

Illegal abortions land over 7,000 Nam women in hospital

Contributed by Alexa Kern and Patience Nyangove
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ABORTION remains a serious health problem in Namibia with 7,147 women having been admitted in hospital over a three-year period with abortion related complications, Minister of Health and Social Services Dr Richard Kamwi has said. In a speech read on his behalf by his deputy Petrina Haingura during the Family Planning and Unsafe Abortion Day, yesterday Dr Kamwi said the figures are from a three year study conducted from November 1995 to October 1998 in 17 hospitals countrywide. In that study which is the only one ever done in Namibia, 107 maternal deaths were identified of which 16% had occurred because of abortion related complications.

“Abortion related deaths were also more common among young women. It was also found that about one third of the deaths were due to septic and illegally induced abortion most likely unsafely performed somewhere.”

The study also found that 20% of women admitted with abortion related complications said their pregnancies were unwanted while 59% of the women dying of abortion related complications were under the age of 25.

Dr Kamwi said the situation was worrisome adding that they was no proper excuse for this unhappy situation as family planning services were available at all health facilities in the country.

The Health Minister also appealed to men folk to get involved in family planning and show responsible leadership.

He commented that the Namibia Planned Parenthood Association was there to ensure that all Namibians have access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services.

“Through the commemoration of this day (Family Planning and Unsafe Abortion Day-NAPPA), we as Namibians must take pride of our inventiveness, as we strive to bring about desired change in behaviour in our society, most especially in our youth.”

Speaking at the same occasion NAPPA country Director Sam Ntelamo said reproductive health services are largely still not accessible to many youth.

“Firstly, young people feel the services are not directed to them or either the RH services are not available at all to the youth,” he said adding that this oversight could be among the contributing factors to the increase in the number of productive health unmet needs experienced by Namibia’s youth. Ntelamo said issues of baby dumping and infanticide are of concern in Namibia and needed to be addressed urgently. He however was quick to point out that without any relevant data it was impossible to estimate the true extent of unsafe abortion, infanticide and baby dumping; as some cases may go unreported.

Ntelamo said between 2003 and 2007 police recorded 74 cases of concealment of birth with these figures suggesting that infanticide and baby dumping are on the increase.

“In the absence of reliable data, we call on those that are financially able to assist to conduct a study on unsafe abortion and baby dumping-of which we believe that the results will provide implementers, scholars and policy makers with empirical evidence on the severity of this problem.”