



Knowledge of Ghanaian Abortion Laws and Factors Hindering the Access to Safe Abortion Services by Female Students at the Tamale Campus of the University for Development Studies (U.D.S)

Hardiks Mark*

Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Oregoon, South Africa

Abstract

Young women in the universities have an independence streak and have no restraints from parents, or school authorities regarding their sex lives, and are at liberty to experiment and have as much sex as desired, sometimes if they are not careful and probably have little knowledge on how to prevent unwanted pregnancies, they can pick seed and conceive. Lack of support from partners and/or family and limited monetary support can lead them to make wrong choices regarding the termination of an unwanted pregnancy. The aim of this study was to assess the knowledge and factors hindering access to safe abortion services among female students at the Tamale campus of the U.D.S. This was a descriptive cross-sectional study conducted at the Tamale campus of the U.D.S. 100 female students between the ages of 15 and 45 years were conveniently selected from a database of 187 female students. A questionnaire containing the relevant research questions related to the topic was designed using google forms, pre-tested on randomly selected 20 participants out of the total study population and subsequently self-administered to 100 female students through a web-based electronic platform. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 20.0. Age distribution of study participants: 15-20 Years, 18 (18%), 21-25 Years, 67(67%), 26-30 years, 15(15%). Knowledge of abortion laws in Ghana: 71(71%) Yes, 29(29%) No. Revision of the current abortion law in Ghana: 72(72%) Yes, 28(28%) No. Reasons for change in abortion Laws: Infringes on basic human rights of women 89(89%), Contents are obsolete 11(11%). Knowledge of safe abortion methods: 95(95%) Yes, 5(5%) No. Knowledge of safe abortion

Midwives 28(28%), Pharmacists 15(15%), General Nurses 7(7%). Factors hindering access to safe abortion services: Religious beliefs 50(50%), Cost of services 30(30%), Fear of stigmatization 22(22%), Lack of knowledge about services 8(8%). Most of the student participants were between the ages of 21 and 25 years. The majority of the

of safe abortion service centers and providers. Half of the students are of the view that religious beliefs generally interfere with their willingness and readiness to access safe abortion services and that the Gynecologist is usually

Keywords: Knowledge; Factors hindering access; Safe abortion; Female students

Introduction

Abortion can be defined as the expulsion or removal of a fetus or embryo from the uterus thus, carrying out its death usually before the period of viability and it can be spontaneous or induced [1]. It can be safe or unsafe depending on where it is done, who performs the procedure or the quality of instruments used and is widely undertaken by women of all religious, cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds as well as by women of various reproductive ages [2]. Women who have never been married and have no children have terminated a pregnancy before and are less likely to undergo a safe abortion as they are likely to be of a low socioeconomic status [3]. Abortions are considered safe when performed with a method that is recommended by the World Health Organization (W.H.O) before the period of viability by a skilled person. These abortions can be done by administering simple tablets (Medical abortion) or a simple outpatient procedure [4]. An important obstacle to the acquisition of safe abortion care and services is the lack of adequately trained personnel (Kim et al, 2020). However, the attitudes of trained health personnel available as well as their beliefs can affect the provision of these safe abortion care services even in establishments where they can be provided [5]. Furthermore, the un hospitable demeanors of health personnel toward young women especially those who are single and choosing to have a safe abortion is very appalling and act as a major hindrance [6]. Knowing your rights and being aware of the status of laws in your country can significantly impact the health

seeking behavior of a woman when it comes to accessing and making use of the available services [7]. Health care providers in many sub-Saharan African and South East Asian countries where elective abortions are legal on various grounds often view that kind of abortion as immoral, instead of accepting the legal status of abortion in their country [8]. Currently in Ghana, abortion is a criminal offense regulated by Act 29, section 58 of the criminal code of 1960, amended by PNDCL 102 of 1985 [9]. Young women in universities have an independent streak and have no restraints from parents or school authorities regarding sex lives and are at liberty to experiment and have as much sex as desired, sometimes if they are not careful and probably have little knowledge on how to prevent unwanted pregnancies, they can pick seed and conceive [10]. It is especially important to know what view university students have on unintended pregnancies that require termination, how they

