

DISENTANGLING THE SOCIAL AND LEGAL BARRIERS TO ABORTION ACCESS AMONG YOUNG WOMEN OF CULTURALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Introduction:

Although abortion rates appear to be declining in Australia, there is still a need for accessible abortion services, including for those who may be less well engaged with reproductive health care, such as migrant and refugee young people. Yet the provision of abortion services in New South Wales (NSW) is restricted by existing legal frameworks, with both medical and surgical abortion provided mainly in private clinics, which may further complicate existing social barriers to information and care.

Methods:

Drawing on our complementary areas of expertise as health and social researchers, legal scholars and reproductive health service providers, this presentation will integrate qualitative insights from a study of the views and experiences of 27 Sydney-based migrant and refugee young people (16-24 years old), particularly the data related to unintended pregnancy and abortion, and a legal analysis of the capacity of existing and potential frameworks to better meet their needs.

Results:

Unintended pregnancy was described as a shameful prospect, revealing sexual activity outside of marriage. While abortion was viewed as culturally or religiously unacceptable it was also seen as preferable to continuing a pregnancy; a view some felt family members would share. However, a pervasive culture of silence regarding reproductive health appears to limit access to information and support regarding unintended pregnancy. Most said they would rely on Google over speaking to peers, family members or even the health service they attended most: general practice.

Conclusion:

The current legal framework in NSW provides disincentives for provision of, and access to, safe abortion care across a range of service settings, including those described as most familiar to young people from 'culturally diverse' backgrounds. Greater attention needs to be paid to improving community awareness, including in more marginalised communities, of pregnancy options, availability of emergency contraception, and access to abortion information and services.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

We have no disclosures of interest to declare.