

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

"Abortion? That's for Women!" Narratives and Experiences of Commercial Motorbike Riders in South-Western Uganda

Stella Nyanzi^{1*}, Barbara Nyanzi² and Kalina Bessie²

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Keppel Street, London WC1E 7HT¹; Medical Research Council Programme on AIDS in Uganda/ Uganda Virus Research Institute, Uganda²

*For Correspondence: E-mail: snyanzi@yahoo.com

Abstract

Although constitutionally illegal, induced abortion is a vital reproductive health option in Uganda. This paper analyses men's narratives about meanings of, and experiences with, abortion. Men play significant roles in abortion as instigators, facilitators, collaborators, transporters, advisors, informers, supporters or punishment givers. Many participants were knowledgeable about abortion. Attitudes were ambivalent, with initial reactions of denial and relegation of abortion to women's private domains. Further exploration, however, revealed active support and involvement of men. Interpretations of abortion ranged from 'dependable saviour' to 'deceptive sin'. Though a private action, abortion is socially scripted and often collectively determined by wider social networks of kinsmen, the community, peers, law and religion. A disjuncture exists between dominant public health discourse and the reality of local men who interact with women and girls as wives, lovers, sex sellers, mothers, daughters and sisters. Interventions targeting men about abortion should include safe sex education, provide safe abortion services and create stronger social support mechanisms. Policy and law should incorporate local knowledge and practice. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2005; 9[1]: 142-161)

Keywords: Abortion, attitude, perception, support

References

1. Ministry of Health, Department of Community Health, Reproductive Health Division. *Sexual and Reproductive Health Minimum Package for Uganda*. Kampala: Earnest Publishers, 2000.
2. Ministry of Health, Reproductive Health Division. Five-year strategic framework 2000-2004. Government of Uganda, Kampala, 2000.
3. Ratcliffe AA, Hill AG and Walraven G. Separate lives, different interests: male and female reproduction in the Gambia. *Bull World Health Organ* 2000; 78(5): 570-579.
4. Greene ME and Biddlecom AE. From absent to problematic: men in demographic accounts of reproduction. New York, Population Council, Research Policy Division 1997; working paper no. 103.
5. Presser H. Demography, feminism and the social policy nexus. *Pop Dev Rev* 1997; 23(2): 295-331.
6. Bledsoe C, Guyer JI and Lerner S. *Fertility and the Male Life Cycle in the Era of Fertility Decline*. Oxford: IUSSP/Oxford University Press, 1999.
7. Ringheim K. When the client is male: client-provider interaction from a gender perspective. *Inter Fam Plann Persp* 2002; 28(3): 170-175.
8. Nyanzi S, Nyanzi B and Kalina B. Urban husbands with rural wives: migration, employment and sexual health in a high HIV risk area in Uganda. *Urban Health Dev Bull* 2003; 6(1&2): 79-86.
9. Nyanzi S, Pool R and Kinsman J. Negotiation of sexual relationships among school-going adolescents. *AIDS Care* 2000; 13(1): 83-98.
10. Nyanzi S, Nyanzi B, Kalina B and Pool R. Mobility, sexual networks and exchange among *bodabodamen* in south western Uganda. *Culture Health Sex* 2004; 6(3): 239-254.
11. Uganda Bureau of Statistics. Uganda Population and Housing Census - Provisional Results, 2002; <http://www.ubos.org/2002census.html>
12. Directorate of District Health Services. Masaka district profile. DISH - Uganda, 2002; <http://www.uagandadisch.org/masaka.doc>
13. Levin A, Dmytraczenko T, McEuen M, Ssengooba F, Mirembe F, Okui O, et al. Costs of maternal health care services in Masaka District, Uganda. *Special Initiatives Report 16*. Bethesda, MD: Partnerships for Health Reform Project, Abt Associates Inc., 1999.
14. Morgan DL (Ed). *Successful Focus Group Discussions*. Newbury Park, CA and London: Sage, 1993.
15. Stewart DW and Shamdasani PN. *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice*. Newbury Park, CA and London: Sage, 1990.

