

Induced Abortion in Uganda: How much has it changed between 2003 and 2013?

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Background: In Uganda, induced abortion is prohibited except to save a woman's life. Nevertheless, many women seek an abortion when they face an unintended pregnancy. The restrictive abortion law compels the persistence of the practice in secrecy and often under unsafe conditions. In 2003, nearly 300,000 induced abortions were estimated to occur each year in Uganda. Since then, no other research on abortion incidence has been conducted in the country.

Methods: Data from 418 health facilities were used to estimate the number and rates of induced abortion in 2013. An indirect estimation methodology was used to calculate the annual incidence of induced abortions – nationally and by major regions. The use of a comparable methodology in an earlier study permits assessment of trends between 2003 and 2013.

Results: In 2013, an estimated 128,280 women were treated for abortion complications and 309,900 induced abortions occurred, both slightly up from 110,000 and 294,000 in 2003, respectively. The national abortion rate was 37 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-49, down from 51 in 2003. Regional variation in abortion rates is quite large. Kampala has the highest abortion rate (78 per 1,000 women 15-49), well above the national average rate, followed by Central 1 (49 per 1,000), East Central (48 per 1,000) and West Nile (46 per 1,000). Abortion rates similar to the national average were found in the Central 2, South West, Karamoja and North regions (ranging from 30-37 per 1,000). The lowest abortion rates were found in the Western and Eastern regions (17 and 19 per 1,000, respectively). The overall pregnancy rate also declined from 326 to 284; however the proportion of pregnancies that was unintended only changed modestly, from 48.6% to 51.3%.

Conclusion: Unsafe abortion remains very common among Ugandan women. Although the overall pregnancy rate and the abortion rate declined in the past decade, the proportion of pregnancies that were unintended remains high. These findings reflect an increase in the use of modern contraception, but also suggest that some women are still having difficulty practicing contraception effectively. Improved access to contraceptive services and abortion-related care are still needed.

Introduction

In Uganda, abortion is permitted only when the life of a pregnant woman is in danger. However, many women resort to an induced abortion, often carried out under unsafe conditions and by a provider that doesn't have the skills to perform the procedure, with serious consequences for their health.

Available evidence indicates that unsafe abortion contributes to maternal mortality in Uganda. In 2006, the Ugandan Ministry of Health estimated that abortion-related causes accounted for 26% of maternal deaths [1]. A 2007 study

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conducted in 553 health facilities to monitor provision of obstetric care services found that abortion was responsible for 11% of maternal deaths [2]. More recently, in the 2010-2015 Strategic Plan for the Health Sector, the MOH estimated that 8% of maternal deaths were due to unsafe abortion [3].

Unsafe abortion is also a major contributing factor to abortion morbidity, much of which is treated in the health care system of Uganda. In 2003, it was estimated that over 85,000 women were treated for complications arising from abortions [4]; the aforementioned 2007 study also found that about 40% of admissions for emergency obstetric care were the result of unsafe abortions [2]. Treatment of complications from unsafe abortion consumes a significant portion of the total expenditure for reproductive health in Uganda. The amount of money spent on postabortion care services in 2010 was estimated to be USD \$13.9 million, which corresponds to 4.1% of the total government expenditure on health, estimated at USD \$350 million [5].

Measures of fertility preferences, contraceptive use and unmet need for contraception suggest that the level of abortion in Uganda is likely to remain high [6]. On average, Ugandan women have two more children than desired and 43% of all births in the five years preceding the 2011 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS) were unplanned [7]. Use of modern contraceptive methods among Ugandan married women has increased in the past decade from 14% to 26%, but the level is still low compared with some other developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, where as much as 33% to 64% of married women were using modern methods [8]. Unmet need for contraception—that is, the percent of women not using any method of contraception among those who do not want a child soon or who do not want any (more) children—has remained high during the past decade: 38% of married women had an unmet need for contraception in 2011 [7].

In this paper, we present new national and regional estimates of induced abortion incidence for 2013, using the Abortion Incidence Complications Method (AICM), same methodology used in the 2003 study.

Methods

The AICM methodology relies on two main data sources: A survey of health facilities and a survey of health professionals knowledgeable about the conditions of abortion service provision in the country. The first survey provides information on the number of women treated in the country's health facilities for abortion complications in a given period. The second survey provides information needed to estimate the proportion of women obtaining abortions who have complications and who obtain treatment at a medical facility.

