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Statistician refutes Planned Parenthood report

By Marcel LeJeune

College Station, TX, Oct 29, 2007 / 07:18 am (CNA).- In a report issued on October 11, 2007 by the Guttmacher Institute (the research arm of Planned Parenthood) and the World Health Organization (WHO), researchers emphasized the numbers of "unsafe abortions" in developing countries that do not have restrictive abortion policies. The researchers concluded that in order to achieve more "safe abortions", governmental policies should continue to be loosened to provide access to them. However, statistician Keith Schumann explains that Planned Parenthood and the World Health Organization use weak or non-existent data to support a conclusion that cannot be found in the numbers.

These findings are consistent with reports from Steven W. Mosher, president of the Population Research Institute, who accused abortion legalization advocates of "deliberately exaggerating the magnitude of the problem in order to create a 'health crisis' to justify legalizing abortion-on-demand" as reported by CNA in early October.

Dr. Keith Schumann, a Ph.D. statistician from College Station, Texas, examined the research reported in the study and found several problems behind the numbers that Guttmacher and the WHO released. Dr. Schumann said, "I cannot make any conclusion on the accuracy or precision of the numbers they report. There are numerous assumptions made in their methodology that can severely sway the final outcome. In other words, the numbers in the report contain such potentially large margins of error and so many problems with the underlying data that were cobbled together that few, if any, conclusions can accurately be made."

Dr. Schumann was unable to recreate the results of the report based on the information that he examined. The data is pulled from multiple sources and in some cases, guesses made by the researchers. Schumann called the assumptions built upon the data "troubling" and it seemed the data itself was said to be "pulled from the air" in some cases.

Some of the more telling numbers reported by the Guttmacher Institute included a 100% "safe abortion" rate for parts of Asia that include China and North Korea. Therefore, even forced abortions, by the totalitarian governments of these Communist countries, fall under the definition of "safe abortions". Also, the data used in several parts of the world was very limited and in other locations and/or dates non-existent. Therefore, the researchers "corrected" the data to show what they called "under-reporting". This included an average correction inflation of 140% per country, including correction inflation for Bangladesh of 300%. For countries where abortions are illegal, the total number of abortions was estimated, then inflated, and then all of these were considered unsafe.

The problems with the report were not reflected in a statement given by Dr. Sharon Camp, Guttmacher president and CEO. She stated that the first step in making abortion safer was to ensure that the procedure was done by capable persons in good conditions. In addressing the policies of countries that restrict abortion, Camp states, "It's high time for policymakers worldwide to renew their commitment to women's health by addressing these crucial issues".

When asked what he might conclude about the methodology used in this report, Dr. Schumann concluded that it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible to get accurate numbers, "We can't even get an accurate number of abortions locally, aside from what Planned Parenthood self-reports. I don't understand how we can then get accurate numbers from a worldwide perspective."

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