

Poll: Brazilians oppose abortion in cases of microcephaly

February 29 2016, by Bruce Douglas



In this Thursday, Feb. 25, 2016 photo, Caio Julio Vasconcelos who was born with microcephaly, undergoes physical therapy at the Institute for the Blind in Joao Pessoa, Brazil. Researchers from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention continue to fan out across one of Brazil's poorest states in search of mothers and infants for a study aimed at determining whether the Zika virus is causing babies to be born with unusually small heads. (AP Photo/Andre Penner)

A majority of Brazilians oppose allowing pregnant women to abort fetuses diagnosed with microcephaly, the type of infant brain damage

linked to the Zika virus, according to a poll published Monday.

In a Datafolha survey carried by the Folha de Sao Paulo newspaper, 51 percent of interviewees said they were against relaxing Brazil's strict anti-abortion laws even in cases when microcephaly has been confirmed. Only 39 percent agreed with a change in the law for such circumstances.

The survey interviewed 2,678 people in 171 municipalities across Brazil on Feb. 24-25. The poll has a margin of error of 2 percentage points.

Abortion is illegal in Brazil except in cases of rape, danger to the mother's life or anencephaly, another birth defect involving the brain, although in practice, wealthy women in urban areas tend to have relatively easy access to safe abortions in private clinics, while the poor often rely on dicey back-alley procedures.

In the wake of the Zika outbreak, some lawyers, academics and women's rights activists have announced plans to file a petition at Brazil's Supreme Court calling for women infected with the virus during their pregnancies to be allowed legal abortions. The U.N. also has urged countries affected by the outbreak to consider lifting restrictive bans on abortion.

At present, women who carry out abortions face jail terms of one to three years. A Brazilian congressman has proposed tougher sentences in cases of women who abort fetuses with microcephaly.

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