Results

Preliminary results: not to be circulated or cited.

Abortion morbidity (Table 1)

- In 2013, 128,280 women were treated for spontaneous and induced abortion complications in Uganda, with 91,960 or 72% receiving treatment for complications related to induced abortion.
- The national rate of hospitalization for induced abortion is 11. In Kampala, this rate is substantially higher (23 per 1,000) than both the national average and any other region in the country.

Abortion Incidence (Table 2)

- It is estimated that 309,900 induced abortions occurred in Uganda in 2013, with a range from 188,040 to 433,430
- The induced abortion rate for the country is 37 per 1,000 women aged 15-49, with a range of 23 per 1,000 to 52 per 1,000.
- Abortion rates vary greatly between Kampala and the remaining regions. Kampala has the highest abortion rate (78 per 1,000 women aged 15-49), while Western and Eastern have the lowest rates (18 and 19 per 1,000 respectively). In the remaining seven regions, the abortion rates range from 30 to 49 per 1,000.

Trends in Abortion Incidence: between 2003 and 2013: (Table 3)

- The number of induced abortions increased 5%
- The abortion rate decreased by 28%, from 51 to 37 per 1,000
- The total Ugandan female population aged 15-49 increased 44%.
- The total number of live births increased 30%.
- The total fertility rate decreased 10% while the wanted fertility rate decreased 15%
- Use of modern contraceptives increased from 14% to 26%; unmet need among married women barely changed from 40% to 38% whereas unmet need among unmarried sexually active remained at the high level of 45%.

Unintended Pregnancies (Table 4)

- There were 2,364,700 pregnancies to women aged 15-49 in Uganda in 2013. The overall pregnancy rate was 284 per 1,000 women. The rate was lowest in Kampala (237 per 1,000) and highest in East Central (326 per 1,000).
- The unintended pregnancy rate was 146 per 1,000 women aged 15-49. It varies quite widely by region: Karamoja has the lowest (73 per 1,000 women), while five regions (South West, Western, Kampala, Central 1, Central 2) have rates between 118 and 149 per 1,000, and the remaining four regions exhibit high rates between 169 and 180 per 1,000 women.
- In 2013, more than half of the pregnancies Ugandan women had were unplanned (51%).

Table 1. Measures for calculating the number of women treated for induced abortion complications, by region, Uganda, 2013

Region	No. of Women aged 15-49*	No. of live births	No. of women treated			% of all abortion complications that are due to induced abortions	Induced abortion complications treatment rate†
			For spontaneous or induced abortions	For miscarriages	For induced abortions		
Total	8,317,000	1,686,471	128,282	36,322	91,960	72	11
Kampala	816,916	102,750	22,467	3,422	19,045	85	23
Central 1	914,994	165,003	16,958	3,751	13,207	78	14
Central 2	861,683	182,515	12,506	4,721	7,785	62	9
East Central	833,910	189,666	15,393	4,703	10,690	69	13
Eastern	1,218,698	296,701	11,939	5,647	6,292	53	5
Karamoja	274,746	61,353	3,803	642	3,161	83	12
North	702,443	146,112	11,031	2,927	8,104	73	12
South West	1,049,845	202,956	13,532	3,040	10,492	78	10
West Nile	478,538	98,885	9,011	2,241	6,770	75	14
Western	1,165,228	240,529	11,642	5,229	6,413	55	6

Table 2. Estimated number of induced abortions, abortion rates and abortion ratios, by region Uganda 2013

Region	Number of Induced Abortions			Abortion Rates‡			Abortion Ratios§		
	Low estimate*	Medium estimate†	High estimate*	Low estimate*	Medium estimate†	High estimate*	Low estimate*	Medium estimate†	High estimate*
Total	188,041	309,904	433,426	23	37	52	8	13	17
Kampala	12,585	63,973	116,189	15	78	142*	9	33	46
Central 1	35,834	44,361	52,961	39	49	58	15	18	21
Central 2	18,948	26,150	33,434	22	30	39	8	11	13
East Central	29,038	40,161	51,415	35	48	62	11	15	18
Eastern	11,425	23,637	36,033	9	19	30	3	6	9
Karamoja	8,145	10,158	12,188	30	37	44	10	12	14
North	15,218	26,042	37,013	22	37	53	8	13	17
South West	26,161	33,307	40,519	25	32	39	10	12	14
West Nile	17,612	21,754	25,936	37	46	54	13	15	18
Western	13,075	20,359	27,738	11	18	24	4	7	9

