Unintended pregnancies (including unwanted and mistimed pregnancies) are high in Kenya and reflect the unmet need for contraception and family planning services in Kenya.

Induced abortion is common and mostly unsafe. Up to 14% of unintended pregnancies end in abortion conducted using non-sanctioned methods and procedures, resulting in a range of life-threatening complications.

More than 75% of women with induced abortion experience moderate to severe and near-miss complications (such as sepsis, hemorrhage, shock, and multiple organ failure) that require medical attention in health facilities, including admission into intensive care units.
Unsafe abortion is one of Kenya’s leading causes of maternal morbidity and mortality, and the maternal mortality ratio (362 per 100,000) is highest among women of age (25–39).

About 2600 women and girls die annually from complications associated with unsafe abortion, translating to about seven women daily.

While post-abortion care is important in addressing unsafe abortion-related deaths, several women still struggle to access quality and safe, comprehensive post-abortion care in Kenyan public health facilities, mainly due to barriers such as stigma, provider hostility, and unpreparedness of health facilities to offer complete services.

The ministries of health and education should fully implement all policies that allow women of reproductive age, adolescents, and vulnerable populations to access sexual and reproductive health services and information.

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.

More research and studies are needed on the impact of unsafe abortion, to understand the relationship between unsafe abortion and maternal mortality in Kenya and for use and engagement with policymakers to inform policy decisions.

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.

Call to action

The ministries of health and education should fully implement all policies that allow access for women of reproductive age, adolescents, boys, and vulnerable populations to quality reproductive health services and information. In addition, the government should decriminalize abortion and continuously engage all stakeholders, including civil society, religious, and traditional leaders, in addressing the stigma associated with abortion.

The content for this brief was primarily drawn from secondary data on unintended pregnancy and abortion in Kenya, and developed by APHRC.

Acknowledgements

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Credits

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Authors

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