

Media

Press misunderstandings hinder debate on sexual and reproductive rights in Brazil.

Mistakes at publishing and interpreting data on abortion, contraception and Cytotec cause misinformation

Mistakes and misunderstandings disclosed by the mass media on abortion and other reproductive and sexual rights related issues present a real obstacle to the debates on the theme in Brazil. Official data from social and scientific research and studies on women's reproductive and sexual rights have suffered huge misinterpretation by the media when emergency contraceptive pills, Cytotec and misoprostol issues are on the spot, and a great amount of misguided information is frequently disclosed to the population. The media's lack of accuracy at publishing material on legal and clandestine abortion and on emergency contraceptive methods might definitely hinder not only the advance on debates but also the education of people as well as their access to sexual and reproductive rights as human rights. It is essential to keep a constant and close follow-up of 'press' coverage in order to guarantee a fair approach on the theme and more precise information to disclose.

Mix-up

An article entitled "Legal abortion numbers drop 42% between 2008 and 2009 – Health Ministry imputes the fact to the use of contraceptives." was published at the *Correio Braziliense* newspaper on February, 8th. It poses as an example of the serious lack of preparation and articulation skills presented by most of Brazilian mass media channels at dealing with the subject, be it from its wider angles to more specific aspects. The information in the article leads nowhere presenting a real mix up of Health Ministry numbers on legal abortions and curettages performed by SUS, with the use of contraceptives and Cytotec. Opposite to what was published in the article, there was a drop on the number of curettages performances and of AMIU (abortion related internment) occurrences, and not a drop on legal abortion numbers. According to the technical coordinator of the women's health area at the Health Ministry, Lena Peres, those numbers actually increased. The emergency contraceptive pill is not abortive and is in no aspect related to Cytotec, so to compare them as equivalent methods represents a very gross error.

Emergency contraception and misoprostol

According to the manual directed at health professionals and published by the Health Ministry in 2005 as part of the series "Human Rights and Reproductive Rights", the EC (emergency contraception) effectiveness results from "a joint or separate action of mechanisms that prevent fecundation and always before implantation. There is no scientific evidence that the EC has any post fecundation effects or that it implies in the precocious elimination of the embryo". The manual also says that, "Feminine and masculine gametes do not have contact, therefore there is no fecundation. The diminishing efficiency of the AE as time length increases after sexual relation and the fact that there is no immediate bleeding in cases of pregnancy are simple but clear demonstrations that the EC is able to avoid pregnancy but never to interrupt it." According to the Health Ministry's brochure, "the review on the scientific research allows us to state that, undoubtedly, the AE has no effect after fecundation and does not stop the implantation, and that "false scientific concepts" brought up the assumption that the pill has abortive effects."

On the other hand, Cytotec, forbidden in Brazil, was launched in the market as a treatment for stomach ulcers and ended up getting famous for its abortive usage.

COMISSÃO DE CIDADANIA E REPRODUÇÃO

Nevertheless, the ob/gyn use of misoprostol (active substance in Cytotec) is legal at hospitals registered by SUS and further recommended in the performance of medicament abortions. Restrictions from ANVISA to the use of misoprostol are strongly criticized by the medical community and sexual and reproductive rights movements in Brazil.

Political Approach

The mass media most traditionally dealt with abortion issues as a police matter, but as from approximately ten years the focus has moved to the opposition between abortion supporters and fighters, indicating that discussions and polemics on the subject have gained political weigh in the country. “The media characteristically focuses the matter through the entrenchment of pro and against abortion positions.”, as shows the study “Olhar sobre a Mídia”, 2002, by *CCR – Comissão de Cidadania e Reprodução*.

Almost one decade later and pitifully the mass media isn't able yet to approach the subject under scientific, social, health and human rights prerogatives. Media professionals should definitely interact with sexual and reproductive rights matters more carefully and get acquainted with its vast literature including scientific research, studies, technical terminologies and some jargons. Further yet, a more accurate critical sense and a deeper understanding when dealing with related issues should be developed .More attention and accuracy when interpreting and reproducing information collected from official and parallel sources are essential to avoid general mistakes and misinformation.