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Glossary of terms

The following terms are defined specifically in relation to sexual and reproductive rights and health.

A

Abortifacient: A substance that causes pregnancy to end prematurely by inducing an abortion.

Abortion: The induced or spontaneous termination of pregnancy.

Abstinence-only education: An approach to sexuality and reproductive-health education that prohibits discussion of significant health topics, such as contraception, including condoms, measures to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as HIV and HPV, and abortion; or that gives false information, for example, about condoms. This type of education focuses solely or primarily on promoting sexual abstinence as a pregnancy- and STI-prevention method.

Adolescent sexual and reproductive health: The physical and emotional well-being of adolescents (defined as people between the ages of 10 and 19), as it relates to their ability to remain free from unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and all forms of sexual violence and coercion.

Advocacy: The strategic use of information to influence policies that affect people's lives.

AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome): An advanced stage of infection with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) in which the immune system is weakened. The individual becomes more susceptible to a variety of infections (called opportunistic infections) and other conditions, such as cancer. The level of HIV in the body and the appearance of certain infections are used as indicators that HIV infection has progressed to AIDS. Different countries may have different ways of defining the point at which a person is said to have AIDS.

Autonomy: The quality or state of self-determination. The freedom to make health-care decisions for oneself, including choices on alternative treatments, testing and care options, and the decision to refuse treatment.

B

“Beijing” (Fourth World Conference on Women): Informal designation for a United Nations (U.N.) conference held in Beijing, China in 1995 specifically addressing the human rights of women, at which 187 U.N. member states adopted a Declaration and Platform for Action. The Platform recognizes women’s right to control all matters related to their sexuality, including their sexual and reproductive health. It further calls on governments to acknowledge and deal with the public health crisis of unsafe abortion and to consider reviewing laws that would punish women for obtaining illegal abortions. Conferences were held five and 10 years later to mark the anniversaries of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing +5 and Beijing +10).

C

Comprehensive sexuality education: An approach to sexuality and reproductive health education that includes information about abstinence, faithfulness to a partner/reducing the number of sexual partners, LGBTQ relationships, and contraception/condom use to prevent HIV/STIs and unwanted pregnancy, as well as the health benefits and side effects of all contraceptives and barrier methods. These programs also encourage family communication about sexuality between parent and child, and teach young people the skills to make responsible decisions about sexuality.

“Conscience” clauses/ conscientious objection/ refusal clauses: Clauses in policies, laws and regulations that allow health-care providers and/or pharmacists to refuse to provide medically needed treatments or medications/drugs if their indication and use conflict with the provider’s religious or personal beliefs. Immediately following *Roe v. Wade*, refusal clauses were established with respect to abortion and sterilization. These clauses have been extended to cover a broad range of services, such as contraception, emergency contraception (EC) and assisted reproductive technologies. They may now include medical and nonmedical individuals and institutions such as physicians, pharmacists, nurses, hospitals, clinics, universities and insurance companies and are in place across the United States. According to international human rights law, the right to conscientious objection only applies to individuals (not institutions) and individuals may not refuse any medically necessary treatments if this would endanger a person’s life. They are obliged to refer patients/clients to providers who will offer the treatment.

Contraception and contraceptive methods: All methods of contraception or birth control are based on either preventing a man's sperm from reaching and entering a woman's egg (fertilization) or preventing the fertilized egg from implanting in the woman's uterus (her womb) and starting to grow. Birth control methods can be reversible or permanent. Reversible birth control means that the method can be stopped at essentially any time without long-term effects on fertility (the ability to become pregnant). Permanent birth control usually means that the method cannot be undone or reversed, most likely because it involved surgery. Examples of permanent methods include vasectomy for the man or tubal ligation for the woman. Birth control methods can also be classified according to whether they are a barrier method (for example, a condom) that blocks sperm, a mechanical method (for example, an intrauterine device or IUD) or a hormonal method (for example, birth control pills). Natural methods do not rely on devices or hormones, but on observing some aspect of a woman's physiology in order to prevent fertilization.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): Adopted in 1979 by the U.N. General Assembly, CEDAW is often described as an international bill of rights for women. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice and to submit national reports on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations. The United States has still not ratified this convention.

