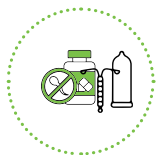


Evidence Brief



Abortion Incidence and Severity of Related-Complications in Liberia

Unsafe abortion is defined as a procedure for terminating a pregnancy that is performed by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment, not in conformity with minimal medical standards, or both. Unsafe abortion is among top causes of maternal illnesses and deaths and the treatment of abortion complications drains significant health system resources. There is limited scientific information available on the context in which women seek unsafe abortions, the magnitude of the unsafe abortion problem, and the resulting complications from such abortions.

This evidence brief summarizes the findings of a 2021 nationwide abortion study in Liberia that aimed to estimate the incidence and severity of related complications.



Methodology

The study used the Abortion Incidence and Complications Methodology (AICM) approach to estimate the induced abortion incidence and the severity of complications. Data was collected using three surveys, including the Health Facilities Survey (HFS), the Knowledgeable Informant Survey (KIS), and the Prospective Morbidity Survey (PMS). All data collection was done between September 2021 and March 2022.



Key Findings

Incidence of Induced Abortion



38,779 induced abortions occurred in Liberia, translating to an induced abortion rate of 30.7/ 1,000 women (15-49 Years) and an induced abortion ratio of 229 /1,000 live births.



There were regional variations in the regional abortion rates, with North Central having the lowest abortion rates (6.6/1000) and South-Central having the highest (49.7/1000).



14,555 women received care for abortion-related complications in facilities. **67%** went to public facilities and **74%** went to primary-level facilities.

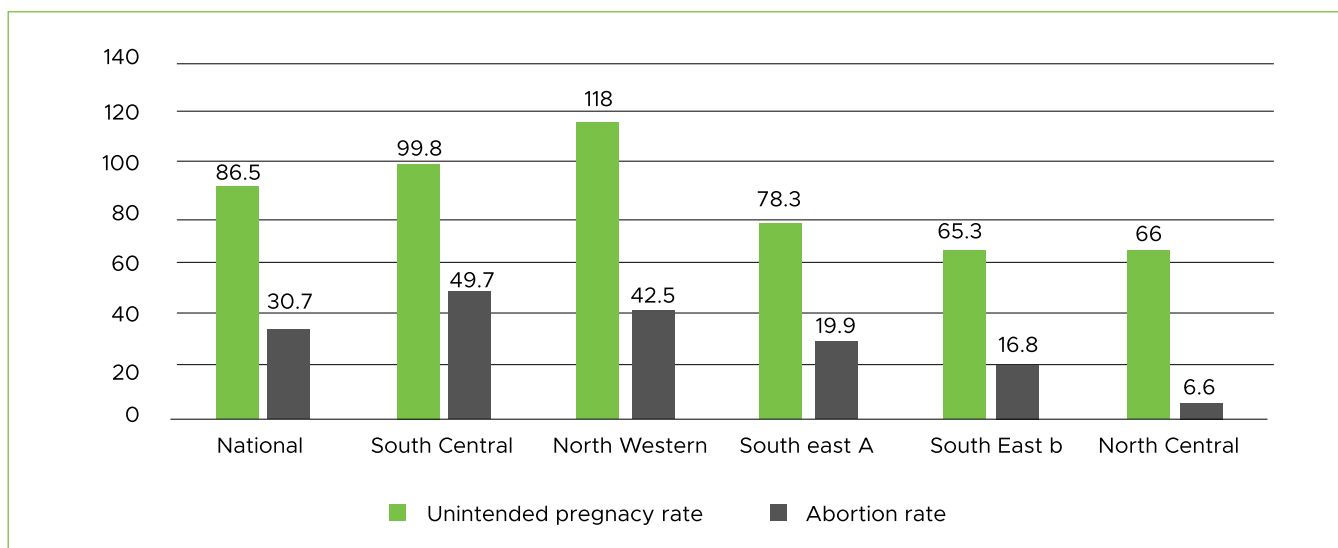


Unintended pregnancy rates and Induced abortion



The national unintended pregnancy rate was 86.5 per 1000 WRA, with wide regional differences (Figure 2).

Of all pregnancies in Liberia in 2021, **52%** were unintended, and of the unintended pregnancies, **35%** ended in abortions.



