

POLICE AS PARTNERS IN PROMOTING ACCESS TO ABORTION IN GHANA

ACP/DR SAMUEL OTU-NYARKO
SUPT/MR. JULIUS YANKSON

GHANA



- Independence in 1957
- Population 26 million
- Majority Christianity (70%)
- 240,000 Square kilometers
- Strong democracy
- Elections in Dec 2016

BACKGROUND

- 98% of all abortion-related deaths occur in developing countries (WHO 2011)
- High morbidity and mortality due to illegal and unsafe abortions
- 10% of maternal deaths are due to unsafe abortion

BACKGROUND

- 30% of all maternal deaths in a KTH were due to unsafe abortion (Prof Akorsa)
- 22% of all maternal deaths at KATH were due to unsafe abortion (Deganus)
- Huge perception of illegality of abortion in Ghana
- Police harassment of safe providers

1960 ABORTION LAW

- **CRIMINAL CODE OF 1960, ACT 29
SECTIONS 58 AND 59**
- Inherited from the British
- This law made abortion illegal
- The doctor and patient were all liable under the law to 10 years imprisonment

LEGAL INDICATIONS FOR ABORTION IN GHANA as amended in 1985 PNDC law 102

- Risk to life or injury to the physical or **mental health**
- Rape, incest, defilement
- Substantial risk that serious fetal abnormality
- Done by registered **medical practitioner** and at a **registered place**

LEGAL INDICATIONS FOR ABORTION IN GHANA as amended in 1985 PNDC law 102

- One of the most liberal on the continent
- However, the knowledge of the amended law is low
- Largely unknown by the Police, leading to harassment of providers
- Widespread perception of illegality drives it underground
- Situation exploited by quacks, herbalists etc.

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS 1/2

- 192 Police officers
- The goal was to determine the knowledge level of Police officers of the Ghana abortion law
- 95.3% knew of someone who had died after an abortion
- Majority 55.3% had a negative attitude towards abortion

KEY SURVEY FINDINGS 2/2

- Almost 80% could not quote any relevant sections of the abortion law
- 15.6% when it was as a result of rape
- Less than 5% responded correctly that abortion could be legally done in Ghana in case of a mentally challenged victim, abnormality of the fetus, incest
- 90% were not aware that apart from Doctors, trained midwives could also legally carry out abortions

SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

- low level of knowledge about the conditions under which abortion could be done legally
- Most of the respondents had been affected by or had encountered abortion issues
- Most had negative views about abortion though they had advised someone to go for an abortion before
- Abortion law was not taught in training institutions

STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING THE FINDINGS

- Identifying a champion
- Getting the police top command to buy in
- Three levels of training, each with different approaches

1. POLICE RECRUITS

2. CADET OFFICERS

3. SERVING POLICE OFFICERS

TRAINING OF RECRUITS



TRAINING OF CADET OFFICERS



PUBLIC HEALTH DEPT. GHANA POLICE SERVICE

TRAINING FOR SERVING POLICE OFFICERS



TRAININGS FOR SERVING POLICE OFFICERS



TRAINING FOR SERVING POLICE OFFICERS



PUBLIC HEALTH DEPT. GHANA POLICE SERVICE

Achievements

- Very high level acceptance within the Police High Command
- Trained about 5,000 officers
- Peer educators, who educate colleagues
- Police know where to get safe service
- Fewer harassments of legal providers whilst illegal ones are gradually being flushed out
- Others eager to go for the trainings

CHALLENGES

- Parents insist on prosecution of abortion cases involving daughters even when it was done safely and legally
- Frequent transfers of trained officers
- Conflicts of religion, moral values and the law
- Not core police work

COMMENTS AT MONITORING VISITS 1/2

- “Abortion had been legal long ago, just that we did not know”
- “We now counsel people who come with abortion cases. We give them information about legal abortion and even point out where it could be done safely”
- “I am better equipped to handle abortion cases”
- “People are surprised when we advice on centers for safe abortion, thinking that they were illegal and owners of such facilities should rather be put behind bars”

COMMENTS AT MONITORING VISITS 2/2

- “We now give protection to those performing abortions legally and even refer cases to them. We look out for the quacks for prosecution”
- “I educated my church members”
- “I hosted two radio shows on laws on abortion in Ghana and safe, legal abortion. Many callers were surprised!”

CONCLUSION

- In countries with favorable abortion laws it must not be taken for granted that law enforcement will be supportive
- Ignorance of the law could be a factor for harassment leading to difficulties for legal and safe service providers
- Law enforcement must be recognized as a key stakeholder and engaged right from the inception of programmes on safe abortion

ABORTION STATISTICS IN GHANA (MOH, GHANA)

YEAR	NUMBER OF ABORTIONS
2011	16,182
2010	10,785
2009	8,717

THANK YOU MEDAASE

