

Unintended Pregnancies and Unsafe Abortion and its Implications on Women of Reproductive Age in Malawi

Context

This fact sheet presents synthesized information/data on unintended pregnancy and unsafe abortion and its implications on women of reproductive age in Malawi. The content for this fact sheet was primarily drawn from secondary data on unintended pregnancy and abortion in Malawi, and developed jointly by the African Population and Health Research Center and SRHR Africa Trust Malawi.

In Malawi, each year, large numbers of women die from illegally induced abortions, contributing to high rates of maternal mortality.

Abortion is currently legal only to save the life of a pregnant woman.



Obtaining an abortion for any other reason is punishable by 7–14 years in prison.

In addition, abortion is highly stigmatized with health providers having negative attitudes and behavior and low levels of awareness and knowledge among women.



*Without quality PAC services, women are likely to have repeated unplanned pregnancies and unsafe abortions.



Key findings



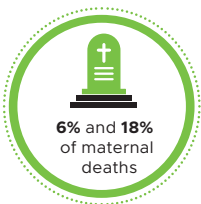
the abortion rate **increased** by 61%

In Malawi, the unintended pregnancy rate increased by **7%** between **1990–1994** and **2000–2004** and decreased by **13%** by **2015–2019**. During the same period, the abortion rate **increased by 61%**.



pregnancies were unintended

Between **2015 and 2019**, there were a total of **866,000** pregnancies annually. Of these, **491,000** pregnancies were unintended, and **134,000** ended in abortion.



In Malawi, complications from abortion have been estimated to account for between **6%** and **18%** of maternal deaths.



Data compiled in **2022** reveals there was an **increase** in the number of those seeking post-abortion treatment in both Blantyre and Lilongwe.



If all needs were met for contraceptive, maternal and newborn, and abortion care in Malawi, the sexual and reproductive health outcomes for women aged **15–49** and their newborns would **decrease dramatically**.

Policy recommendations



Full implementation of existing policies on sexual and reproductive health services: The Ministry of Health should fully implement policies that allow women of reproductive age, adolescents, and vulnerable populations to access sexual and reproductive health services and information.



Improve access to sexual and reproductive health services: The government needs to ensure that women of reproductive age, adolescent boys and girls, as well as vulnerable populations have access to quality reproductive health services without being stigmatized.



Increased awareness in the community:

National-level CSOs should work jointly with grassroots organizations together with the media to educate and provide accurate information to the community and engage religious leaders on the right for women to access sexual and reproductive health services, including post-abortion care.



Capacity strengthening for the media:

Civil society needs to continuously strengthen the capacity of journalists through workshops to equip the media with the right information on access to reproductive health services such as abortion and post-abortion care.



Expanding data availability:

Academia and research institutions need to continuously work with the relative ministries such as the ministries of health and education to generate and avail more data and evidence on safe and unsafe abortions in Malawi.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Unintended Pregnancies and Abortion Dissemination (UPAD) studies project was designed to give an opportunity for researchers from APHRC and Guttmacher Institute to share their research findings on unintended pregnancies and abortion in Kenya and Malawi. The project aims to accomplish this through deliberate, strategic, and planned engagement with key stakeholders such as the policymakers, civil society organizations, media, and SRHR advocates in Kenya and Malawi. The one-year project was funded by the Guttmacher Institute.

AUTHORS

Jane Mangwana, Kenneth Juma, Doris Omas and Judith Pangani