

PRATIGYA: CAMPAIGN FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND SAFE ABORTION

Pratigya focuses on finding common ground that simultaneously addresses the serious issue of gender biased sex selection while protecting women's right to safe, legal abortion services in India.

In spite of a liberal Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act 1971, which governs safe abortion services in India, a large number of abortions are still unsafe due to various social, cultural, economic and awareness barriers which impact the availability of abortion care.

The Preconception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act is designed to safeguard the welfare of women in India and prevent gender biased sex-selection. The MTP Act is designed for safeguarding women's reproductive rights with specific reference to safe abortion services. However, in practice, there is significant confusion in the implementation of the Acts, resulting in avoidable barriers on access to safe abortion services. Following the release of the census 2011 data on sex ratio, there has been an increased focus on gender biased sex-selection among various groups including the media. This has compelled governments at the national, state and district level to strictly address this issue that resulted in restraining doctors to provide abortion services, limiting availability of medical abortion drugs etc.

While there is consensus that gender biased sex selection and gender discrimination are serious social issues in India, there is also a need to protect and advance women's need for access to safe abortion services. Concerned about the conflation in implementation of these two Acts impacting adversely on safe abortion access, a group of interested stakeholders met in January 2013 to discuss and evolve a strategy to address this issue which led to genesis of Pratigya : Campaign for Gender Equality and Safe Abortion.¹

In the initial phase, the campaign assembled the working groups that were created mainly to develop guidelines for healthcare professionals, relevant regulatory bodies and media professionals along with situational assessment on abortion conducted in states of Rajasthan and UP.

The formed working groups focused on three core issues as stated:

- Clarifying the MTP and PCPNDT Acts,
- Reviewing the contextual changes post introduction of medical abortion pills,
- Expanding the allies from the Reproductive Health and Rights' space to advocate for the cause.

¹ Achutha Menon Centre, Action Research and Training for Health, Asia Safe Abortion Partnership, Bitiya, Breakthrough, CEHAT, Centre for Health and Social Justice, Centre for Reproductive Rights, Department for International Development – UK Aid, Family Planning Association of India, Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India, Foundation for Reproductive Health Services India (Formerly Marie Stopes India), Gramin Punarnirman Sansthan, Indian Nursing Council, International Centre for Research on Women, Ipas Development Foundation, National Health Systems Resource Centre, Packard Foundation, Parivar Seva Sanstha, Population Council, Population First, Population Foundation of India, Population Services International, R P Education Society, Shikshit Rojgar Kendra Prabandhak Samiti (SRKPS), Society for all Round Development (SARD), UNFPA, CREA

In the current phase, Foundation for Reproductive Health Services India (FRHS India) is managing the secretariat and has been actively involved in advocating with government and stakeholders on safeguarding women's right to safe abortion.

The campaign is largely focusing on following key activities in the current phase:

- **Developing Strategic communication regarding distinction between the MTP and PCPNDT Acts for target audiences (through stakeholders mapping).**
- **Engaging with key Government Officials at the national level and state levels from Maharashtra and Rajasthan, working on Safe Abortion and PCPNDT Acts and Sex Selection Groups to develop a common understanding on the issue**
- **Sensitization of media professionals (journalists, artists, news editors, etc.) on recognizing abortion as women's reproductive health issue**
- **Partnering with other organizations like WHO and other multilateral and bilateral organizations to provide an overarching guidance on abortion care in the country.**

The campaign activities are guided by a group of 6-7 experts i.e. Campaign Advisory Group which meet every quarter to review the progress and discuss ways in which the campaign can highlight the clarification between two Acts. The campaign is strategically focusing on two states i.e. Rajasthan and Maharashtra and is working with our state leads to ensure advocating with state governments on campaign priorities. The campaign communication plan has been developed and shared with partners to align their message with the campaign objectives. Through our advocacy activities, the Campaign envisions to create a platform to promote gender equality, place the issue of sex selection within this paradigm, while at the same time speak up for women's right to access safe abortion.

Pratigya : Campaign for Gender Equality and Safe Abortion

Secretariat, B-37, Gulmohar Park, New Delhi 110049

Ph: 91-11-49840000| Email: secretariat@pratigyacampaign.org

www.pratigyacampaign.org