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Violence against Women and Reproductive Rights: Revealing Connections

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What are the connections between freedom from violence and reproductive justice?
Global Advocacy: Securing rights of access & agency

• Criminal law repeal & access to lawful services

• Access to skilled birth attendance & emergency obstetric care

• Access to range of quality contraceptive methods without discrimination
Too little attention to the ways ...

- Restrictive laws subject people to violence
- Health systems are sites of violence
- Violence is a tolerated feature of our social, economic & political lives
Tragedy of Reproductive Violence

- Normalized, even accepted condition of our lives
- As advocates, we work instead to reduce and protect from its harmful consequences
Is this the most we ever hoped for in our reproductive rights agenda?

... to survive violence?
To see reproductive violence in...

Law, Care & Life

To see freedom from violence as intimately bound to reproductive justice

Freedom from Violence as Reproductive Justice
Theme 1: Violence in Law

- Criminalization as a violation of the right to be free from torture & other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment

- Applied to unsafe abortion, but human rights authorities rarely acknowledge the inherent violence of criminalization
Theme 1: Violence in Law

- Reproductive agency as act of conscience
- To compel or constrain acts of conscience is repugnant to human dignity
- BUT gender norms rationalize harm of reproductive violence as no harm at all
- Harm is disappeared into physiology & social roles
Theme 1: Violence in Law

• Make plain the violence criminal laws inflict

• Reproductive rights are not only health rights

• Reproductive rights are civil & political rights

• Reproductive rights are preconditions of full & equal citizenship in open & democratic states
Theme 2: Violence in Care

- Violence against women during labor & delivery

- *Alyne da Silva Pimentel Teixeira v. Brazil* (CEDAW, 2011)
Theme 2: Violence in Care

• **Institutional Violence**: set of norms, hierarchies, & conventions through which violence is rationalized, even normalized

• **Special Rapporteur on Torture**: routine defense of violations on grounds of medical need (& authority) fosters culture of impunity
Theme 2: Violence in Care

- HRs *empower* patients within closed settings to challenge entrenched power through
  - Lived experience
  - Articulations of harm, suffering & injustice
  - Claims of entitlement

- Reproductive justice begins & ends with the justice claims of people themselves
Theme 3: Violence in Life

Caution: In the particularity of experience, we may lose the structural dimension of violence

• Its social, political & economic origins

HRs language of individual empowerment

• Right to decide #, spacing & timing of children
Theme 3: Violence in Life

How do we ensure this right ...

• In relations of economic dependence
• In precarious and informal work conditions
• In conditions of poverty, racism & violence

Otherwise enforces conditions of violence ...

• Relieves state responsibility for conditions
• Prevents collective action to change conditions
Theme 3: Violence in Life

HRs language of obstetric violence

• Reproductive violence within generalized pattern of violence & social inequality

• Links VAW in reproductive health with other realms of everyday life: home, street, school

• Links reproductive justice advocates with larger social justice movements
Way Forward: Advocate For ...

- Health rights of access & agency
- Political rights to full & equal participation
- Economic rights to livelihoods & resources
- Social rights of freedom from violence

Let these be the human rights of our reproductive justice agenda for the future