

POLICY PAPER

[Integrating post-abortion family planning in China \(INPAC\)](#)

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Around nine million induced abortions are conducted every year in China. This large number of abortions is primarily a result of incorrect, inconsistent or non-use of contraception. One third are repeat abortions. Unsafe and repeat abortions are associated with a high risk of injury, long-term physical and psychological morbidity and a heavy social-economic burden in the long term. Most abortions are performed in hospital settings where post-abortion family planning services are often lacking, and women are usually not referred to family planning clinics for counselling and services. Thus, there is great need for improved post-abortion family planning services in China. Three European partners worked in close collaboration with four Chinese partners to review current policies and develop new ones, focused on integrating post-abortion family planning services into existing abortion services in hospital settings in China.

Integrating post-abortion family planning services

The INPAC project looked at the effect of integrating post-abortion family planning services into existing abortion services in China on the number of unintended pregnancies and repeat abortions. The study included different interventions. In 2013, INPAC conducted a literature review of China's policy and practice of family planning and abortion, and a survey in 300 hospitals across the country. Between 2014 and 2016, INPAC compared three different types of services across 90 hospitals. In a first group, both service providers and users were informed/trained on abortion services, post-abortion counselling was offered, and free contraceptive methods were made available. A second group received exactly the same treatment as the first group, but, in addition, providers received incentives to offer post-abortion family planning services, and the partners of the women were invited to participate. The third group was a control group, who received normal abortion care without specific post-abortion family planning services.

The results showed a higher use of modern contraception, lower unintended pregnancies and fewer repeat abortions in the two intervention groups, compared to the control group.

Involving stakeholders

At the beginning of the project, a Policy Advisory Board was established that met regularly with the INPAC consortium, aimed at strengthening the relations between the researchers and the policymakers, and providing advice on how to translate study results into policy. The Advisory Board was involved throughout the entire research process: from development of the study design to implementation and evaluation. The members represented different political levels.

INPAC also conducted interviews with policy - makers and service providers to have a better understanding of their perception on the importance and implementation strategies of integrating post-abortion family planning services into the hospital abortion services. Their feedback on strengthening the capacities of abortion providers regarding post-abortion family planning services, and promoting long-term reversible contraceptive measures, have been taken into account in INPAC's recommendations.

Additionally, an online questionnaire was conducted among the 90 participating hospitals in 30 Chinese provinces. We wanted to hear their opinion on the feasibility of integrating post-abortion family planning services into the regular abortion services in their hospitals. The majority of the respondents (87%) expressed a willingness to continue providing post-abortion services after the INPAC project was completed. They also mentioned the necessity of additional funding (resources) to provide post-abortion family planning services in hospitals.

Key policy recommendations

- Integrate post-abortion family planning services into existing abortion services and information.
- Include contraceptive counselling and follow-up consultations for all women of reproductive age (including women that had an abortion) in all family planning policies and guidelines.
- Implement the guidelines for maternal and child health care services at all policy levels throughout China.
- Increase funding for post-abortion family planning services.
- Strengthen capacities of providers regarding post-abortion family planning services.
- Include the promotion of long-acting reversible contraceptives in the services, especially post-abortion.
- Invest in prevention campaigns about abortion for unmarried young people.

ABOUT INPAC

INPAC – **I**ntegrating **P**ost**A**bstion family planning services into existing abortion services in hospital settings in **C**hina – was a collaborative research project funded by the European Union under the 7th Framework Programme (FP7) conducted from August 2012 to January 2017. The consortium consisted of seven groups led by the International Centre for Reproductive Health at Ghent University (ICRH/Ghent University, Belgium), working together with the Chinese Society for Family Planning – Chinese Medical Association (CMA-CSFP, China), Fudan University – School of Public Health (FU, China), the National Research Institute for Family Planning (NRIFP, China), Sichuan University (WCSUH, China), Aarhus University – Danish Epidemiology Science Centre (AU-DESC, Denmark), and Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM, UK). We are thankful to all partners of the INPAC project for their support. We are also grateful to other Chinese ANSER members, Professors Feng Cheng, Xiaoying Zheng and Kun Tang, and Mr. Jun Zhang and Mrs. Ping Hong for their scientific advice.

Making a difference with research results

Policy changes

The INPAC recommendations have been applied at different levels. First they were implemented in the Chongqing province, where the local Health and Family Planning Commission developed guidelines for post-abortion family planning services and translated them into local regulations.

In August 2018, the National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China developed guidelines for post-abortion services, based on the INPAC recommendations, and advised their implementation throughout the whole country.

Societal benefits

Besides the health benefits, the integration of more effective post-abortion family planning services will also induce other societal benefits, for example empowering Chinese women to seek other types of reproductive health services as they are better informed. It also creates a neutral environment for women who seek abortion and shows the importance of preventive care, which could be a best practice for the reforms of the Chinese health care system in general.

Economic advantages

In China, an operation for induced abortion costs around 10,000 RMB (or 1,300 euro). During the INPAC intervention, repeat abortion rates were reduced by nearly 50%. Around 5,856 women took part in the study and approximately 2,928 of them were able to avoid an abortion. We can estimate that nearly 30 million RMB (or almost 4 million euro) has been saved. This figure could even be much higher if the interventions were implemented throughout the whole country, as the estimated annual abortion rate in China is around 9 million.

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