Annual induced abortion and unintended pregnancy rates per 1,000 women



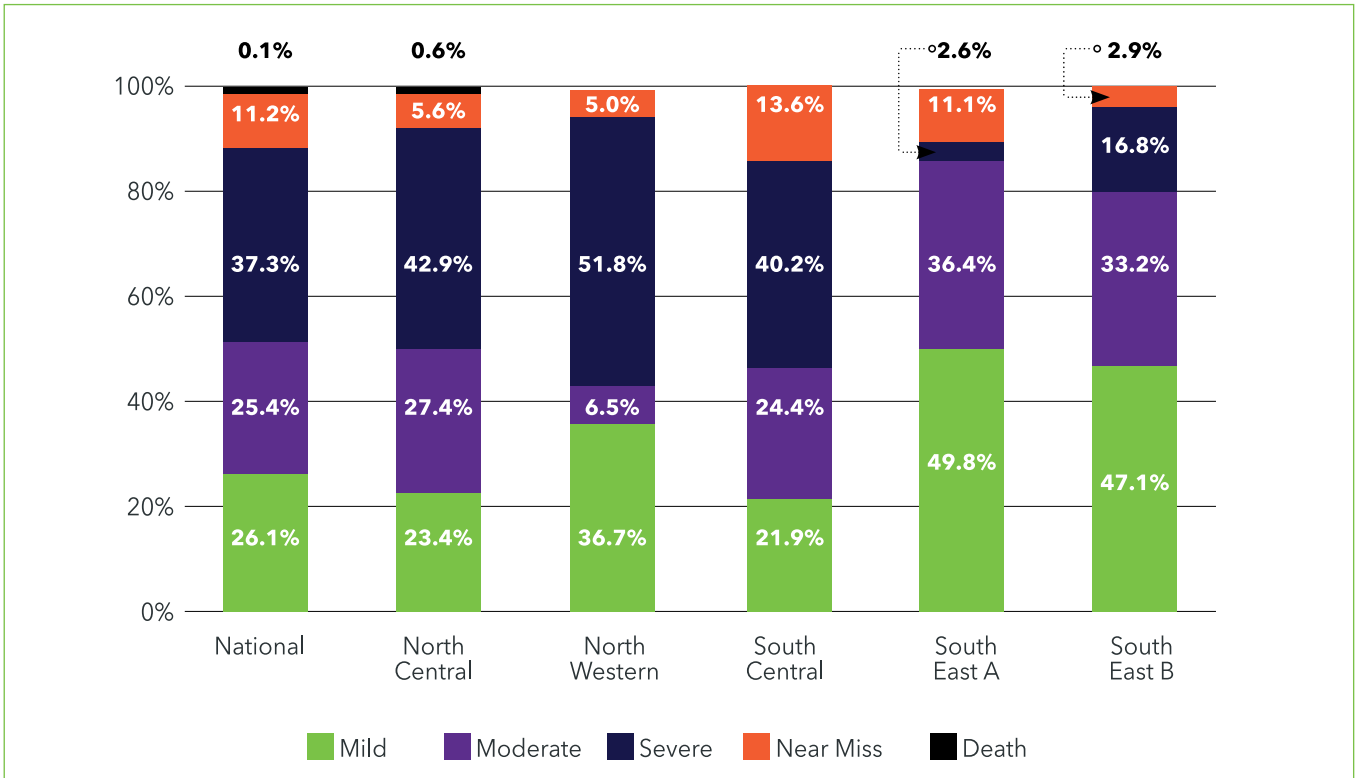
Severity of abortion complications



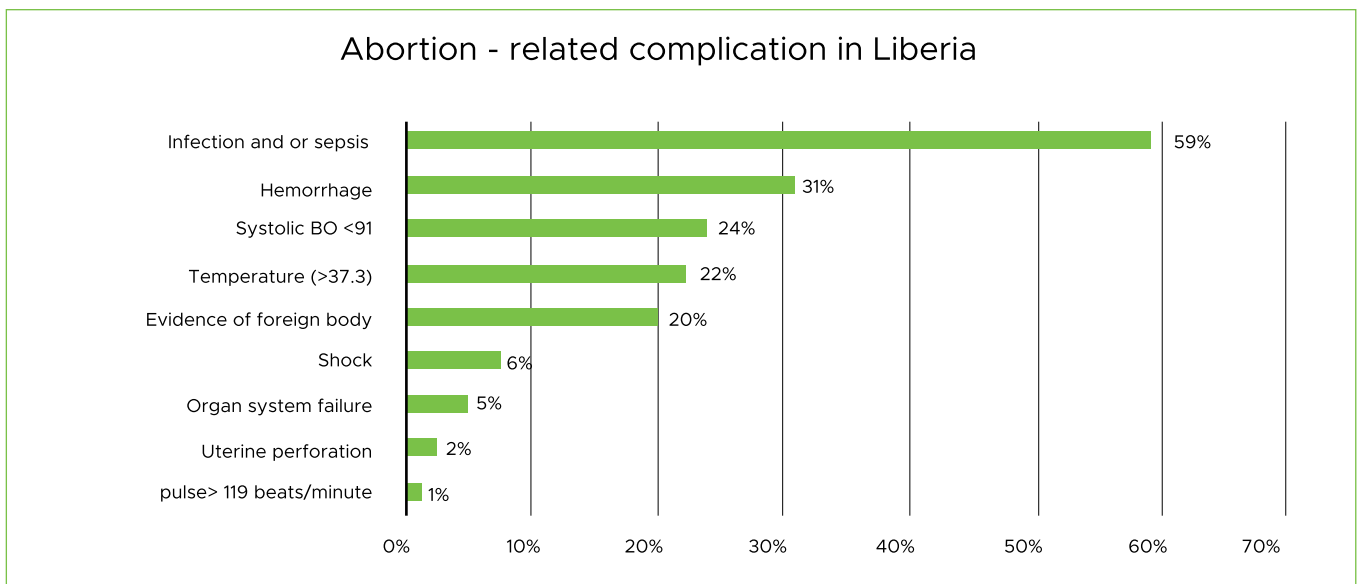
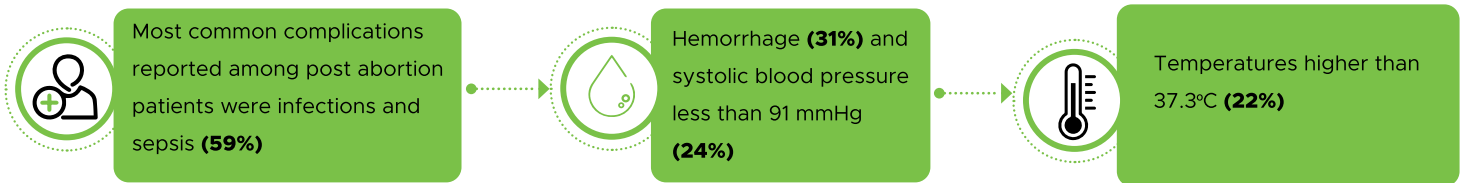
About **26%** of women seeking post-abortion care had mild complications, **25%** moderately severe, and **37%** severe complications. Nationally, 11% of all complications were near-miss or resulted in death.

Regions with highest proportions of women with severe complications were North-Western (**52%**), North Central (**43%**), and South-Central regions (**40%**), whereas South-East B (**17%**) and South-East A regions (**3%**) had the least proportion of women with severe abortion-related complications.

The regional variations in the severity of complications could be reflective of differences in facility infrastructure, provider capacity and knowledge of clinical practice, availability of supplies and commodities.



Severity of abortion complications among women treated in health facilities, Liberia, 2021



Prevalence of abortion complications among patients seeking care in facilities



Conclusion

Induced abortions are common in Liberia, and most of these induced abortions can be linked to unintended pregnancies. Most women present in health facilities with severe and near-miss complications that threaten their lives and can potentially result in death. Such complications tend to demand attendance by highly skilled providers (such as physicians and gynecologists) and long hospital admissions.



Recommendations

- Advance legal and policy reforms that address the causes of unsafe abortions and unintended pregnancies, and provide an enabling environment for access to sexual and reproductive health services for all women and girls.
- Expanding access to quality post-abortion care, including post-abortion contraception counseling and method provision at all health system levels. This also includes strengthening the capacity of lower-level health facilities and mid-level providers to provide quality care.
- Ensure full dissemination and implementation of the revised Public Health Law once passed to all communities, health facilities, and policymakers.
- Community education and awareness on the dangers of unsafe abortion, existing legal status of abortion and current access points (e.g. hospitals), stigma reduction, and awareness on a wide range of family planning methods available in Liberia.



Acknowledgments

This research was supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency - Grant No. 12103 through the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC).



Source

The information in this fact sheet can be found in: Abortion incidence and severity of complications in Liberia: *Key findings from the 2021 Liberia National Abortion Study* (Monrovia, Liberia: Ministry of Health, Liberia, African Population and Health Research Center, Clinton Health Access Initiative Liberia, and Guttmacher Institute 2022).