

Abortion: knowledge and perceptions of adolescents in two districts in Kenya

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Abstract:

Pregnancy among adolescents is unplanned in many instances. Although some pregnant adolescents carry the pregnancy to term, abortion, in many instances unsafely induced, is a commonly sought solution in Kenya. **OBJECTIVE:** To determine adolescents' perceptions of induced abortion. **DESIGN:** A cross-sectional descriptive study carried out between July 1995 and June 1996. **SETTING:** An urban and a rural district in Kenya. **PARTICIPANTS:** Adolescents aged 10-19 years in schools in Nairobi and Kiambu districts, and a group of immediate post-abortion adolescent girls in some health facilities in Nairobi. **MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES:** The number of health programmes formulated and put into use, which are adolescent-friendly and providing information, education and communication on abortion issues. **DATA COLLECTION:** One thousand eight hundred and twenty adolescents were subjected to a self-administered questionnaire that collected demographic and health data as well as perceptions of induced abortion. Focus group discussions on perceptions of abortion were held with 12 groups of adolescents in schools and the information obtained recorded on paper and in a tape-recorder. **RESULTS:** One thousand nine hundred and fifty two adolescents, comprising of 1048 school girls (SG), 580 boys (SB), 192 post-abortion girls (PA) and 132 adolescents in the focus group discussions, formed the study sample. More than 90% were aware of induced abortion (IA). Knowledge of IA correlated positively with level of education ($P < 0.01$). Seventy one per cent of SG, 84% of PA and 40% of SB were aware of abortion-related complications, the most common being infections, death and infertility. Eighty three per cent of PA felt that complications were preventable by seeking care from a qualified doctor compared to one quarter each for the SB and SG. 56% PA, 69% SB and 72% SG felt that abortions were preventable. However, less than 40% proposed abstinence as a primary strategy. The most important source of information on abortion was the media followed by friends and teachers. **CONCLUSION:** Adolescents are aware of abortion and the related complications, but there is more variability in their knowledge and preventive measures.