

## Despite Being Illegal 1/3 of All Pregnancies End in Abortion in Brazil

Contributed by Irene Lôbo  
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In Brazil, the criminalization of abortion does not reduce the number of instances of abortion and has, moreover, grave public health consequences, such as the high rates of maternal mortality.

This is the opinion of the gynecologist and obstetrician, Jefferson Drezett, coordinator of the Integral Attention Service for Women in Situations of Sexual Violence in São Paulo.

The physician gave a talk, this Sunday, May 29, on the topic "Abortion as a Public Health Problem," during an encounter in Brasília sponsored by the Special Secretariat for Women's Policies.

"The fact that abortion is prohibited winds up leading an enormous contingent of women to seek clandestine abortions, which are mostly performed in precarious conditions and end up causing injuries and having physical consequences for the women," the physician affirms.

Maternal mortality is high in Brazil. Data from the Special Secretariat for Women's Policies indicate that, in 2002, 53.77 maternal deaths were registered for every 100 thousand live births.

The chief causes of these deaths were hypertension (13.3%), hemorrhage (7.6%), puerperal infection in the 42 days after childbirth (3.9%), and abortion (2.7%).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 20 million unsafe abortions occur annually throughout the world.

Around 95% of them are performed in developing countries. The WHO informs that 31% of pregnancies in Brazil end in abortion, around 1.4 million each year.

According to Drezett, the countries that are most liberal in providing access to abortion are the ones where the least number of abortions occur.

Referring to a WHO study, he mentions the example of the Netherlands, where abortion is legal and which has the lowest abortion rates in the world: 0.53 for every 100 women of fertile age.

In Brazil the rate is 3.65 for every 100 women between the ages of 15 and 49.

"Decriminalization does not increase the number of abortions; it may even reduce them, if it is accompanied by other measures that help enable women better to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights," the physician claims.

In Brazil abortion is considered legal under only two circumstances stipulated in Article 128 of the Penal Code: in case of risk to the mother's life or if the pregnancy was the result of rape.

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