



## Weekly News Review – 18 August 2017

### A round-up of the week's most important, Africa-focused Family Planning and Reproductive Health reporting

#### Individuals making a difference

Amid the cacophony surrounding access to contraception and abortion rights – data reports, education initiatives, misinformation campaigns, policy disputes and legal battles (more on all of those below) – it is nice to be reminded about the important effects that individuals can have on the people around them and then on the wider world. This week saw several such stories.

[Nigerian Health Minister Isaac Adewole](#), promoted the opening of a new fistula repair facility by donning scrubs and returning to the operating room to join other surgeons who are part of the initiative. [Malawian First Lady Gertrude Mutharika](#) urged girls to avoid early marriage. [Cecile Richards, President of Planned Parenthood](#), used her platform to scold Democrats about staying firm on choice.

Individuals out of the spotlight do the hard work every day. PBS featured [Edna Adan in Somalia](#) who established a hospital 15 years ago, and has delivered 20,000 babies. “We have the lowest maternal mortality. We’re a quarter of the national rate. And it’s still too many.” Engender Health brings the story of [Kizza Kedekiya and Katusemi Evelyne, a young couple in the Hoima District of Uganda](#) who had two children and “felt the need to be role models and examples to other married youth in our community” and became peer educators for family planning information and methods. UNFPA’s #HerStoryHerVoice video series looked at “[Teen Mums in Kilifi \(Kenya\)](#)”, and their efforts to raise awareness in the community, putting faces to the 13,000 girls who drop out of school annually due to pregnancy. Pathfinder profiles [Mbuyi from DRC](#), who struggles raising 15 children but has now discovered she has a choice about pregnancy and is spreading the word about contraception in her village. [#FPVoices](#) introduces individuals from around the world every week, and released short video segments about [Ethel Chavula from Malawi and Angela Mutunga from Kenya](#) to “strengthen connections among the incredible people working in or benefiting from family planning around the world.” [Esenam Amuzu from Ghana](#) reflected on her childhood and lack of sex education, and launched “a youth-led initiative called ‘My Teen Life’, to give young people a voice in how we talk about sexuality in rural parts of Ghana.”

In the US, 2017 is seeing a rise in pregnancy-related deaths. *Romper* tells the stories of eight women and their [near-death pregnancy experiences](#). Women bear the [physical, mental and emotional brunt of preventing pregnancy](#), a study published in the *Journal of Sex Research* points out. And that burden is more pronounced when an abortion is involved. [Former US Olympic 400m champion Sanya Richards-Ross](#) says she “has helped other women by speaking publicly about having an abortion. [She] revealed in her new book that she had a termination a day before leaving for Beijing 2008, where she won a gold and bronze medal [and] later claimed that every female athlete she knows has had an abortion but the issue is ‘not talked about’.” A [woman in Sydney](#) was prosecuted for taking a pill “with the intent of producing a miscarriage.”

The story has prompted a [“wake-up call”](#) and wider discussion about abortion reform, which one group calls [“unfinished business”](#).

The Edinburgh Festival saw the premiere of a [one-woman show](#) by Therese Ramstedt, who needed to communicate to counter the trend in the UK: “One in three women in the UK will have an abortion in their lifetime, but it remains one of the biggest taboo subjects around women’s bodies... While the play is based on her personal experience, she also wanted the performance to represent other women’s experiences.”

Reporting on the [sad death of Heather Heyer](#) at the Charlottesville, Virginia, anti-KKK rally served to highlight one of the racist organization’s tenets: “While traditional conservatives oppose abortion in almost all cases, the alt-right is in favor of abortion rights for those they deem unworthy of existence: African Americans, Latinas, and other racial and ethnic minorities.”

[Women Help Women](#) is “supporting the independent use of abortion medicines [by] fighting stigma one email at a time.” *Rewire* has the story about a Texas woman who started an annual challenge, to [combat abortion stigma “one taco or beer at a time”](#), which raised \$30,000 in its first year, when she tweeted a photo challenging her followers “to drink a beer, eat a taco, and fund abortion.” (The challenge runs through September 15 this year).

### **Reports worth reporting**

The [Population Research Bureau’s 2017 World Population Data Sheet](#) was released. Among its findings: “30% of sub-Saharan African women use contraception vs. 70% in Europe... Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality calls for empowering women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health. Over the last two decades, increasing numbers of married women ages 15 to 24 in many low- and middle-income countries have met their family planning needs to delay or limit childbearing with modern methods of contraception. But challenges and barriers unique to younger women slow progress in several countries. Age-restrictive policies, social pressures, and provider bias limit knowledge about available options and access to appropriate methods, leading to higher rates of contraceptive failure and discontinuation after short periods.”

Other reports out this week worth reading: Annual reports from the [Guttmacher Institute](#), [ODI](#) and [Every Woman Every Child](#), [Top tips for advocates working on emergency contraception](#) from the International Consortium for Emergency Contraception, [Fast facts from the 2016 Ethiopia DHS](#) and two tools from HC3 – [Promoting SRH products and services for men](#), and [Aid in integrated SBCC programs](#).