*Corresponding author: Hardiks Mark, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Oregoon, South Africa, E-mail: HardiksMark43@gmail.com

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deal with them and their options and opinions in resolving these issues as well as their knowledge and perception about the abortion law and services available [11]. Lack of support from partners and/or family and limited monetary support can lead university female students to make wrong choices regarding the termination of an unwanted pregnancy [12]. The aim of this study was to assess the knowledge and factors hindering the access to safe abortion services among female students at the Tamale campus of the U.D.S.

providers: Gynecologists 50(50%), Midwives 28(28%), Pharmacists 15(15%), General Nurses 7(7%) (Figure 7).

Factors hindering the access to safe abortion services: Religious beliefs 50(50%), Cost of services 30(30%), Fear of stigmatization 22(22%), Lack of knowledge about service availability 8(8%) (Figure 8).

Discussion

Most of the study participants are between the ages of 21 and 25 years (Figure 1). This finding is not surprising since that is generally the age category for which Ghanaian students are admitted for tertiary

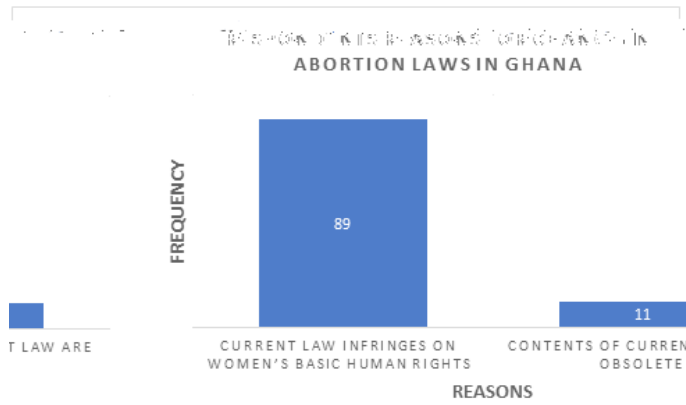


Figure 4: Respondents reasons for change in abortion laws in Ghana.

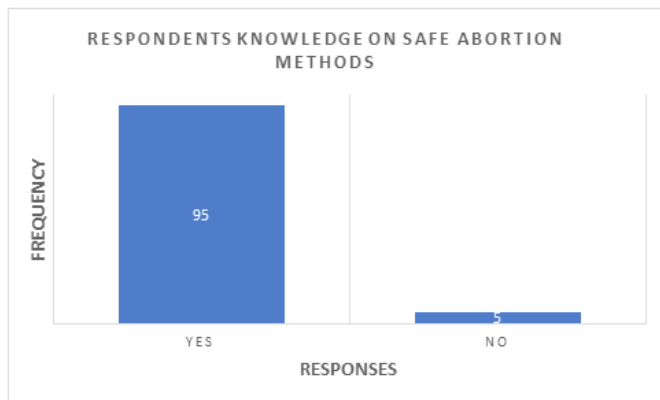


Figure 5: Respondents' knowledge of safe abortion methods.

Study limitations

Due to the nature of our study design and methodology, we could not establish an objective relationship between the factors affecting the access to safe abortion services and the respondents' perceptions about the concept of abortion in general.

Conclusions

Most of the study participants are between the ages of 21 and 25 years. The majority of the students have knowledge about abortion laws in Ghana, the different methods of safe abortion, and the availability of safe abortion service centers and providers. Half of the students are of the view that religious beliefs generally interfere with their willingness and readiness to access safe abortion services and that the Gynecologist is usually the most qualified medical specialist to provide safe abortion services.

Recommendations

1. Ghana Education Services (GES) together with the Public Health Department of the Ghana Health Services (GHS) should intensify their efforts on public education and awareness of the abortion laws with a more emphasis on female university students
- 2.