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# Zika increases illegal abortions in Latin American countries

By **Maria Gabriela Méndez** / Thursday, 23 Jun 2016 12:55PM

A recent research studied the increase of **illegal abortions** in **Latin American countries** after the **Zika virus** started to spread. Scientists found that in some regions, the demand for illegal abortions went up to 36 and 76 percent.



A research study team based in Amsterdam sought to understand if the demand for **illegal abortions** had increased in Latin American countries after their governments announced the effects the virus had in **unborn babies**.

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*The vast majority of Latin American countries have strict laws against abortions. Image Credit: UTexas*

In Brazil women who are found to have performed an illegal abortion can face up to 3 years in state prison. Abortion is accepted if the fetus is dead inside the wound, brain dead or the mom was raped.

Chile, Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Nicaragua reject the process of abortion in every case entirely. Studies have found that rates of abortion in countries that prohibit the procedure are almost the same than countries that accept it.

In many Latin American countries, sex education and contraceptive measures are not an option. Especially, in rural communities and countries facing an extreme case of product shortage, such as Venezuela.

Abigail Aiken, a health policy researcher from the University of Texas, wondered whether the [Zika virus](#) announcements would have increased [illegal abortions](#) in these countries. The researcher had not much to work with since abortions are illegal they are performed entirely under the radar.



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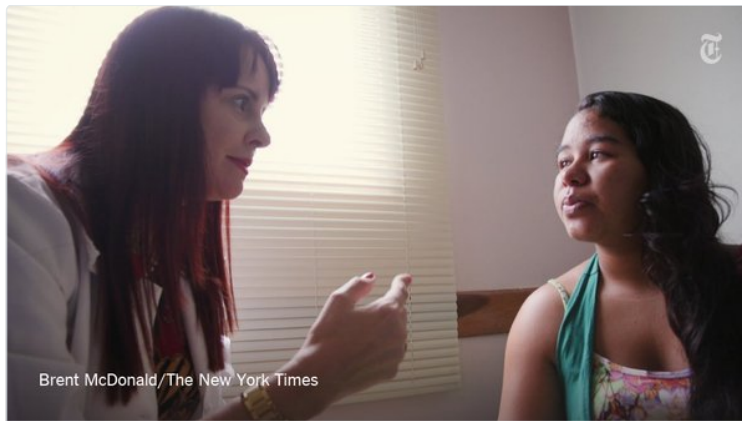
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Before the rise of Zika, there were up to 900,000 illegal abortions in Brazil each year [nyti.ms/27Eo3ar](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/19/health/zika-virus-abortion-brazil.html)

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Aiken found the website Women on The Web, a platform for females from all over the world who are restricted by their government's laws or by resources and are not able to safely perform an abortion.

The researcher worked along with the website to determine a database of Latin American women, seeking abortions after the consequences the [Zika virus](#) had over unborn babies.

## Increasing numbers of abortions in the region

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), explains the Zika virus spreads thanks to a mosquito bite, infected with the disease or by sexual relations with a man that contracted the virus. Infected woman, can also pass the virus onto their unborn child.

Some questions on Zika and Pregnancy still need to be answered, and researchers are still determining the likelihood for a future mother to get the Zika virus or how the fetus gets infected. What scientists do know, is that the virus affects the fetus giving them microcephaly.

Brazil has been one of the most affected countries in the region with babies born with microcephaly, since the outbreak in 2015, rates have increased. The disease causes babies to be born with smaller heads, brains and have congenital diseases that in many cases result in a child death.



Researcher Abigail Aiken along with the Women on Web team analyzed data since Nov 17, 2015, when the Pan American Health Organization alerted about the Zika virus, to March of 2016. Image Credit: New Scientist

The initial findings showed that orders from different women in Brazil doubled in a three month period after the government had announced the consequences of Zika and pregnancy, Venezuela, Ecuador and Honduras had a 70 percent increment in orders and Colombia, El Salvador and Costa Rica had a 30 percent increase.

Countries such as Mexico, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, had not issued warnings about Zika virus and pregnancies and the orders from Women on The Web remained the same.

“It seems as though women were responding not only to the threat of Zika but to the advisories issued by their governments,” said lead researcher Aiken.

## Limitations of the study

According to Gilda Sedgh, the principal research scientist at the Guttmacher Institute, these countries face up to 4 million abortions per year. Sedgh focused in health research and was not involved in the study

Dr, Gilda Sedgh assures the results can not show a clear answer since the website Women on Web represents just a small amount of women from the region when compared with the bigger numbers.

“The numbers could be an early warning sign of increased demand for abortion because of Zika. Yet is also possible that Women on Web might have experienced an increased demand as a result of visibility of their services,” said Dr. Sedgh to The New York Times.

**Emmanuelle Saliba**

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The study is also limited to resource women better, most likely living in the city and having access to the internet and smart devices. According to Sedgh, there's a larger amount of women seeking abortions for different reasons who don't have the resources.

Abortion restrictions have always been an issue in this region of the world, yet researchers hope that the study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, provides a hint towards the increment of abortions and Zika virus.

Local governments in the Latin American region should also be warned by this early signs on abortion rates, to understand the risks of women seeking for illegal abortions and threatening their lives with methods that might not be the best for their health.

Source: [NY Times](#)

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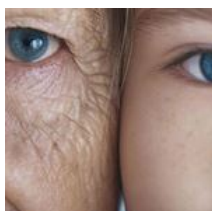
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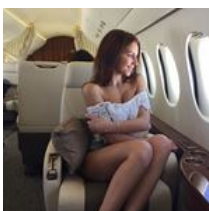
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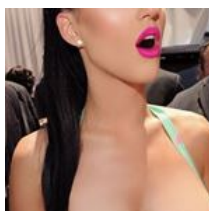
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