



International Family Planning

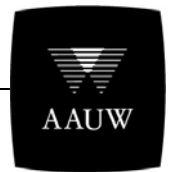
The American Association of University Women supports federal funding for comprehensive international family planning programs, and opposes attempts to restrict their services and funding sources. This position springs directly from AAUW's 2007-2009 Public Policy Program, which "supports international family planning programs that are consistent with AAUW policy."¹ These critical services give millions of women and families around the world access to reproductive health care and the information needed to plan the timing and spacing of pregnancies. Family planning programs help women make informed decisions, which in turn help to reduce the incidence of maternal and infant mortality and improve the overall health of women and families worldwide. International family planning also fosters self-sufficiency, promotes preventative health care, and educates people on ways to protect themselves and their families from the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

Importance of International Family Planning Funding

Women are the primary caretakers and household managers in much of the developing world, and their health and well-being determine how their families fare in life. Enabling women to have the number of children they want, when they want them, is central to the quality of women's lives and the lives of their families. Over the past 30 years, the use of effective contraceptive methods has increased rapidly throughout the developing world. Yet over 200 million women worldwide still do not have access to a range of modern, safe, and effective contraceptive methods to postpone or avoid childbearing.²

- ***Family planning improves women's survival rates.*** Complications of pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for women of reproductive age in developing countries.³ Every year, over 500,000 women—at least one woman every minute of every day—die during pregnancy and childbirth.⁴ Almost 99 percent of these deaths occur in the developing world.⁵ About 74,000 of these women die attempting to terminate an unwanted pregnancy, and thousands more suffer serious complications.⁶ Providing quality family planning and reproductive health services to all who want them in the developing world is one of the most effective strategies for reducing maternal mortality.
- ***Family planning improves child survival rates.*** Access to family planning allows women to time and space births, reducing the incidence of infant mortality and improving overall child health.⁷ Children born within two years of an older sibling are about 2.5 times more likely to die in their first five years as children born at least two years later.⁸ Nearly 11 million children under the age of five die every year, and over 99 percent of them are in the developing world.⁹ Family planning could help to prevent many of these unnecessary deaths.

Because equity is still an issue



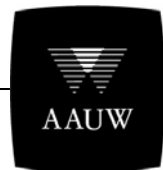
- ***Family planning increases women's educational opportunities and improves their economic options.*** A lack of access to family planning resources, which often results in early and frequent births, can impede a women's ability to access education. This has a domino effect, reducing her employment opportunities and thus her capacity to support herself and her family.¹⁰ Women who begin childbearing before age 20 are less likely to finish school than those who wait even a few years.¹¹ The higher a woman's level of education, the more likely she is to postpone marriage and childbearing.¹²
- ***Family planning services reduce the incidence of abortion.*** The primary cause of abortion is unplanned pregnancy.¹³ Access to family planning counseling and contraception allows women to choose if and when to have children, therefore reducing the number of unintended pregnancies and the need for abortion.¹⁴ Although opponents of international family planning claim that it promotes abortion, family planning funds are not used for abortion. Since 1973, the Helms amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act has prohibited the use of federal funds for abortion services.¹⁵ No federal dollars pay for abortion services either in the United States or abroad.

Threats to International Family Planning

- ***Global gag rule (also known as the Mexico City Policy).*** On Jan. 22, 2001, the 28th anniversary of the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, President George W. Bush issued an executive order reinstating the global gag rule. The global gag rule was originally implemented by the Reagan administration in 1984 at the United Nations International Conference on Population in Mexico City; however, it had been repealed by President Bill Clinton in 1993.¹⁶

This restriction prohibits overseas organizations that receive U.S. international family planning funds from providing abortion services, and from advocating for changes in abortion policy—even with their own private funds. The gag rule also bans free speech, including making public statements, drafting and distributing material, and sponsoring conferences pertaining to abortion law and policy. AAUW opposes the global gag rule because it forces family planning providers to choose between providing a full range of reproductive health information and services or receiving vital U.S. family planning funds.

