


 REUNION
 POINT

**24hours
 service**
News

Unsafe abortion - a stealthy killer in Africa

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 03/22 - An unsafe abortion not only keeps lives of millions of disadvantaged African women at death's door, but remains a controversial issue with religious, moral, cultural and political dimensions in population affairs.

Reproductive health experts on the continent say that reaching a common ground on what is known about unsafe abortions could turn the situation around.

Public debate about the issue is often rare. Due to its sensitivity, the decision to undergo back street abortion is usually taken by an individual or a small group of family members or close friends.

But when the abortion goes wrong and the unexpected occurs, it is the wailing and sorrow that grip the survivors.

Against this background more than 150 researchers, health-care providers, and policymakers committed to ending women's deaths and defects from unsafe abortion Tuesday started a three-day regional consultation here, aiming to reach a consensus that could drive policy and action in addressing the tragedy.

Participants of the meeting are sharing skills and experiences in dealing with a public health concern that every day adds to the toll of Africa's high maternal death rates.

Reasons for women, particularly those aged between 15 and 19 years, resorting to unsafe abortion are varied.

However, researchers converge on one point that the underlying cause has its roots in the unequal gender power relations that fuel women's vulnerability to unwanted sex and the resultant unwanted pregnancy.

The situation, said Ethiopia's health minister, Dr. Tedros Adhanom, called for a concerted effort on the part of governments to adopt policies and laws that support all women.

"I believe that the major focus should be in strengthening policies and services that could address prevention strategies," said the minister, suggesting an increase in contraceptive prevalence.

Participants of the consultation will marshal new research evidence on this neglected women's health issue in order to strengthen the political will needed for action.

A good deal of new science has shown that maternal deaths and injuries from unsafe abortions can be easily prevented with access to comprehensive reproductive health care.

Such care includes contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancies, safe abortion and post-abortion care.

Available data show an estimated 4.2 million unsafe abortions are performed each year in Africa. Some 3.5 million of these are in sub-Saharan African countries.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 30,000 African women die each year and millions suffer due to unsafe abortions and related complications.

"As abortion is highly stigmatised in our communities most of the cases go unreported and unaccounted for," Tedros observed.

Some African countries have legislation on abortion that is more restrictive than the practice observed or inferred.

19:56 - Russia: Angolan Magazine Launched In Russia

18:48 - Angola/Russia: Angolan Magazine Launched In Russia

18:43 - Malanje: Governor Satisfied With Work On Malanje/Lui River Road

18:41 - Audit Court Wants Social Security On Politicians' Agenda

18:35 - Head Of State Appoints Reserve Bank Deputy Governors

18:28 - Huambo: Rains Destroy Bridges In Longonjo

18:24 - Huambo: Health Personnel At Seminar On Use Of Vitamin A

17:20 - Defence Minister Regrets Death Of Jurist Joao Felizardo

16:48 - Polisario Front Chief Writes To Angolan Head Of State

16:22 - Police, Red Cross Cooperate In Landmine Awareness

16:05 - Premier Calls For Public Managers Accountability

Some of the laws in such countries as Angola, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Togo and Uganda, permit abortion only to save the life of the woman.

In Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Rwanda and Zimbabwe, for example, the legislation permits abortion to protect the woman`s life and physicalhealth.

Algeria, Botswana, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Namibia and Sierra Leone permit abortion to preserve the woman`s physical and mental health as well.

In some countries, abortion is prohibited without exception in the written law, but in practice it is permitted to save a woman`s life. In other cases, abortion law is vague and subject to different interpretations.

Regardless of what the legislation says in each country, unsafe abortions are a serious concern that require identification of gaps in knowledge and collaboration for increased political will to reduce undue maternal deaths.

[First page](#) | [Politics](#) | [Economy](#) | [Social](#) | [Sport](#) | [Culture](#) | [Africa](#) | [International](#) | [Specials](#) | [24 hours service](#)

© 1996-2003 Angop. All rights reserved.

