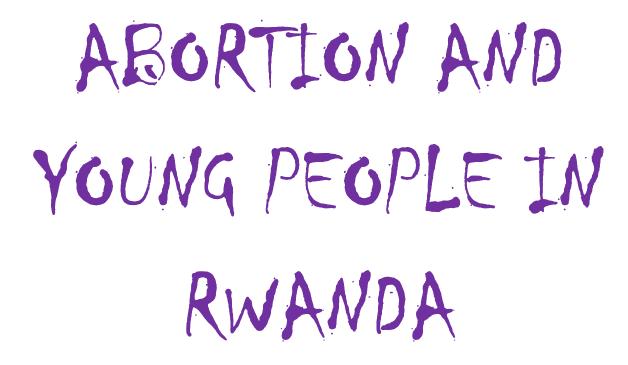
ASSOCIATION RWANDAISE POUR LE BIEN ETRE FAMILIAL (ARBEF)



A BOOKLET OF PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT ABORTION COLLECTED AND COMPILED BY YOUTH ACTION MOVEMENT RWANDA

JOIN THE ACTION, PROTECT THE FUTURE!

KIGALI, 2011

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Family planning association of Rwanda, (ARBEF) is a local non-profit, non-governmental organization that is registered as an organization under operation code 004/2011 since 1987. ARBEF promotes sexual reproductive health and rights and is a full member association of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).

Among ARBEF's volunteers, there is a section composed of young people named Youth Action Movement (YAM) which is a group of young people that advocates for sexual reproductive health and rights of young people at national and international levels.

YAM is established in more than 45 African countries which are member associations of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). In Rwanda, it is the youth branch of the ARBEF. YAM is established in the four provinces of the country and capital city. Most of the volunteers are university students.

YAM, through the funding of Youth Incentives, the international program on sexuality, based in Holland, has been running a project with the aim of raising public debate around the topic of abortion. This booklet is one of the outputs of this project.

The present booklet is one of the realizations of YAM members. It would not have been possible without the support and participation of each member. We acknowledge the contribution of all the young people and ARBEF staff that gave the support in this project and also contributed by sharing their stories regarding abortion issue in Rwanda.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARBEF Association Rwandaise pour le Bien Etre Familial

(Rwandese Association for Family Welfare)

YAM Youth Action Movement

IPPF International Planned Parenthood Federation

ICPD International Conference on Population and Development

MDGs Millennium Development Goals

NUR National University of Rwanda

ISAE Higher Institute of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry

KIU Kigali Independent University

KIE Kigali Institute of Education

WHO World Health Organization

PAC Post Abortion Care

HIV Human Immune deficiency Virus

AIDS Acquired Immune deficiency Syndrome

STIs Sexually Transmitted Infections

FOREWORD

"Some grown-ups think we are too young to know, they should know that we are too young to die" A 19 year old youth advocate

Unsafe abortion is a concern in Rwandan young women. Although it is difficult to determine exactly the magnitude of the problem because there has been no proper research about it, the study conducted by Paulin et. al $(2009)^1$ showed that 10 per 1,000 women aged 15-49 were treated for complications of abortion in health facilities in Rwanda, the number being even higher when it includes women who experience complications and are not documented. For young people aged 10 - 24, this problem is undoubtedly far worse given that girls are condemned for being pregnant or giving birth to children outside of marriage. Those who have parents are often thrown out of their parent's homes and those who are in schools are often dismissed when they get pregnant.

Still worse, abortion law in Rwanda is very restrictive and it blocks the development of initiatives related to abortion services. This law disregards the various reasons for which unintended pregnancies among young people occur including the lack of emergency contraception and low access to quality family planning services. In Rwanda, the unmet need for contraception stands at 38% in women aged 15-49 and for young people this need is far high because contraception is generally looked at as a practice for married people. To the factors above adds that of sexual violence: in 2008, UNIFEM conducted a study in four districts and found that 86% of women who responded had undergone a forced sexual intercourse or attempted sexual intercourse in the family or a familiar environment, such as the workplace². The above environments are conducive to high rates of unintended pregnancies, some of which appearing even in the context of incest. With fear of financial difficulties to raise the child, the pain during labor, health and social problems, the needs for abortion increase. Being denied safe abortion services, young women use unsafe means such as traditional herbs to abort pregnancies. This results in various complications which lead to abortion-related morbidity and mortality of young women while men who made them pregnant get scot free of any charge. This increases young women's vulnerability and perpetuates gender inequality. In fact, this is an

¹ Basinga, P., Moore, A., Susheela, S., Suzette, A., Liz, C., Birungi, F. and Ngabo, F. (2009) *Abortion Incidence in Rwanda*. Kigali: School of Public Health.

² http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/baseline_survey_on_sexual_and_gender_based_violence_rwanda.pdf

unacceptable situation for young women to face, making the promotion of safe abortion services increasingly urgent.

All young people-that is, individuals aged 10-24 years have the right to comprehensive, high quality information, education and services that promote their sexual and reproductive well-being. This right is guaranteed by international human rights treaties, such as the convention on the rights of the child (1990) and the African charter on the rights and welfare of the child (1999). It is also emphasized in the international Governmental agreements on development such as the programme of Action from the 1994 ICPD and the MDGs.

As the international human rights treaties, ARBEF believes that young people have the right to comprehensive information and services that promote their sexual and reproductive well-being. It is from this background therefore that YAM decided to collect and compile some stories from young people to learn more about the abortion situation in Rwanda.

