

School-Leaving, Contraceptive Use and Induced Abortion Among Young Female RH Clinic Clients in Port Au Prince, Haiti

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Induced abortions occur in every country around the world. However, 60% of the world's women live in countries where abortion is illegal. 19 million pregnancies end in unsafe and/or illegal abortions. Annually, 68,000 women die from unsafe abortions. Young women are more likely to seek out unsafe abortion services than older women due to the stigmatization of pregnancy outside of wedlock and the conflicts represented by having a child and completing their education or achieving other goals during this time in their lives. Additionally, young people are less likely to have access to contraception or perceive the need for its use given patterns of sexual activity (Bankole, A., Singh, S. and Hass T., 1999; Calves, 2002; Ahmed et al, 2005).

The data for this study were collected in 2004 from youth users of reproductive health facilities in Port au Prince, Haiti. Young women and men between the ages of 15-24 years visiting one of four youth centers for reproductive health services, voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) or to receive condoms were approached for interview. In addition, young women visiting a reproductive health clinic for all ages were approached for interview. A total of 478 young men and 807 young women were interviewed. Only the data for young women are analyzed in this study due to a greater likelihood of underreporting of abortion among men. This study examines young women's experience with abortion and the effects of school-leaving on abortion, while controlling for other important sociodemographic factors using an events history model. Time varying information includes, when the young women started school and the age at which she left (if she has left), the respondents' age, age at first sex, contraceptive use at first sex, age at first and subsequent pregnancies, wantedness status of the last pregnancy, and age at abortion. Fixed covariates include socioeconomic variables such as religious affiliation, residence and relationship status.

Ninety percent of the young women surveyed in this study had already had sex. The lifetable median age at first sex was 17 years of age for this sample. Nearly 60% of the sexually experienced young women had ever been pregnant, and 13% of these reported modern contraceptive use prior to the last pregnancy. Overall, 71% of the ever pregnant women stated that their last pregnancy was not wanted. Twenty-five percent of first pregnancies were reported to have ended in abortion, while a quarter of young women with subsequent pregnancies also reported ending those with induced abortion.

Preliminary results indicate that being in school results in a significantly higher likelihood of ending a pregnancy in abortion. Use of contraception at first sex was not significantly associated with increased odds of ending a pregnancy in abortion. Girls who became pregnant at younger ages were also more likely to terminate the pregnancy.

Although these data were collected from a population with special characteristics it is quite illuminating for those interested in the factors associated with induced abortion among young women. The young women studied represent those who are motivated to seek access to reproductive health services. Sexual activity levels are high, as are levels of contraceptive use compared to general female population 15-24 of Port au Prince. While it is difficult to determine whether their abortion experience caused them to seek out reproductive health services, we can glean some insights into the effects of school-leaving, contraceptive use, age at first sex, age at first pregnancy, and contraceptive use at the time of conception during their fairly short reproductive lives from the information provided by this study.

The information generated from this study will help FOSREF, the primary NGO providing reproductive health services to young people in Port au Prince to better target their educational and informational outreach efforts to young people. It should also serve to inform education policy on the importance of keeping young women in school. Last but not least, it should sensitize policymakers to the magnitude of the problem of induced abortion under unsafe circumstances among young women who are able to access reproductive health services. It may also provide insights into the unmeasured magnitude of the problem among young women who have not yet been able to access similar services.