Eastern Europe: Turning back the wheel? Dr. Rodica Comendant, Moldova ICMA Coordinator

Objectives:

To present an historical overview of abortion situation in Eastern Europe
 To try to define how the "wheel is turning back" and to analyze the causes
 To present some solutions...



ИЗБАВИШЬСЯ ОТ ЗАЧАТОГО – НЕ ИЗБАВИШЬСЯ ОТ УБИТОГО!

"Abortion – always a murder"

"You may throw away the conceived one, but never - the killed one!"



"Every miscarriage, done by the "povituha" (the illegal provider), or the midwife is harmful and can led to death"



Period of Stalin dictate (1936 - 1955) brought the general violation of human rights, including the sexual and reproductive women rights. In 1936 abortion was criminalized again. During 20 years, until Hruschiov legalized it, thousands of women had died.

USSR: "The ideal" abortion situation

- The first region in the world with legal abortion since 1920 (!), then again in 1956
- The most liberal law: under request up to 12 weeks and on a broad list of social indications up to 28 weeks
- Free of charge abortion services, extensive network of facilities and providers, including in the rural aria
- 3-day paid medical leave after abortion
- Introduction of vacuum aspiration in 1985 (miniabortions) in the ambulatories
- Practice was based ONLY on Ministerial orders
- Good data collection

USSR: was the abortion situation ideal?

"Sex doesn't exist!"

- Any sex education programmes,
- The lack of family planning programmes
- Many myths around contraception, imposed by the pro-nathalist policy, very limited choice of contraceptives
- In result: Abortion has been viewed as the principal mean of fertility regulation for women,
 Extremely high level of abortions (>100 per 1000)
- Any attention paid on the quality of abortion care

Since 1991: How the situation has changed?

- The crash of communist system: the region became open for the evidences, has started to share it's statistics
- Family planning concept has been introduced
- The number of abortion dropped down
- The economic crisis seriously affected the public health systems
- Poverty, migration, epidemic of STDs, including HIV...
- Declining birth rates, demographic crisis

BIRTH RATE, MORTALITY AND POPULATION GROWTH IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION (per 1000 people)



STATISTICS. PROBLEMS. PERSPECTIVES

Since 1991: How the situation has changed?

- Access to abortion services has been reduced dramatically:
- Abortion became a paid service, it's not covered by the insurance in most of the countries
- Clinics in the rural area have been closed down
- Poor women, adolescents suffered the most
- Private institutions started to provide abortion services, often on poor quality and not sharing their statistics
- Abortion became a serious source of unofficial income for providers: many abortions go unregistered or registered as spontaneous

General abortion rates (/1000 women) in Eastern Europe

survey estimates ↔ governmental sources



Source: CDC and ORC Macro, 2003, Reproductive, Maternal and Child Health in Eastern Europe and Eurasia: A Comparative Report

Abortion rate according to world region Abortion/ 1000 women 15-44 years



Source: Sedgh et al. The Lancet, 370(9595):1338-1345. 2007

How the situation has changed: Abortion laws subjects to change

- Limitation of the indications for 2nd trimester abortion (social from 13 to 4 in Russia and further limitation of medical indications)
- Implementation of WHO criteria of viability from 22 weeks immediately has been reflected in the further limitations of the indications ONLY to 22 weeks (Ukraine, Russia, Moldova), even on malformed fetus
- Lithuania: the discussions in the parliament to introduce live protection from the conception
- Slovakia: growing influence by the church, abuse of conscientious objections : multiple clinics refuse to provide abortion, imposing this right

Since 1991: How the situation has changed: Quality of services

- Low understanding of the concept of CAC, patient centered care, violation of patient's rights
- Abortions are performed in medical settings by qualified professionals, but far from WHO evidence based recommendations (main method: D&C under general anesthesia and chlorine instillation for second trimester abortion)
- The electrical vacuum aspiration equipment is out of order, MVA implementation process is problematis...
- Unsafe abortions rate is high
- Proportion of abortion as a cause of maternal death is high

Mortality from unsafe abortions in different regions of the world



Source: The Allan Guttmacher Institute, 1999

Main causes of maternal deaths, Republic of Moldova, 10 years (1992-2012), source: MoH of Moldova



Medical Abortion: still an "elite" method in Eastern European countries

- Cost is prohibitive;
- Statistics are virtually inexistent;
- Lack of technical support and practice guidelines from professional groups
- Low knowledge of the method: misuse, low efficacy...
- Lack of providers motivation to use a new method
- A very low use ~ 1% (Ukraine, 2007)

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Some solutions...

- WHO: Strategic approach in analyzing abortion services: ROMANIA – 2002, MOLDOVA - carried out in 2005, UKRAINE – 2008, The RUSSIAN FEDERATION – started in 2006, pending...
- National RH Strategies: abortion one of the priorities (Moldova, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan
- Gynuity Health Projects: Introductory MA studies(Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaidjan)
- ICMA: Information dissemination, networking: Eastern European Alliance for Reproductive Choice
- www.medicalabortionconsortium.org

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