D

Dilatation (or dilation) and curettage (D&C): Also known as sharp curettage, D&C involves dilating the cervix through the use of mechanical dilators or pharmacological agents and using sharp metal curettes to scrape the walls of the uterus, removing its contents. It was once the standard method of uterine evacuation, however, vacuum aspiration and/or medical abortion are now preferred for first-trimester abortion, as mandated by the World Health Organization.

Dilatation (or dilation) and evacuation (D&E): A surgical technique in which the uterus is evacuated (emptied) with suction, curettage and forceps. According to the World Health Organization, this is the safest method of abortion after about 12 completed weeks of pregnancy where skilled, experience providers are available.

E

Economic justice: Economic justice, which touches the individual person as well as the social order, encompasses the moral principles that guide us in designing our economic institutions. These institutions determine how each person earns a living, enters into contracts, exchanges goods and services with others and otherwise produces an independent material foundation for his or her economic sustenance. The ultimate purpose of economic justice is to free each person to engage creatively in the unlimited work beyond economics, that of the mind and the spirit.

Ectopic pregnancy: Pregnancy outside the uterus; a life-threatening condition that can cause massive internal bleeding. An ectopic pregnancy is never viable.

Emergency contraception (EC): Methods of preventing a potential pregnancy after unprotected sexual intercourse. One of the most common methods of emergency contraception is administration of an elevated dose of birth control pills, often called “the morning-after pill,” taken within 120 hours of intercourse. This method is most effective within 72 hours after intercourse, in which time it can reduce the risk of pregnancy from 75 to 89 percent. Another method is insertion of an intrauterine device (IUD) within five to seven days after intercourse. Emergency contraception works by preventing ovulation, fertilization or implantation. It does not affect an established pregnancy, meaning it does not cause an abortion.

Equity: Not the same as equality, it relates in general to ethical judgments about the fairness of income and wealth distribution, costs and benefits distribution, accessibility of health services, exposure to health-threatening hazards and so forth.

F

Family planning: The conscious effort of individuals or couples to plan for and attain their desired number of children and to regulate the spacing and timing of their births. Family planning includes a range of contraception services and treatment of involuntary infertility in order to enhance women’s choices to avoid or induce pregnancy.

Female genital cutting: Female genital cutting (FGC), also known as female genital mutilation (FGM) and referred to as “female circumcision”, comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia

or other injury to the female genital organs for cultural, religious or other non-therapeutic reasons. Most of the girls and women who have undergone FGC live in 28 African countries, although some live in Asia and the Middle East. They are also increasingly found in Europe, Australia, Canada and the U.S., primarily among immigrants from these countries. Currently, the number of girls and women who have undergone FGC is estimated at between 100 and 140 million; in some cases, adult women also undergo re-infibulation (sewing up of the vaginal labia or opening after childbirth). It is estimated that each year, an additional 2 million girls are at risk of undergoing FGC.

Fertility: The ability to conceive and have children or the ability to become pregnant through normal sexual activity. Infertility is defined as the failure to have offspring or to conceive after a year of regular intercourse without contraception if the woman is younger than 35 years.

Fetal homicide laws: Efforts to confer legal personhood on a fetus, usually in regard to a violent offense committed against a pregnant woman. Rather than declaring the assault or murder of a woman an aggravated offense if she is pregnant, thereby punishable by stiffer penalties, fetal homicide laws attempt to establish that a fetus has the same rights as the woman carrying it and do not give pregnant women added protection. Such laws affording personhood to fetuses can also criminalize actions or behaviors of pregnant women that could negatively affect the fetus (e.g., alcohol or other substance use during pregnancy) or undermine a woman's right to terminate a pregnancy. For instance, in states allowing only doctors to perform abortions, women who induce their own miscarriages could face criminal charges under these laws.

