

## Obstetric violence during cases of abortion

Complications resulting from abortion are one of the primary causes of death for women in Brazil and are considered to be guaranteed priority, requiring the action of multidisciplinary staff, and, above all respecting the woman's liberty, dignity, autonomy, and moral and ethical authority to decide, without prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination of any kind, which may deny and dehumanize this treatment.

In cases of abortion, obstetric violence can occur when health officials:

- Deny or delay medical treatment to a woman in abortion situation;
- Question women about the causes of the abortion (whether intentionally or not);
- Perform procedures, predominantly invasive ones, without explanation, consent or, frequently, without anesthesia;
- Threaten, accuse, or blame the woman;
- Coerce the woman in an abortion situation with the aim of forcing confession and denunciation to the police.

### Denounce obstetric violence

Require a copy of your medical records in the health unit where you were treated. These documents belong to the patient, and you can be charged only the cost of making copies.

Find a Public Defender, regardless of whether you were treated in a public or private institution.

Call 180 (Violence against Women) or 136 (Dial Health).

**Texto:** Núcleo Especializado de Promoção e Defesa dos Direitos da Mulher e Associação Artemis

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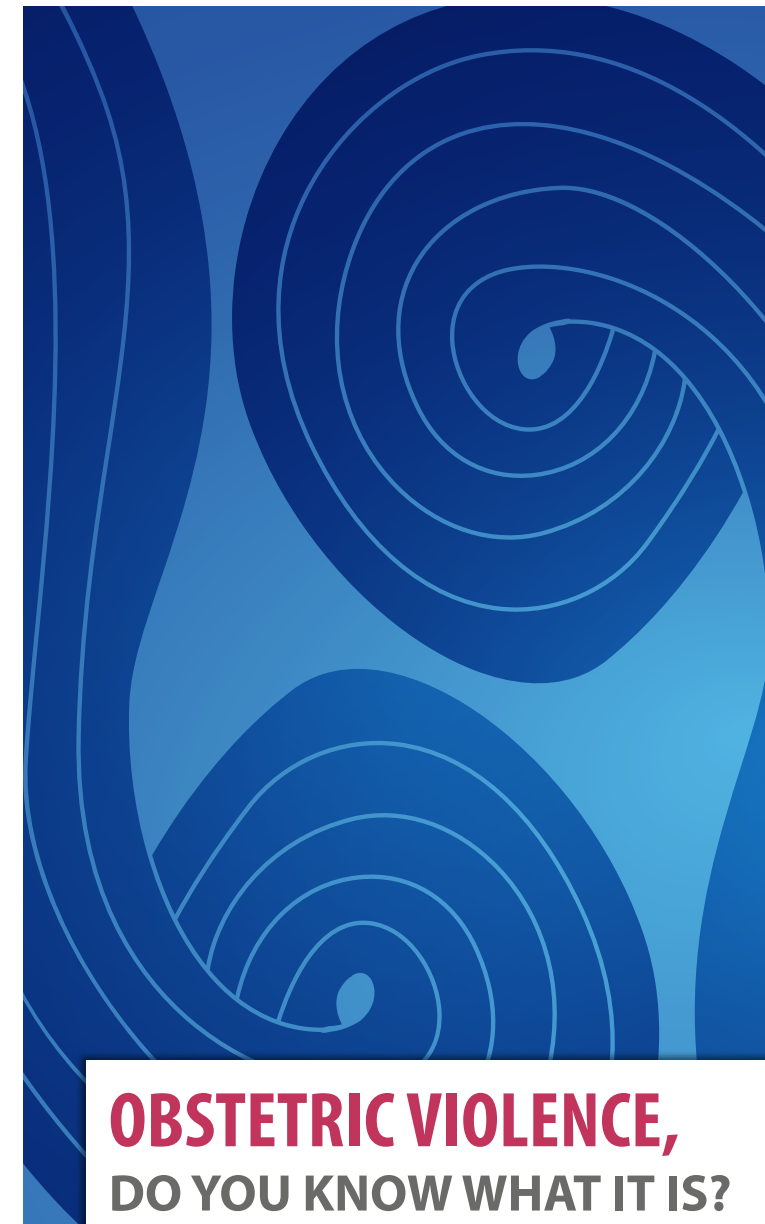
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**DEFENSORIA PÚBLICA**  
DO ESTADO DE SÃO PAULO