In September 2003, President Bush issued an executive order expanding the gag rule into all programs—reproductive health or otherwise—that the United States funds, which has meant that even more women worldwide are denied basic health care services and access to family planning.¹⁷ Under the expansion, foreign NGOs that receive U.S. HIV/AIDS funds are not able to provide legal abortion information to women who are at-risk for or have HIV/AIDS, even when such information could be life saving. Additionally, in countries where abortion is illegal, the expansion prevents health care providers from advocating for reform of abortion laws that contribute to high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity.¹⁸ In countries where abortion is legal, the expansion prevents health care providers from providing much needed safe and affordable abortion services. AAUW opposes the expanded Bush gag rule because it forces health care providers to either



accept U.S. funding and withhold information and services that could save women's lives, or refuse critically needed U.S. funds at the risk of endangering their HIV/AIDS programs and other affected services. Bipartisan efforts have been continually made to repeal the global gag rule. In 2007 the House and Senate passed different provisions to lift the Mexico City Policy and to help NGOs affected under this policy, but presidential vetoes have always been threatened, preventing full repeal.

- ***Funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).*** UNFPA helps developing countries improve reproductive health through maternal and child health care, family planning, and other services. These programs also expand women's access to education, health services, and employment. In particular, these programs increase the use of family planning and reduce reliance on abortion. Although Congress funded UNFPA at \$34 million for fiscal year 2002, in February 2002 President Bush froze UNFPA funding. This action was taken at the request of Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ) on unfounded assertions that UNFPA funds were used to support China's coercive one-child policy.

In May 2002, the Bush administration sent members of the U.S. State Department to investigate the claims that UNFPA encouraged forced abortion in China. Even though the U.S. State Department concluded that UNFPA "did not knowingly support coercive abortions," and that the program "improved women's lives" by reducing abortion and unwanted pregnancies through education and birth control,¹⁹ the administration reinterpreted the conclusions and diverted the originally allocated \$34 million from UNFPA into USAID's Child Survival and Health Program Fund. The Bush administration continued to withhold congressionally appropriated UNFPA funding; when FY 2007 funding is included, the UNFPA funding withheld reaches almost \$200 million since 2002.²⁰ The FY2008 passed appropriations bill includes a \$6 million increase in funding for UNFPA, to \$40 million, and a requirement that Bush articulate his reasons for withholding funds.²¹

Conclusion

AAUW believes that comprehensive international family planning programs are vital for women and families around the world. These programs provide women with much needed reproductive health care and information that enable them to plan the timing and spacing of births, therefore reducing the number of unintended pregnancies and increasing the overall health of women and children worldwide. AAUW opposes any attempts to restrict funding for international family planning programs or to place restrictive gag orders on those accepting such funds.

For more information, call 202/785-7793 or e-mail VoterEd@aauw.org.

