The Individual- and Household-Level Cost of Unsafe Abortion in Uganda

Ugandan law allows abortion under some circumstances, but laws and policies on abortion are unclear and are often interpreted inconsistently, making it difficult for women and the medical community to understand what is legally permitted.

As a result, almost all abortions in the country take place under clandestine settings and pose a serious threat to women’s health and well-being.

Unsafe abortion is one of the leading causes of maternal morbidity and mortality in the country, though the exact incidence is unknown. In 2015, Uganda had a maternal mortality ratio of 343 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births—well above the average of 239 per 100,000 among all developing countries.

The cost of treating complications of unsafe abortion drains already scarce resources from the national health system and places a heavy economic burden on women and their families.

ABORTION EXPENSES

According to a 2011–2012 survey of 1,338 women who received postabortion care at 27 health facilities, on average, Ugandan women paid 59,600 shillings (US$23) for their abortion procedure and any treatment received prior to arriving at a health facility.

Including the cost of treatment for complications arising from the abortion procedure brought the average cost of abortion to 128,000 shillings (US$49) per woman.

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NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCE FOR CHILDREN

Women treated for postabortion care reported that their unsafe abortion had adverse effects on their productivity or that of someone else’s in their household (73%), their children’s well-being (60%) or their household’s economic well-being (34%).

ECONOMIC LOSS AND REDUCED PRODUCTIVITY

Women staying one night in a health facility had more than twice the odds of experiencing some economic deterioration of their household, compared with women who had not had an overnight stay.

Women who spent one or more nights in a health facility were more than twice as likely as those who did not to suffer loss of productivity or to experience the loss of economic assets (such a home, farm or livestock), to lose a job, to incur debt or reduce consumption.

Women who incurred higher post-abortion care expenses were 60% more likely than those with lower expenses to have seen their economic circumstances worsen.

Loss of productivity was more commonly reported by married women than by unmarried women.

Women’s access to effective contraceptives needs to be improved to address the root cause of most abortions: unintended pregnancy.
Consequences of Unsafe Abortion

Most women reported that their unsafe abortion had one or more adverse effects.

- Loss of productivity: 73%
- Negative consequences for their children*: 60%
- Deterioration in economic circumstances†: 34%

% women receiving postabortion care

*Child had less to eat or was unable to attend school. †Loss of economic assets (home, farm or livestock) or job, increased debt or reduced consumption.

pregnancy. This is particularly important in light of the high cost of unsafe abortion. It would be much more cost effective for women to have access to cheaper contraceptives than to have to undergo costly and unsafe procedures.

- Women need accurate information on the availability of contraceptive services, and greater efforts are needed to ensure that poor women, in particular, are aware of and have access to these services.

Most data in this fact sheet are from Sundaram A et al., Documenting the individual- and household-level cost of unsafe abortion in Uganda, International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 2013, 39(4):174–184. Additional resources can be found in the version available at https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/individual-and-household-level-cost-unsafe-abortion-uganda