

# FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN EXPERIENCING ABORTION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES IN MALAWI

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Authors: Ephraim Chimwaza, Hannifa Makwinja, Lovemore Amin, Benson Chikoja

Centre for Social Concern and Development

Author Contact Details: [ephraimchimwaza@gmail.com](mailto:ephraimchimwaza@gmail.com) , Tel: +265 999 458 907



# Presentation

- Introduction and background
- Methodologies
- Results
- Conclusion and recommendations

# Introduction and back ground

- Safe and legal abortions are rarely practiced in the public health sector in Malawi, and rates of maternal mortality and morbidity from unsafe abortion is very high.
- The major contributing factors are articulated by policy and laws restrictions. For example;
- Penal Code of Malawi Sections 149, 150 and 151 prohibits any form of abortion including aiding and trading in materials for abortion with a maximum of 14 yrs imprisonment for the service provider, 7 yrs for the concerned woman and 3 yrs for the trader.
- Section 243 of the same Penal Code provides an exception to the restriction above when the woman's life is in danger.
- However, there is no definition or regulation to determine the situation where a woman's life should be deemed to be in danger.

# Background cont.....

- As part of addressing burden of unsafe abortion that is contributing to maternal deaths, Malawi needs to urgently review its archaic abortion law.
- According to 2018 reports from Ministry of Health, 439 women in every 100,000 women die in Malawi due to pregnant related causes. According to Ministry of health data, most pregnant related death in Malawi is a result of unsafe abortions, hemorrhage, sepsis, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, obstructed labour and ruptured uterus.
- However, little is known about women's experiences seeking and accessing abortion in informal settlements in rural areas in Malawi.
- This study aimed at assessing women's experience seeking and accessing abortion in informal settlements in Mwanza district the rural area of Malawi.

## Methodology

- Seven focus group discussions were conducted with a total of 71 women and adolescent girls recruited from an informal settlement in Traditional Authority Dambe in rural areas Mwanza district.
- Women who took part were of reproductive age from 20 to 24 years.
- Adolescence were from 12 to 19 years old.





- The interview guide explored participants' perceptions of unplanned pregnancy, abortion, and access to sexual and reproductive health information in their community.
- Thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts was conducted using Excel.



# Results

- Participants described a variety of factors that influence women's experiences with abortion in their communities.
- According to participants, limited knowledge of sexual and reproductive health information and lack of access to contraception led to unplanned pregnancy among women and adolescent girls in their community.
- Participants cited stigma and loss of opportunities that women with unplanned pregnancies face as the primary reasons why women seek abortions.

## Results cont.....

- Participants articulated abortion stigma as the predominant barrier women in their communities face to safe abortion.
- Other barriers, which were often interrelated to stigma, included:
  - lack of education about safe methods of abortion,
  - perceived illegality of abortion,
  - as well as limited access to services,
  - fear of mistreatment and mistrust of health providers and facilities and health centers.



# Conclusions and recommendations

- Women in informal settlements in Mwanza district, Malawi face substantial barriers to regulating their fertility and lack access to safe abortion services.
- As part of addressing burden of unsafe abortion that is contributing to maternal deaths, Malawi needs to urgently review its archaic abortion law.
- Policy makers and reproductive health advocates should support programs and activities that employ harm reduction strategies and increase women's knowledge and skills of and access to medication safe abortion outside the formal healthcare system.

# Recommendations cont.....

- Government has the mandate to fulfill its obligation of providing comprehensive Sexual Reproductive Health Services to all women and girls including in rural areas. Let government enact good laws on abortion so that women and girls can access the abortion services.
- Activists should pledged their commitments to support Malawi government to pass the Termination of Pregnancy Bill.
- It is a matter of time that Malawi will have a new abortion law. There are just three steps which are remaining, these are Cabinet approval, enactment in Parliament and finally Presidential Assent.
- The more the Cabinet and Law makers drag their feet to enact the Termination of Pregnancy Bill, the more they are sending women and girls to the graves through deaths which could have been prevented.

# The end

- Thanks for listening