**OBSTETRIC VIOLENCE,**  
**DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT IS?**



Núcleo Especializado de Promoção e Defesa dos  
Direitos da Mulher



artemis

## Obstetric Violence – Do You Know What It Is?

Obstetric Violence is out there. It can be defined as the appropriation of the women's body or reproductive processes by health professionals, through dehumanization of treatment, abuse of medicalization and pathologization of natural processes, causing the loss of autonomy and ability to decide freely about their own bodies and sexuality, negatively affecting their quality of life.\*

In countries like Argentina and Venezuela, Obstetric Violence is identified as a crime against women, and as such must be prevented, punished and eradicated.

In order to change the reality of Obstetric Violence, it is imperative to understand it and denounce it, as well as to ensure that the cases in which it occurs are received, investigated and prosecuted.

It is also important to comply with existing laws and norms in the country, which guarantee women full exercise of their citizenship, sexual and reproductive liberty and the right to health.

\* Definition given by the law in Venezuela and Argentina, countries where Obstetric Violence is acknowledged.

## Obstetric Violence during Pregnancy

All women are entitled to high quality prenatal care, and this right aims for the health and well-being not only of the mother, but also of the child.

Obstetric Violence during pregnancy may happen when:

- Anyone at a district health unit where pre-natal visits occur denies services to a woman or imposes difficulties in treatment;
- Someone makes insensitive comments to a woman

based on her skin color, race, ethnicity, age, level of education, religion or belief, socioeconomic condition, marital status, sexual orientation, number of children, etc.;

- Anyone offends, humiliates or curses a pregnant woman or her family;
- Health officials neglect to provide high quality treatment for a pregnant woman;
- A cesarean section is scheduled without recommendation based on scientific evidence, solely according to the doctor's interests or convenience.

Brazil is the number one country in the world in cesarean sections, which results from the indiscriminate practice of surgery against the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO). Reducing the cesarean section rates in Brazil is essential in order to improve the indices of maternal and child morbidity and mortality.

Examples of myths told to pregnant women to justify a cesarean section without clinical indication:

the baby is too big, too small or is "behind schedule"; the woman is short or has narrow hips ("it can't pass"), the umbilical cord is wrapped around the baby's neck; the baby's foot is "stuck in the ribs" of the mother; there is not enough amniotic fluid; the woman had a previous cesarean surgery, is disabled or has reduced mobility; absence of labour contractions or cervix dilatation; hemorrhoids; hepatitis; heart disease, etc.

## Obstetric Violence during childbirth

In Brazil, every woman is entitled to a companion of her choice during the entire duration of labor, birth, and postpartum, as well as to be treated with dignity and to have guaranteed her physical and psychological integrity.

- The most common forms of obstetric violence during childbirth are:
- The hospital or birth center refuses to admit a woman in labour;
- The companion of the woman's choice is not allowed to be with her;
- Procedures on the woman's body that interfere in the process of childbirth, cause pain or physical injury (be that to be slight or grave). Examples: administering serum with oxytocin in order to accelerate the childbirth for to the doctor's convenience; successive manual examinations by different people on the woman's cervix; no food provided for the woman in labour; episiotomy (surgical incision used to enlarge the vaginal opening); immobilization (arms and legs), etc.;
- Any verbal or behavioural action that makes the woman feel inferior, vulnerable, abandoned, emotionally insecure, fearful, accused, insecure, dissuaded, victimized, alienated, or that causes loss of integrity, dignity, and reputation;
- Performance of cesarean surgery without clinical indication or the woman's consent;
- Delay or prevention of the woman's contact with the baby just after the birth; preventing shared accommodation of mother and baby, taking the newborn to the nursery without any medical necessity, solely for the convenience of the institution;
- Preventing or hampering of breastfeeding (preventing it during the first hour after the child's birth, separating the baby from the mother, leaving the baby in the nursery where baby bottles or pacifiers are used, etc.);