



COPASAH GLOBAL SYMPOSIUM 2019

Citizenship Governance and Accountability in Health

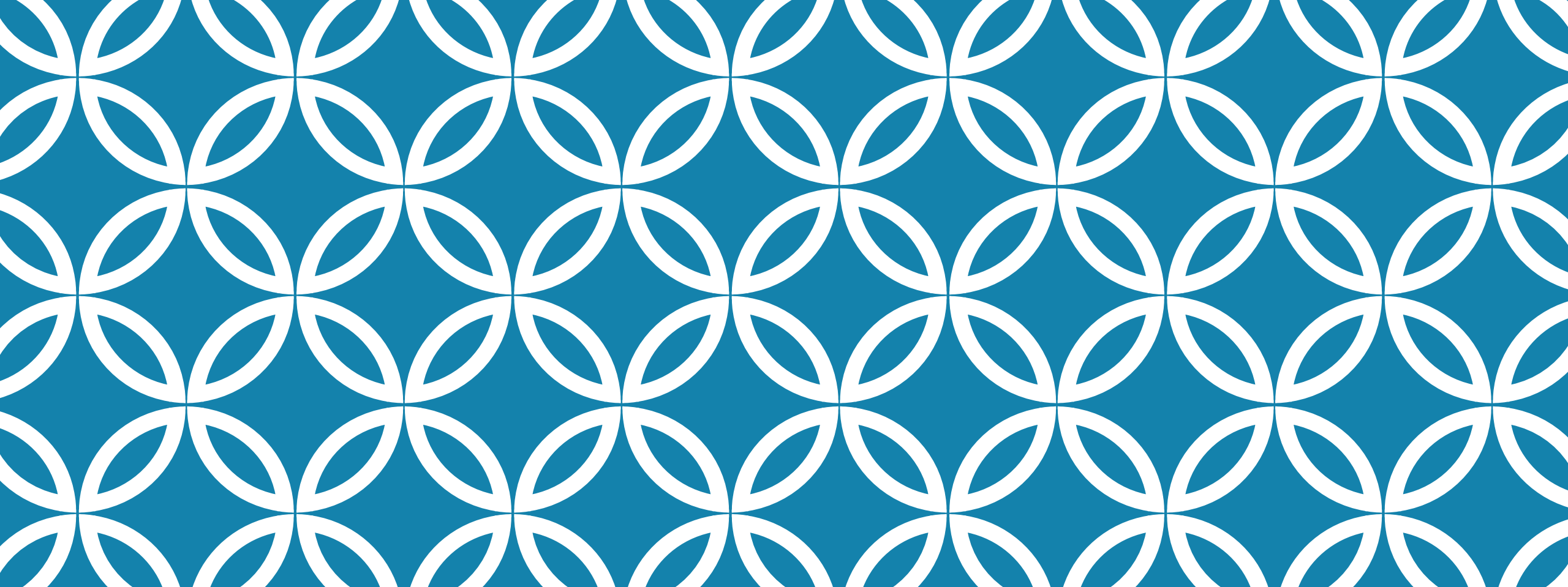
SATELLITE SESSION

**The Right to Safe Abortion: Recognising its Importance, Building
Solidarity and Mobilising for Change**

Organiser: Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW)

**Co-organiser: Naripokkho, Bangladesh; CommonHealth, India; Women's Global Network for
Reproductive Rights, Philippines**

15 OCTOBER 2019



SATELLITE SESSION PRESENTATION

PHILIPPINES

ISSUES

The **restricted legal environment** on access to safe abortion and the **stigma** against abortion has historically driven the issue of safe and legal abortion underground and marginalized abortion in the rights discourse in the Philippines.

As a result, the healthcare system has failed to comprehensively address the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of women. Healthcare providers are constrained by the stigma, normative gender concepts, personal belief systems, ambiguity of the law, and limitations of the healthcare system from adequately providing humane, non-judgmental, and compassionate sexual and reproductive health (SHR) services to women.

ISSUES

Abortion is prevalent in the Philippines, and the stigma and restrictive legal context pushes women to opt for unsafe abortions, leading to maternal morbidity and mortality. Women needing postabortion care are prevented from seeking the life-saving treatment because of fear of being humiliated, abused, and possibly prosecuted.

BASELINE FINDINGS

- There **were limitations in awareness and knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, including abortion and postabortion care.**
- Participants were aware that abortion is a common experience for many Filipino women. A significant percentage of participants even personally know women who had or considered having abortion. However, **they understood abortion mainly as a biomedical issue.**
- Although they agreed that abortion is legally restricted, **they had different perceptions regarding the extent to which it is prohibited, or conversely, legally warranted,** based on certain grounds. Most of the students believed that saving a woman's life was the only exemption allowed by the law.

BASELINE FINDINGS

- While majority of midwifery and nursing students in the survey tended to agree that learning abortion procedures should be included in their training, participants in the FGD expressed **reservations about this due to the fear that knowledge about abortion procedures could lead to its practice.**
- The students' discussions about abortion revealed how **the interplay of religious, moral, socio-cultural, and ethical norms, influence their attitudes towards the issue.** Thus, while they acknowledged abortion as a medical issue, much of their discourse was grounded in their religious and moral beliefs

BASELINE FINDINGS

- The participants appeared to strongly support women's bodily and reproductive autonomy. **The extent to what choices women can make, however, were limited to what was believed was right and ethical based on religious convictions and ideals of womanhood and motherhood.**

ADVOCACY INITIATIVES AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

- A **CEDAW Committee** report in 2015, which was a result of the a Task Force Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Inquiry, called on the Philippine government to respect, protect, and fulfill women's reproductive rights and address the unmet need for contraception by ensuring universal and affordable access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health services, commodities and related information, including access to emergency contraception. The Committee has issued a robust set of recommendations, **which includes urging the Philippines to decriminalize abortion**, and sensitize government representatives towards eliminating ideological barriers that limit women's rights. **The CEDAW recommendation formed the basis for advocacy work on the decriminalization of abortion in the Philippines.**

ADVOCACY INITIATIVES AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

- Department of Health Administrative Order in the Prevention and Management of Post Abortion Complications
 - Reproductive Health Law
 - Magna Carta for Women
 - Other laws, policies, guidelines
- Improving healthcare systems, healthcare education
- Raising community voices



COPASAH GLOBAL SYMPOSIUM 2019

www.copasah.net

<http://copasahglobalsymposium2019.net>

