

A Partial Revolution: Realities of Abortion Reform in Argentina

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Why has there been **limited change to abortion and contraception usage rates**, despite the **legal legitimization of abortion in Argentina**?

What are the **historical, social, and anthropological roots** to understanding attitudes towards **abortion and motherhood** in Argentina?

Data & Methods

Mixed Methods

Ethnographic Interviews (n = 36 subjects)

- **Research sites:**
 - Primary medical center (Villa Verde, Pilar, Buenos Aires, Argentina)
 - Maternal hospital (Hospital Maternal Nuestra Señora del Pilar, Buenos Aires, Argentina).
- **Interviews:**
 - 20 medical professionals (doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists)
 - 10 low-income teenage mothers/families
 - 6 activists and academics
- **Analysis:** Focused/thematic coding.

Subject Observation

Weekly workshops with local families

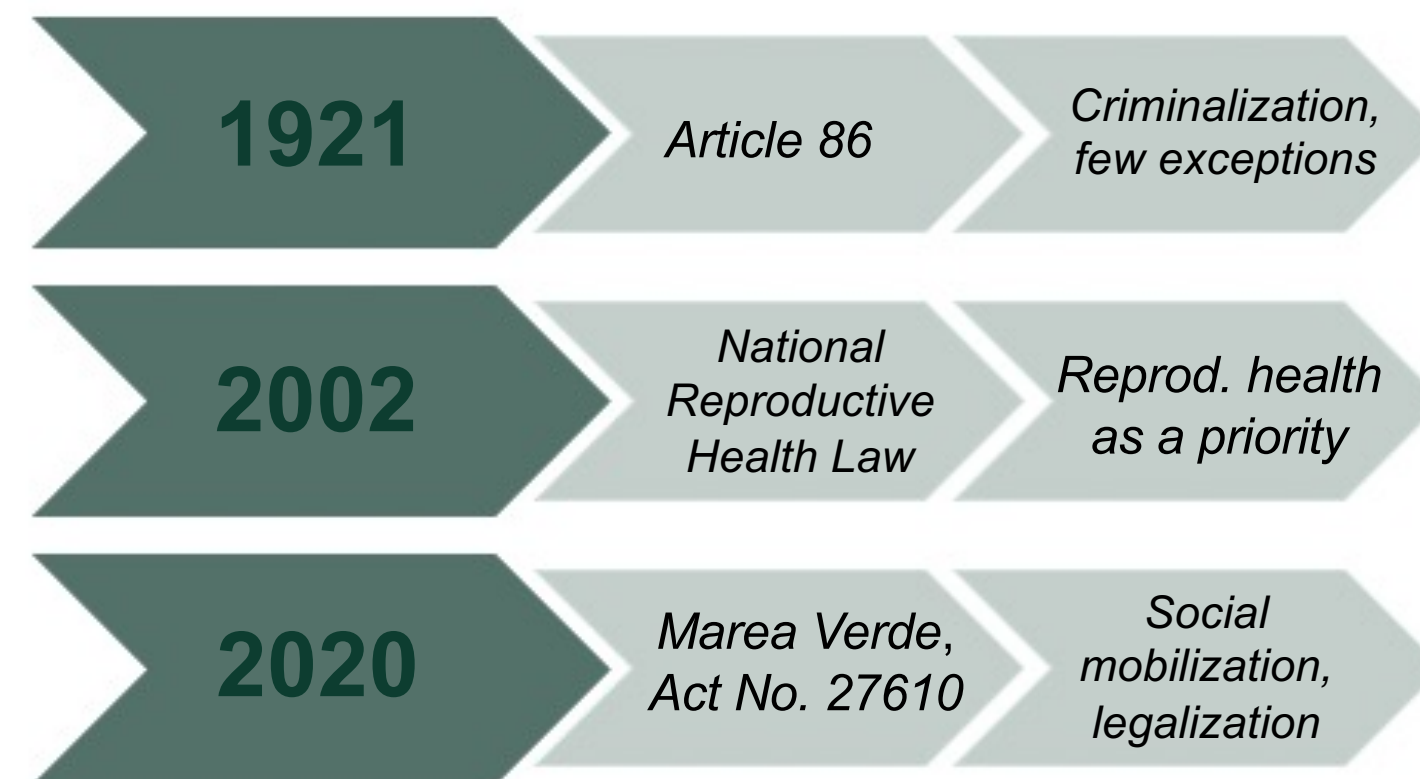
- **Themes:** motherhood, personal life project guidance, pregnancy, and domestic abuse
- **Partnership:** Local non-profit Salud Hábitat Desarrollo (SAHDES).

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Background



Pilar, Buenos Aires, Argentina

- **Population:** 366,874 inhabitants
- **Population density:** 154 v. 2,570 /km²
- **Structural Inequalities:**
 - 51% of the population below the poverty line
 - High drop out rates, no access to higher education
 - Reliant on governmental subsidies
 - Low-resource housing, informal employment
- **Religion:** Deeply rooted Catholicism, focus on family building

"Sometimes I think she gives me more love than I give her. [...] Before my pregnancy I was always alone, and now I have her. My world is complete, at peace."

—
18-year-old mother, talking about her 2-month-old baby

"[Young mothers] desire ownership over a piece of their life, which in their circumstances, they can *only achieve* through a baby. It gives them a *sense of authority* that they have not had before"

—
Resident doctor at a Maternity Hospital in Pilar

"Passing laws is not enough. Structural change is most important, particularly in rural environments. Abortion should not be our first resource — sexual education and contraceptives are key in leading change. [...]"