Fistula (obstetric): a rupture between the vagina and the bladder and/or rectum, usually caused by prolonged and obstructed labor when a baby's head cannot safely pass through the birth canal (often in the case of pregnancy of a very young woman), unsafe abortion and traditional practices, such as female genital cutting. Obstetric fistula is a common, yet neglected, problem faced by women and girls in low-resource settings, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Women and girls affected by this condition continuously leak urine or feces, which often leads to social ostracism. The World Health Organization estimates that at least 2 million women and girls currently live with this condition and another 50,000 to 100,000 more develop it each year.

G

Gender: The economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female at a particular time.

Global Gag Rule: Also known as the “Mexico City Policy,” a U.S. government policy that disqualifies foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) from receiving family-planning or State Department funding or technical assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) if they provide counseling on abortion, provide safe legal abortion services (except in very narrow circumstances), or participate in political debate surrounding abortion — even if they carry out these activities with their own funds.

H

Health-care provider: An individual or institution that provides medical services (for example, a physician, nurse, midwife, hospital or laboratory).

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus): A type of sexually transmitted retrovirus that can also be transmitted through exposure to infected blood or body fluids, from a mother to her fetus during pregnancy or from mother to child during birth or through breastfeeding. HIV infection causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

I

Incomplete abortion: Retention of a portion of the fetal or placental material within the uterus after spontaneous or induced abortion (retained products of conception).

Induced abortion: An abortion that is brought about intentionally, as opposed to a spontaneous abortion (a miscarriage).

Informed choice: Voluntary decision to accept or not to accept a sexual and reproductive health service after receiving adequate information about the risks, advantages and disadvantages of all available options.

“Informed consent” legislation: “Informed consent” legislation requires women who want to obtain an abortion to receive a state-supplied script of information often followed by a mandatory delay of up to 48 hours before they are legally permitted to undergo the procedure. The scripts provided by states often include offensive, irrelevant or medically inaccurate information with little to no scientific backing, such as information on fetal pain or the supposed link between abortion and breast cancer.

Integrated services: Availability of multiple health services, for example, family planning and STI treatment, through a single facility.

M

Manual vacuum aspiration (MVA): A simple yet effective vacuum aspiration technique. This innovative technology consists of a flexible plastic cannula that is connected to a manual aspiration syringe with a locking valve to perform an endometrial biopsy or a uterine evacuation. MVA is safer and more cost effective than D&C. With the MVA instruments, a qualified health-care provider may perform a wide range of ambulatory surgical procedures using the capabilities already available in the office or treatment room, thus, the patient is not forced to be admitted to a hospital and instead can undergo a safe and effective procedure in a private setting.

Maternal morbidity: Serious disease, disability or physical damage to women caused by pregnancy-related complications. Maternal morbidity is widespread but not accurately reported. The cumulative total of those severely affected by pregnancy-related injuries is estimated at approximately 300 million, or more than one-quarter of the developing world's adult female population.

Maternal mortality: Deaths of women while they are pregnant or within 42 days of the end of a pregnancy (either an abortion or birth) caused by or related to the pregnancy or its management.

Medical (medication) abortion: The use of one or more medications to end pregnancy. These medications terminate the pregnancy, which is then expelled by the uterus in a process similar to miscarriage. Medical abortion is sometimes called by other names, including medication abortion, pharmacological abortion, pharmaceutical abortion and the abortion pill. Medical abortion does not include emergency contraception (EC), also known as the "morning-after pill," which prevents pregnancy from occurring.

Menstrual regulation (MR): Most broadly understood as a method of establishing non-pregnancy for women whose menstrual period is overdue by a maximum of 14 days. In some countries, the term "menstrual regulation" is used interchangeably with "vacuum aspiration;" in some countries, it specifically denotes manual vacuum aspiration; in others, the term commonly means uterine evacuation by any means, but usually by vacuum aspiration, without confirming pregnancy.

Midlevel providers: A range of non-physician health-care providers, midwives, nurse practitioners, clinical officers, physician assistants and others, whose training and responsibilities differ among countries but who are trained in a range of clinical procedures related to reproductive health and who can be trained to provide early abortion.

P

Parental consent/notification: In 2008, 43 states had laws on the books requiring parental consent or notification prior to a minor's abortion. In 2008, 34 states have laws in effect that mandate the involvement of at least one parent in a minor's abortion decision. If a minor wants to avoid this process, she must either travel out of state or obtain approval from a judge, known as a "judicial bypass." This delay can increase both the cost of the abortion, as well as the physical and emotional health risk to the minor.