16. Strauss A and Corbin J. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing the Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA and London: Sage, 1998.
17. Roseanne C (Ed.). *Anthropology of Pregnancy Loss: Comparative Studies in Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Neo-natal Death*. Berg Publishers, 1996.
18. Johnson-Hanks J. The lesser shame: abortion among educated women in southern Cameroon. *Soc Sci Med* 2002; 55(8): 1337-49.
19. Ahman E and Shah L. Unsafe abortion: worldwide estimates for 2000. *Reprod Health Matters* 2002; 10(19): 13-17.
20. Hollander D. Although abortion is highly restricted in Cameroon, it is not uncommon among young urban women. *Inter Fam Plann Persp* 2003; 29(1): 49-50.
21. Calves AE. Abortion risk and decision-making among young people in urban Cameroon. *Stud Fam Plann* 2002; 33(3): 249-260.
22. Varga CA. Pregnancy termination among South African adolescents. *Stud Fam Plann* 2002; 33(4): 238-298.
23. Henshaw SK, Singh S, Oye-Adeniran BA, Adewole IF, Iwere N and Cuca YP. The incidence of induced abortion in Nigeria. *Inter Fam Plann Persp* 1998; 24(2): 156-164.
24. Kebede S, Jira C and Mariam DW. A survey of illegal abortion in Jimma hospital, southwestern Ethiopia. *Ethiop Med J* 2000; 38(1): 35-42.
25. Koster-Oyekan W. Why resort to illegal abortion in Zambia? Findings of community-based study in Western Province. *Soc Sci Med* 1998; 46(10): 1303-12.
26. Johnston HB and Hill K. Induced abortion in the developing world: indirect estimates. *Inter Fam Plann Persp* 1996; 22: 108-114.
27. Luboga S. Adolescent sexuality in Uganda. Uganda Youth Conference: Freedom Extreme, Kampala Uganda, 2004.
28. Kinoti SL, Gafkin L, Benson J and Nicholson LA. Monograph on abortion issues in East, Central and Southern Africa: with policy implications. Arusha, Tanzania: The Commonwealth Regional Health Community Secretariat for East, Central and Southern Africa, 1994.
29. Marston C and Cleland J. Relationships between contraception and abortion: a review of the evidence. *Inter Fam Plann Persp* 2003; 29(1): 6-13.
30. Huntington D, Mensch B and Toubia N. A new approach to eliciting information about induced abortion. *Stud Fam Plann* 1993; 24(2): 120-124.
31. Khan ME and Manderson L. Focus groups in tropical diseases research. *Health Policy Plann* 1992; 7(1): 56-66.
32. Mundigo AI. Research methodology: lessons learnt. In: Mundigo AI and Indriso C (Eds.). *Abortion in the Developing World*. London: WHO & Zed Books, 1999, 465-476.
33. Barreto T, Campbell OMR, Davies JL, Fauveau V, Filippi V, Graham W, et al. Investigating induced abortion in developing countries: methods and problems. *Stud Fam Plann* 1992; 23(3): 159-170.
34. Helitzer-Allen D, Makhambera M and Wangel AM. Obtaining sensitive information: the need for more than focus groups. *Reprod Health Matters* 1994; 3: 75-82.
35. Le Compte MD and Schensul JL. *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1999.
36. Bernard HR. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Newbury Park: Sage, 1994.
37. Trotter R and Schensul J. Applied ethnographic research methods. In: Bernard HR (Ed.). *Handbook of Ethnographic Methods*. CA: Alamira Press, 1998.
38. The Penal Code Act of Uganda. 1950; <http://annualreview.law.harvard.edu/population/abortion/Uganda.abo.htm>
39. Rutgers S. Abortion admissions in rural Matebeleland north province. *Cent Afr J Med* 2001; 47(9-10): 214-220.
40. Airede LR and Ekele BA. Adolescent maternal mortality in Sokoto, Nigeria. *J Obstet Gynaecol* 2003; 23(2): 163-165.
41. Lema VM and Mpanga V. Post-abortion contraceptive acceptability in Blantyre, Malawi. *E Afr Med J* 2000; 77(9): 488-493.
42. Nyanzi S, Nyanzi B and Kalina B. Contemporary myths, sexuality misconceptions, information sources, and risk perceptions of *Bodabodamen* in southwest Uganda. *Sex Roles* 2005; 52(1-2):111-119.