Chapter 2 Summary: Maternal and infant mortality: a global perspective

It is often argued that legalizing abortion is necessary to limit maternal mortality. However, evidence from around the world shows otherwise. A global analysis reveals that countries in which abortion is restricted have, in fact, lower maternal mortality rates (MMRs) than countries in which abortion is legalized. Additionally, countries with high mortality rates from unsafe abortion also have "the least effective and accessible health care services, making complications and deaths from unsafe abortion more likely."¹

Chile has one of the lowest MMRs in the Americas.² Its MMR (defined as number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births) decreased by 70 per cent after abortion was banned.³ In contrast, after legalizing abortion, Guyana's MMR decreased by only 32 per cent.⁴ This trend is confirmed by El Salvador and Nicaragua, which both had significant decreases in MMR after banning abortion.⁵ Egypt and the Ugandan district of Soroti also have restrictive abortion laws and have had a decrease in MMR of 52 per cent and 75 per cent, respectively.⁶ In contrast, South Africa legalized abortion in 1996 and has actually seen a slight increase in its MMR, including an increase in deaths due to

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⁴ Ibid., p. 1615.
abortion, from 114 in 2002-4 to 136 in 2005-7; the country is considered to be making "no progress" in improving maternal health.\(^7\)

Across the globe, factors that are known to decrease MMR include increased education for women, better health care, skilled attendance at birth, emergency obstetric care, primary health care facilities improvement, and long distance transportation to a hospital.\(^9\)

These findings challenge the notion that abortion improves maternal health, and have powerful implications for policies aimed at decreasing maternal mortality.

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