Partial-Birth Abortion Ban: The Partial-Birth Abortion Ban, or Federal Abortion Band, passed in 2003 and upheld by the Supreme Court in April 2007, is a statute that deals with a method of pregnancy termination usually used in the second trimester, from 18 to 26 weeks, some of which occur before and some of which occur after viability. The law itself contains no reference to gestational age or viability; the present statute is directed only at a method of abortion, rather than at preventing any woman from obtaining an abortion. While there is an exemption if a woman's life is at risk, primarily objections to this statute are because it fails to make any exception when a woman's health is at stake, which violates established constitutional protections that have been in place for 30 years. It uses broad language subject to wildly different interpretations that cover steps doctors routinely take in performing abortions in the second trimester, thus making it impossible for doctors to understand exactly what is prohibited.

Peer-educators/promoters: Young people who have been trained to assist their peers in need of reproductive health information and services. Peer educators receive special training in making decisions, providing client referrals, or providing commodities or services. They usually work with individuals or in small groups.

Policy: Statements, plans, practices and regulations adopted by a government or other organization that are designed to guide or control institutional and community behavior.

Postabortion care (PAC): A package of critical reproductive health services consisting of community and service provider partnerships for prevention of

unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion; mobilization of resources to help women receive appropriate and timely care for abortion complications, and ensuring that health services reflect and meet community expectations and needs; treatment of incomplete and unsafe abortion and complications that are potentially life-threatening; counseling to identify and respond to women's emotional and physical health needs and other concerns; contraceptive and family-planning services to help women prevent an unwanted pregnancy or practice birth spacing; and reproductive and other health services that are preferably provided on-site or via referrals to other facilities in providers' networks and are accessible to women.

Prenatal care: Health care for pregnant women intended to promote their own and their child's well-being. Services include dietary and lifestyle advice, weighing to ensure proper weight gain and examination for pregnancy-related problems, such as edema and preeclampsia (toxemia). In cases where complications are likely, care may be sought from an experienced specialist.

Primary-care provider: A physician or other health-care provider chosen by or assigned to a patient, who both provides primary care and acts as a gatekeeper to control access to other medical services.

Public health: The collective well-being of populations and activities undertaken by that society to assure conditions in which people can be healthy. This includes organized community efforts to prevent, pre-empt and counter threats to the public's health.

R

Rape: Forced or manipulated nonconsensual sexual contact, including vaginal or anal intercourse, oral sex or penetration with an object.

Reproductive health: A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. It implies that people have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this, is the right of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility, which are not against the law, and the right of access to health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth.

Reproductive justice: Reproductive justice is the complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, economic, and social well-being of women and girls, and

will be achieved when women and girls have the economic, social and political power and resources to make healthy decisions about their own bodies, sexuality and reproduction for themselves, their families and their communities in all areas of their lives.

Reproductive rights: Rights that rest on the recognition of the basic right of all individuals and couples to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. Reproductive rights also include the right of all individuals and couples to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence.

Rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health: An approach adopted at International Conference on Population and Development reflecting a new global policy consensus on the connections between population policy and sexual and reproductive health and rights. The approach is to empower women and meet peoples sexual and reproductive health needs, thereby achieving population stabilization through the promotion of choice and opportunity and without employing coercion and control. The rights-based approach is built on existing international human rights agreements and recognizes sexual and reproductive health and rights as important ends in themselves.

S

Safe sex: Sexual activity conducted in such a way as to reduce the risk for transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, including use of condoms. A broader definition might include relations that lower the risk for disease, unintended pregnancy, violence, coercion or abuse of power.

Self-determination: The right to make one's own decisions, particularly as related to reproduction. Includes full respect for the physical integrity of the human body and willingness to accept responsibility for the consequences of sexual behavior. In addition to the right to adequate health care and the ability to determine the number and spacing of one's children, the right to reproductive self-determination involves, among others, the right to marry voluntarily, the right to form a family and the right to freedom from sexual violence and coercion.

