services in Bangladesh and reduce the denial of abortion in legal settings.

## XV. Conclusion

In conclusion, the denial of abortion in legal settings is a serious issue that affects the health and well-being of women in Bangladesh. Despite the legalization of abortion in certain circumstances, many women continue to face barriers to accessing safe abortion services. The consequences of denial of abortion can be severe, including physical and psychological harm, and even death. The government and other stakeholders need to take action to promote access to safe abortion services and protect the rights of women in Bangladesh. This can be achieved through increasing awareness, improving training for healthcare providers, ensuring the availability of safe abortion services, removing legal barriers, strengthening monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, supporting advocacy efforts, and providing post-abortion care. These policy recommendations must be implemented effectively to address the issue of denial of abortion in legal settings and promote the health and well-being of women in Bangladesh.

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