

Ignorance increasing illegal abortions - report

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KAMPALA. Mass ignorance of the abortion laws and reproductive health policies has prompted women to turn to unsafe abortions and increased the incidence of unwanted pregnancies in the country, a new research reveals.

The research findings are contained in a report: Stakes are high: The tragic impact of unsafe abortion and inadequate access to contraception in Uganda.

It was done by Centre for

Reproductive Rights, International Women's Human Rights Clinic and O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law of Georgetown in USA, who released the report on Wednesday in Kampala.

The report chronicles personal testimonies of women expressing widespread ignorance and false impression that abortion in Uganda is illegal in all circumstances without any exception.

The Regional Director for Africa at the Centre for Reproductive Rights, Ms Evelyn Opondo, while releasing the report, said although Uganda's laws permit abortion in specific circumstances to save a woman's life or on mental and physical health grounds, many women don't know about this.

"The perceived illegality of abortion services in Uganda has led

to stigma, fear and secrecy driving far too many women to desperate measures to end a pregnancy," said Ms Opondo.

"Leaders in Uganda must not only clarify the abortion laws, but

KEY INFORMATION

Policy. Dr Anthony Mbonye, the acting director general of health services at the Ministry of Health, said the ministry last year released a post-abortion management policy, which provides a comprehensive management of post-abortion complications and will reduce deaths occasioned by unsafe abortions.

also broaden access to information among healthcare professionals and the public at large about reproductive health care, including access to family planning and safe abortion services," she added.

Dr Charles Kiggundu, the vice president of the Association of Obstetrics and Gynaecologists of Uganda, said each year an estimated 297,000 induced abortions occur in the country, with nearly 85,000 women receiving treatment for complications from unsafe abortion. He further explained that about 65,000 women experience complications arising from unsafe abortion but do not receive any treatment.

According to Ministry of Health, unsafe abortion is one of the most easily preventable causes of maternal mortality in Uganda yet more than

a quarter of maternal deaths occur because of unsafe abortion mainly due to ignorance or lack of understanding of reproductive health laws.

"Studies have shown that women's ability to exercise reproductive autonomy, including access to effective contraception and safe abortion services, leads to better health for women but it is tragic that women in Uganda continue to lose their lives as a consequence of their ability to become pregnant," Dr Kiggundu bemoaned.

The testimonies were obtained in March 2014 within Kampala and Mubende districts. The interviews were conducted by students from O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law of Georgetown with supervisors from Leadership and Advocacy for Women in Africa and Centre and Law Clinic.