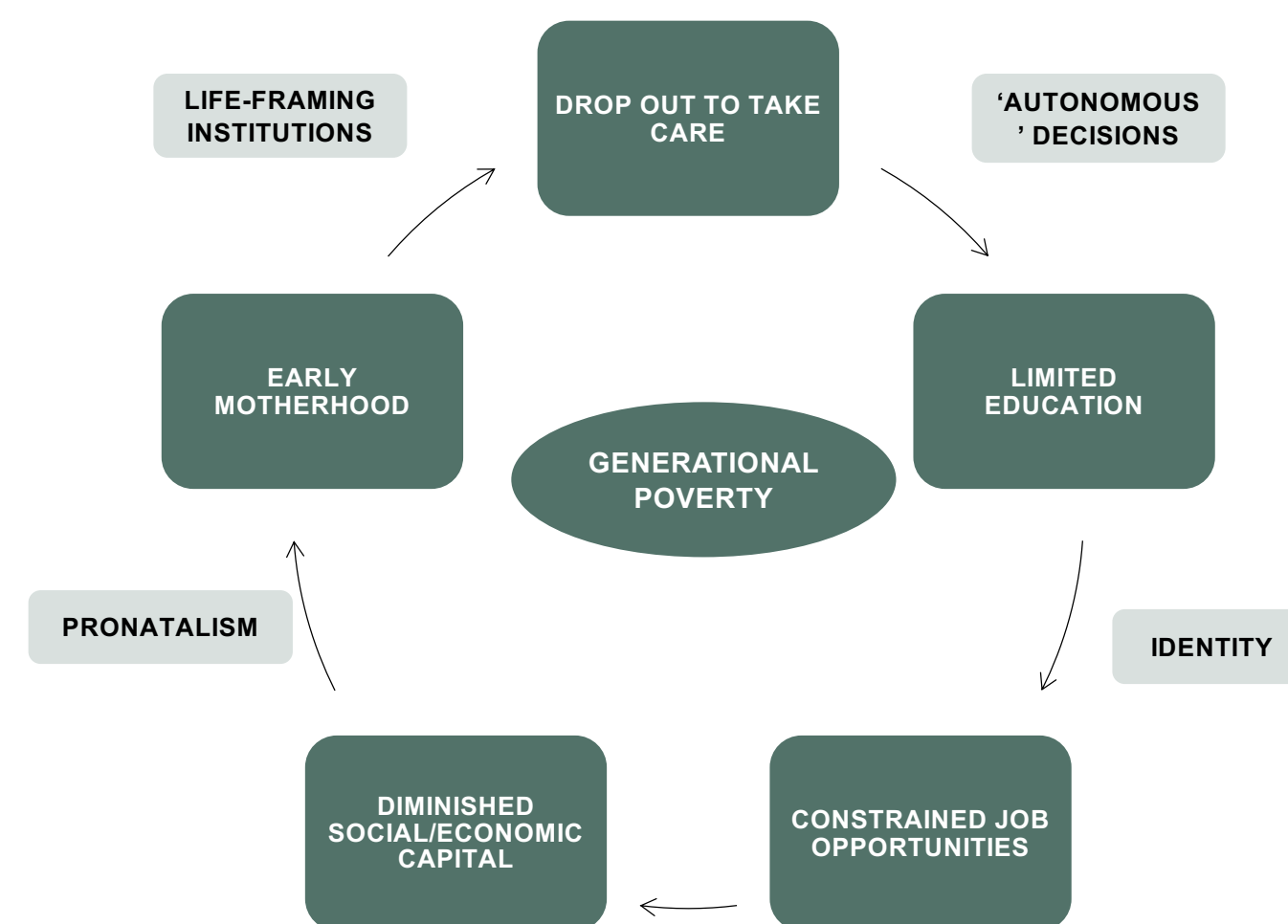
In the end, it's not about abortions: what matters is [patients] are getting to the clinic and receiving opportunities to thrive and build healthy lives within a supportive community"

—
Activist during the 2015 Feminist Social Movement

Main Themes and Discussion

Motherhood as a Life Project

- Motherhood as a **comprehensive life project amidst limited prospects**
 - "The best investment of a young woman's life," becoming an active choice
- Potent force that **shapes personal identity and empowerment**
 - Follows Biological Parenthood, normative discourses
- Underscores **resistance against abortion reform**, rooted in the conviction of **motherhood's irreplaceable value**
 - Convoluted family bonds: feelings of fulfillment vs. resentment
- Idealization of motherhood while consistently perpetuating precariousness



Conscientious Objectors and Policy Applications

- Pregnancies can be terminated through the **first 14 weeks of pregnancy for free, at any public primary healthcare center**.
- Grants healthcare providers the **right to abstain from participating in abortion procedures due to personal or moral beliefs**.
- Very prominent in rural, under-developed areas
- Key policy challenge
 - Patient-physician relationship: young, unemployed, uneducated, and unskilled women view doctors as authorities
 - Limits informed consent and personal agency
 - Blocks access to treatment and prevention, goes beyond medical background into morality

Urban/Rural Reception of Social Movements

- Urban centers saw a **surge of activism**, whereas rural areas exhibited **limited degrees of engagement**
 - Disparities in access to information, healthcare, and awareness about the movement's objectives.
- Communities are **less connected, less informed; more reticent to engage** in practices associated with social revolutions and movements
- Thorough policy on paper, lacks understanding of the real/social world

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Figure 1: Life Cycle of the Life Project