Table 3. National trends in abortion incidence and related measures: 2003-2013 and 2000/01-2011

Measure	2003*	2013	% change
	<i>Revised figures</i>		
No. of women aged 15-49	5,769,000	8,317,000	44
No. of live births	1,295,409	1,686,471	30
No. of pregnancies	1,877,673	2,366,055	26
Total fertility rate	6.9	6.2	-10
Total wanted fertility rate	5.3	4.5	-15
No. of women treated in health facilities			
For any abortion	109,926	128,282	17
For spontaneous abortion	25,982	36,322	740
For induced abortion	83,944	91,960	10
Measures of abortions			
No. of induced abortions	293,804	309,904	5
Abortion rate†	51	37	-28
Abortion ratio‡	16	13	-19
Induced abortion complications treatment rate§	15	11	-27
Antecedents on abortion			
	2000/01	2011	% change
Contraceptive use/unmet need			
<i>Among married women aged 15-49</i>			
% using any method	23	30	30
% using traditional method (periodic abstinence and withdrawal)	9	4	-55
% using modern method¶	14	26	86
% with unmet need for modern contraception**	51	38	-26
<i>Among unmarried sexually active women aged 15-49</i>			
% using any method	44	43	-2
% using traditional method (periodic abstinence and withdrawal)	6	5	-17
% using modern methods¶	38	38	0
% with unmet need for modern contraception**	45	45	0
Unplanned fertility			
% of births unplanned	38	43	13
% of births mistimed	24	32	33
% of births unwanted	14	12	-14

*All data for 2003 was recalculated due to UN Population adjustments.

† The abortion rate is the number of abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-49; ‡ The abortion ratio is the number of abortions per 100 pregnancies;.

§ The abortion treatment rate is the number of induced abortion complications treated in health facilities per 1,000 women 15-49; ¶ Includes pill, IUD, injectables, implants, spermicides, condoms, and female and male sterilization. ** Women have an unmet need for modern contraception if they want no more children or do not want a child in the next two years, are married or unmarried and currently sexually active and are using traditional method of contraception (periodic abstinence or withdrawal) or no method at all. Sources: Uganda DHS 2000/01, Uganda DHS 2011

Table 4. Estimated pregnancies, pregnancy rates, and distribution of pregnancies by outcome, nationally and regionally, Uganda 2013

Regions	No. of pregnancies	Pregnancy rate*	Unintended pregnancy rate†	% pregnancies that are unintended‡	% of pregnancies ending in				
					Planned births	Planned pregnancies ending in miscarriages	Unplanned births	Abortion	Unintended pregnancies ending in miscarriages
Total	2,364,660	284	146	51	41	8	31	13	7
Kampala	193,670	237	133	56	37	7	17	33	7
Central 1	246,801	270	133	50	42	8	25	18	7
Central 2	247,783	288	149	52	40	8	34	11	8
East Central	271,777	326	180	55	37	8	33	15	8
Eastern	382,043	313	169	54	39	8	39	6	8
Karamoja	84,798	309	73	24	64	13	9	12	3
North	203,981	290	176	61	33	7	39	13	9
South West	280,185	267	118	44	47	9	26	12	6
West Nile	142,591	298	171	57	36	7	34	15	8
Western	311,031	267	128	48	43	9	34	7	8

* The pregnancy rate is the number of pregnancies (live births + abortions + miscarriages) per 1,000 women aged 15-49 per year; †Number of unintended pregnancies (unplanned births + abortions + unintended pregnancies ending as miscarriages) per 1,000 women aged 15-49 per year; ‡The percent of pregnancies that are unintended is the number of unintended pregnancies divided by the total number of pregnancies per 1000 women; Notes: We assume

that the age specific fertility rates (ASFR) and the wantedness status of births based on the UDHS 2011 applies to 2013; population estimates for 2013 were obtained by interpolating the UN 2012 population data for 2010-2015.
Sources: HFS, 2012 UN Population data

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