**AAUW Public Policy and Government Relations Department
January 2008**



- ¹American Association of University Women. (August 2007). *2007-09 AAUW Public Policy Program*. Retrieved December 6, 2007, from http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue_advocacy/upload/2007-09-PPP-brochure.pdf.
- ²Sonfield, Adam. (2006). Working to Eliminate the World's Unmet Need for Contraception. *Guttmacher Policy Review*, 9(1). Retrieved December 20, 2007, from <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/gpr/09/1/gpr090110.html>.
- ³United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (November 2007). *Maternal Mortality*. Retrieved December 20, 2007, from <http://www.childinfo.org/areas/maternalmortality>.
- ⁴United Nations Population Fund (UNPF). (October 2007). *Maternal Mortality Statistics*. Retrieved November 27, 2007, from <http://www.unfpa.org/mothers/statistics.htm>.
- ⁵UNPF. (October 2007). *Maternal Mortality Statistics*. Retrieved November 27, 2007, from <http://www.unfpa.org/mothers/statistics.htm>.
- ⁶UNPF. (2007). *Facts About Safe Motherhood*. Retrieved November 27, 2007, from <http://www.unfpa.org/mothers/facts.htm>.
- ⁷Population Action International (PAI). (May 2006). *Fact Sheet: How Family Planning Protects the Health of Women and Children*. Retrieved December 20, 2007, from http://www.populationaction.org/Publications/Fact_Sheets/FS2/Summary.shtml.
- ⁸PAI. (May 2006). *Fact Sheet: How Family Planning Protects the Health of Women and Children*. Retrieved December 20, 2007, from http://www.populationaction.org/Publications/Fact_Sheets/FS2/Summary.shtml.
- ⁹PAI. (May 2006). *Fact Sheet: How Family Planning Protects the Health of Women and Children*. Retrieved December 20, 2007, from http://www.populationaction.org/Publications/Fact_Sheets/FS2/Summary.shtml.
- ¹⁰UNPF. (2005). *State of the World Population 2005: The Promise of Equality: Gender Equity, Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals*, p. 384. Retrieved December 20, 2007, from http://www.unfpa.org/upload/lib_pub_file/493_filename_en_swp05.pdf.
- ¹¹Upadhyay, Ushma and Bryant Robey. (1999). Offering Women Choices. *Population Information Program, Center for Communications Programs, John Hopkins University School of Public Health*, 27(2). Retrieved December 21, 2007, from <http://www.infoforhealth.org/pr/j49/j49chap5.shtml>.
- ¹²UNPF. (2005). *State of the World Population 2005: The Promise of Equality: Gender Equity, Reproductive Health and the Millennium Development Goals*, p. 384. Retrieved December 20, 2007, from http://www.unfpa.org/upload/lib_pub_file/493_filename_en_swp05.pdf.
- ¹³PAI. (August 2005). *Fact Sheet: Contraceptive Use Helps Reduce the Incidence of Abortion*. Retrieved December 20, 2007, from http://www.populationaction.org/Publications/Fact_Sheets/FS29/Summary.shtml.
- ¹⁴Cohen, Susan. (2006). Toward Making Abortion 'Rare': The Shifting Battleground over the Means to an End. *Guttmacher Policy Review*, 9(1). Retrieved December 20, 2007, from <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/gpr/09/1/gpr090102.html>.
- ¹⁵PAI. (June 1, 2004). *Fact Sheet: How the Global Gag Rule Undermines U.S. Foreign Policy and Harms Women's Health*. Retrieved December 20, 2007, from http://www.populationaction.org/Publications/Fact_Sheets/FS5/Summary.shtml.
- ¹⁶PAI. (June 1, 2004). *Fact Sheet: How the Global Gag Rule Undermines U.S. Foreign Policy and Harms Women's Health*. Retrieved December 20, 2007, from http://www.populationaction.org/Publications/Fact_Sheets/FS5/Summary.shtml.
- ¹⁷Center for Reproductive Rights. (2003). *Breaking the Silence: The Global Gag Rule's Impact on Unsafe Abortion*. Retrieved December 21, 2007, from http://www.reproductiverights.org/pdf/bo_ggr.pdf.
- ¹⁸Center for Reproductive Rights. (2003). *Breaking the Silence: The Global Gag Rule's Impact on Unsafe Abortion*. Retrieved December 21, 2007, from http://www.reproductiverights.org/pdf/bo_ggr.pdf.
- ¹⁹Cohen, Susan. (October 2002). For the Record: Bush Bars UNFPA Funding, Bucking Recommendation of Its Own Investigators. *Guttmacher Report on Public Policy*, 5(4). Retrieved December 21, 2007, from <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/tgr/05/4/gr050413.html>.
- ²⁰Americans for UNFPA. (2007). *Funding Timeline*. Retrieved December 21, 2007, from <http://www.americansforunfpa.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?&pid=216&srcid=213>.
- ²¹Americans for UNFPA. (December 2007). *\$40 Million Passes in House FY 2008 Omnibus*. Retrieved December 21, 2007, from <http://www.americansforunfpa.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?&pid=638&srcid=226>.