Sex: Sex refers to the biological characteristics that define humans as female or male. While these sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive, as there are individuals who possess both, they tend to differentiate humans as males and females. In general use in many languages, the term sex is often used to mean "sexual activity," but for technical purposes in the context

of sexuality and sexual health discussions, the above definition is preferred.

Sexual health: Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences that are free from coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.

Sexual rights: Include the rights of all people to decide freely and responsibly on all aspects of their sexuality, including protecting and promoting their sexual and reproductive health; to be free of discrimination, coercion or violence in their sexual lives and in all sexual decisions; and to expect and demand equality, full consent, mutual respect and shared responsibility in sexual relationships.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs): Medically, an STI is an infection before and after it causes symptoms and becomes a disease. A sexually transmitted disease is an infection that has symptoms. Some examples of STIs are HIV, chlamydia, HPV (human papilloma virus) and herpes.

Skilled birth attendant: A nurse, midwife, doctor or other practitioner with professional training in obstetric care.

Spontaneous abortion: A miscarriage; the unintentional termination of any pregnancy that is not viable (the fetus cannot survive) or in which the fetus is born before the 20th week of pregnancy. Spontaneous abortion occurs in at least 15-20 percent of all recognized pregnancies and usually takes place before the 13th week of pregnancy.

Social justice: Functionally, “justice” is a set of universal principles that guides people in judging what is right and what is wrong, no matter what culture and society they live in. Justice is one of the four “cardinal virtues” of classical moral philosophy, along with courage, temperance (self-control) and prudence (efficiency). (Faith, hope and charity are considered to be the three “religious” virtues.) Virtues or “good habits” help individuals to fully develop their human potentials, thus enabling them to serve their own self-interests, as well as work in harmony with others for their common good. The ultimate purpose of all the virtues is to elevate the dignity and sovereignty of the human person. Social justice is the virtue that guides us in creating those organized human interactions we call institutions. In turn, social institutions, when justly organized, provide us with access to what is good for the person, both individually and in our associations with others. Social justice also imposes on each of us a personal responsibility to work with others to design and continually perfect our institutions as tools for personal and social development.

T

Transgender: Transgender is the state of one's "gender identity" (self-identification as male, female, both or neither) not matching an individual's "assigned gender" (identification by others as male or female based on physical/genetic sex). Transgender does not imply any specific form of sexual orientation — transgender people may identify as queer, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual or asexual. A transgender individual may have characteristics that are normally associated with a particular gender, identify elsewhere on the traditional gender continuum, or exist outside of it as "other," "agender," "intergender" or "third gender." Transgender people may also identify as bigender, or along several places on either the traditional transgender continuum, or the more encompassing continuums, which have been developed in response to the significantly more detailed studies done in recent years.

U

Universal health care: Health care that includes everyone in the proposed area and that is paid for, all or in part, by public funds. Publicly funded medicine can be government administrated and provided, but this is not always the case. Systems exist where publicly funded health care is provided by mainly private entities.

Unsafe abortion: The termination of a pregnancy carried out by someone without the skills or training to perform the procedure safely or in a place that does not meet minimal medical standards, or both.

Unwanted pregnancy: A pregnancy that a pregnant woman or girl decides, of her own free will, is undesired.

V

Vacuum aspiration: A procedure in which a suction tube attached to an electric or manual vacuum pump is inserted through the vagina into the uterus to loosen and remove its contents.

Violence against women: Any gender-based act or conduct that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women. This includes threats of such acts, and all forms of coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty in both the public and private sphere.

Voluntary counseling and testing (VCT): The combination of counseling and testing as both a preventive service and a diagnostic tool for HIV infection.

W

World Health Organization (WHO): The United Nations specialized agency for health, established on April 7, 1948. WHO's objective, as set out in its constitution, is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health, which it defines as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Y

Youth-friendly services: Services that are provided in a manner that recognizes the special information and service needs of young people. These services are developed and provided in a manner acknowledging that the challenges and obstacles facing adolescents are different than those confronted by adults.

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*Protecting women's health
Advancing women's reproductive rights*

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