

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

FOCUS: Unsafe Abortion Among Youth

In last week's Bulletin, we discussed sexual abuse and how it can lead to unplanned pregnancies.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) says every year, some 3 million girls aged 15 to 19 undergo unsafe abortions. Many of these girls may choose an unsafe abortion, since their pregnancies may be unplanned.

Even if a child doesn't undergo an unsafe abortion, the World Health Organisation (WHO) says that complications during pregnancy and childbirth are the second leading cause of death for 15-19 year-old girls, globally.

Therefore, there is a greater need for youth to know more about contraceptives, unsafe abortion and abstinence.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To educate listeners about the importance of equipping youth with sexual and reproductive health knowledge to avoid unplanned pregnancies
- To help create a positive attitude towards planning births, having smaller families and using modern family planning methods including emergency pills in cases of rape
- To promote discussion and dialogue between listeners and other community members about the dangers of having an abortion by an untrained person.

The Problem: Unplanned Pregnancies and Unsafe Abortions Among the Youth

For some adolescents, pregnancy and childbirth are planned and wanted, but for many they are not.

In some communities in the country, becoming pregnant outside marriage is considered an abomination.

As a result, some girls who get pregnant before marriage may face social pressure – and can lead them into having an unsafe abortion -- which can put their lives in danger.

Other girls may feel too ashamed to seek family planning services – and go ahead and have unprotected sex.

Unsafe sex can lead to an unwanted pregnancy and ultimately to an unsafe abortion, which can also result in high numbers of maternal deaths.

According to a *Strategic Assessment of Unsafe Abortion in Malawi* conducted by the Reproductive Health Unit (RHU) which is under the Ministry of health, young women, including girls as young as 12, are undergoing unsafe abortions.

It further reveals that unsafe abortions are killing three women and girls daily in Malawi.

An unsafe abortion is an abortion performed by someone with little or no experience.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community, especially young people, that it is possible to avoid unplanned pregnancy and unsafe abortion – if they use family planning methods.

The Strategic Assessment of Unsafe Abortion in Malawi by the Reproductive Health Unit established that half of all women seen in post-abortion care are under the age of 25.

The report further estimates that 110,000 women in Malawi have an abortion every year. Of these, 38,000 are treated for serious complications linked to unsafe abortion methods.

According to the report, about a third of adolescents aged 12 to 19 years surveyed reported having a close friend who tried to have an abortion.

The report further says, unsafe abortions account for 18 per cent of all maternal deaths and are the leading cause of obstetric complications.

It also says abortion-related complications are the fourth common cause of maternal deaths in the country after postpartum haemorrhage (defined as a blood loss of 500 ml or more within 24 hours after birth), post puerperal infection (a bacterial infection following childbirth), eclampsia and severe pre-eclampsia. (A disorder of pregnancy characterized

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- Strategic Assessment of Issues Related to Unsafe Abortion in Malawi, draft report. 2010. Malawi Ministry of Health, Reproductive Health Unit.



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