### **Education**

President of the Guttmacher Institute Ann Starrs makes a case for [“comprehensive, nonjudgmental and empowering sexuality education”](#), which evidence has shown to be valuable and cost-effective. The International Campaign for Women’s Right to Safe Abortion looked at one way of [educating a new generation of pro-choice activists](#): “narrative medicine... candid conversations and logical, realistic explanations behind abortion procedures helped to debunk common pro-life arguments, thus strengthening [the] resolve in the pro-choice movement”

One group of students in Egypt were [nearly expelled from Cairo’s al-Azhar University for submitting a magazine on sex education](#) for their final-year assignment, which was rejected as inappropriate, caused a furor in local media and “laid bare... the attitudes that have hampered

Egypt as it attempts to deal with overpopulation.” They withdrew the project and submitted a sports magazine and passed.

The UNFPA’s [“Youth Enterprise Model”](#) in Uganda has been an effective way of reaching adolescents: “784,200 adolescents and young people accessed sexual reproductive health (SRH) information and 73 enterprises and institutions were trained in youth-friendly health service delivery.”

In South Africa, as [the refusal of a large number of health workers to perform abortions](#) is driving women to seek unsafe backstreet procedures, one professor called on medical schools to address students’ bias against abortion and teach them how to remedy botched procedures.

Other new sex education initiatives were announced this week in [Ghana](#), [Kenya](#), [Mozambique](#), [Namibia](#), and [Tanzania](#).

The Population Council announced (with partners the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University, the Population Reference Bureau, Tulane University, Avenir Health and ideas42) a new, [five-year global Social Behavior Change Communication \(SBCC\) project](#), which “aims to improve healthy behaviors and norms across key global health areas, including [among others] family planning and reproductive health; Social and behavior change programs raise awareness, reduce misinformation and address barriers.” *Gender & Adolescence: Global Evidence* released “An agenda for policy and action to [support girls through puberty and menarche](#).”

More education at the professional level is also needed. *Family Medicine* published a study highlighting the [inadequacy of counseling available for women with unintended pregnancies](#) from their doctors and the need for training in options counseling.

A survey in *The American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing*, [concludes](#) that “[postpartum nurses often fail to warn mothers about potentially life-threatening complications](#), mainly because they need more education themselves...Something as simple as educational programs for nurses, can have a real impact on preventing maternal deaths in US.” Internationally, Jhpiego uses “a ‘low-dose high-frequency’ approach to empower nurses and midwives with the skills they need.”

*The World Journal of Surgery* says that [US-trained surgeons are not getting the skills they may need in humanitarian settings](#): “[It] is poorly aligned with typical MSF surgical caseloads, particularly in OB/GYN and orthopedics. New mechanisms for obtaining relevant surgical skills should be developed to better prepare American surgical trainees interested in humanitarian work.”

## **Misinformation**

A harrowing report was published in *Pacific Standard* about how the US Christian right is “[co-opting the women’s rights movement](#) to fight contraceptives in Africa.”

A campaign against “[Crisis Pregnancy Centers](#)” across the US: Despite their name, “Crisis Pregnancy Centers aren’t really about helping you as you think through your options. Rather, they are about ensuring that you avoid an abortion altogether—no matter what you want, or what you think is best for your life.”

And Allure magazine declares “[Abortion on TV and in Movies Is Way Too Dramatic](#).”

## **Global policy disputes and legal battles**

[Nova Scotia's health minister](#) “looks to improve abortion access, calling [the] province 'out of step’”, while activists call the barriers “[unconscionable](#)”. [Western Australia](#) is debating “safe zones” around abortion clinics; [Scottish ministers were urged to lead fight against 'period poverty'](#),

A report on CBS News about [Iceland](#), where antenatal screening has led to a near-disappearance of children with Down syndrome stirred controversy from abortion foes, the [government clarified](#) that it “does not mandate abortions for mothers whose unborn children test positive for Down syndrome, nor do they mandate that a mother is required to take the test in the first place.”

While the Trump administration is [cutting teen pregnancy prevention programs](#), and [foes of birth control mandate deny Americans care](#), a study in *Obstetrics & Gynecology* shows that [post-abortion care costs](#) are rising because of the [scarcity of nearby clinics](#). A judge determined that [Arkansas](#) can block Planned Parenthood funding (which [PP says it will fight](#)), and [Oregon approved a sweeping bill expanding abortion access](#). Yet another panel looked at the [inverse relationship between abortion restrictions and women's health](#).

And [Lessons from Before Abortion Was Legal](#) in *Scientific American* is a reminder of why all of these ongoing battles are important.

### **CIRHT!**

[A new Center of Excellence is being planned for St. Paul's Hospital Millennium Medical College](#), with the goal of becoming a regional hub for training and scholarship in family planning, contraception and comprehensive abortion care.

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