Contraceptive Policy and Reproductive Health in Romania:
A Case of Progress and Need
By Stephanie Lundquist

Abstract

Romania experienced a dramatic change in reproductive policy in its transition from communism to democracy. President Nicolae Ceausescu enforced a pronatalist population policy which severely restricted abortion and the use of contraceptives during his regime from 1964 to 1989. In the early 1990s, women regained legal access to abortion. Both women and men were also able to use contraceptives, but the lack of access presented, and continues to present, a problem in post-communist Romania. In 2000, the Romanian government approved a policy detailing the funding of contraceptives to be disbursed by the public sector to otherwise non-targeted populations. These policies have had various affects on fertility, abortion and maternal mortality.

This paper thoroughly analyzes the consequences of the delegalization and relegalization of abortion and contraception in Romania. It finds that after Ceausescu’s pronatalist policies in 1966, women were pushed to the “black market” to terminate unwanted pregnancies. Maternal mortality increased significantly due to ill-practiced abortions. After relegalization in 1989, the Romanian population, liberalized from Ceausescu’s “reign of terror”, was distrustful of medical advice regarding contraceptives. In maintaining the method of immediate birth control, the number of abortions skyrocketed in 1990, but gradually decreased as the population became more receptive to modern contraceptives.

This paper concludes that NGOs and the Romanian Ministry of Health must work together to be efficient and to increase the funding and distribution of a constant
supply of contraceptives, specifically targeting rural and low-income women, who still bear a large unmet need.