This is a booklet of personal stories that was developed in consultation and through interviews with young people in Universities (KIE, KIU-Gisenyi Campus, ISAE Busogo and NUR) and those in prisons serving a sentence for committing abortion. It was YAM's initiative to compile this booklet and young people themselves in YAM collected these stories.

Section 1 of the booklet provides basic information on abortion and some statistics, section 2 is made of 19 different testimonies from young people in prison, in Universities and parents. The names used in these testimonies are fictional therefore we apologise if anyone feels offended. Section 3 provides accurate information related to beliefs about abortion and corrects misconceptions with facts. Section 4 presents the views of young people on abortion in Rwanda. The specific questions and myths in this booklet are those that were mostly asked by people during some workshops and conferences that were held as part of this project. The appendix includes a list of websites where more information related to abortion can be found.

We hope that the stories in this booklet will enable youth intermediaries, policy makers, youth serving civil society organizations and young people themselves to understand more the situation of unsafe abortion among young people in Rwanda and together can strategize better ways to address this issue.

1. INFORMATION ON ABORTION:

MAJOR CONCEPTS:

- Abortion: is when an embryo or fetus leaves a woman's body so that a baby does not develop.
- Miscarriage or spontaneous abortion: The expulsion of an embryo or fetus from the uterus without any help
- Induced abortion: This is when an abortion is helped to occur. It can be done safely by using instruments or medications to end a pregnancy.
- ➤ Menstrual regulation: This is a procedure to end a pregnancy without having a pregnancy test to make sure a pregnancy existed. It leads to bleeding that is like menstrual period.
- Safe abortion: This is an induced abortion carried out under supervision of a health care provider and using proper materials in a proper place (clean). Where the procedure is legal, is among the safest procedures in medicine.
- Post abortion care: medical care given after a miscarriage or incomplete abortion that includes treatment of complications, contraceptive counseling and provision and referrals for other sexual and reproductive health services.

ABORTION STATISTICS:

- 19 million out of 211 million women who become pregnant each year worldwide ends in unsafe abortions
- 13% of all pregnancy related deaths are due to unsafe abortion worldwide and 99% of them are in developing countries i.e. 18.4 million/19 million unsafe abortions worldwide are in developing countries.
- Around 80 million pregnancies each year are unintended and more than ½ result in induced abortion.
- About 1/3 (26.5 million) of unintended pregnancies each year result from incorrect use or failure of contraceptives.

- In Rwanda, 17% of women use any contraceptive method apart from modern contraceptive methods, 10% use modern FP methods and 6.1 live births per woman (total fertility rate).
- In 2009 Abortion in Rwanda recently accounted for 50 percent of women who die from reproductive health complications, according to the Ministry of Health.

2. PERSONAL STORIES:

PERSONAL STORIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN PRISON

By 13th July 2010, 21 out of 114 females are in prison due to carrying out illegal abortions in Karubanda prison. Out of the 21 prisoners, 90% are 25 years and below.

"My name is Anne, I am 20 years old and I was born in Byumba District, I have been in Karubanda prison since 2007 for committing abortion. I am the 3rd born in the family and the only girl, I was raised by my dad after my mum died when I was still young. I was in the 5th year of my secondary education when a teacher at my school started dating me. I needed school materials and since I could not afford them, I allowed to have sexual intercourse with this teacher at that tender age. With limited knowledge on contraceptive use, I got pregnant and had to drop out of school since it's against school regulations. I decided to have an abortion and my elder brother out of fear reported me to the police. I am supposed to serve a period of 9 years of which I have so far completed 3 years".

Crying she says "I have lost hope and this is the end of my life". She is pleading to the government to reduce the sentence given to this kind of crime; she says it's too harsh and unfair.

"Carol is my name, I am 24 years old born in Mpare sector in the southern province of the country, I have served 2 of a 10 year sentence. I used to stay with my mum and her 2 younger sisters. After my boyfriend impregnated me and disappeared, with low income and the fear to tell my mum about it, I decided to abort at 5 months of pregnancy. I had limited knowledge on the use of condoms or other contraceptives and did not even know that one can get imprisoned for abortion. Through a friend of mine in the neighborhood, I got traditional/herbal medicine and took it. I started bleeding heavily after some days and everyday it got worse, I decided to go to the hospital and from there I was taken to prison. 10 years of imprisonment is a very hard punishment that was given to me yet I was a victim of ignorance. I think that this punishment should be reduced to at least 5 years and after analyzing the situation around which the abortion was carried out".

"My name is Clarisse, I am 21 years old now. I got imprisoned at the age of 18 for committing abortion. I have to serve 4 more years now. I am the first born in the family of 6 and I stopped my education in primary 5 due to sickness. I used to stay with both my parents when I got impregnated by a 42 year old married local leader who was also a family friend. Out of fear of my dad who is a pastor, I arranged with the local leader to get me traditional medicine to do an abortion. I got very sick though and on the way to the hospital, I was over bleeding and my mum got to know from the doctor that I had aborted. After I recovered I was directly handed over to police and then to prison. My dad urged me to keep it a secret to protect the local leader who is a friend of my dad. Sometimes I feel like I did more than abortion to deserve the punishment I was given, I really plead that policy makers should revise the law on abortion and make it a bit tolerant and analyze the fundamental reasons why one decides to do an abortion".

"I am 24 years old and my name is Brenda. I am a former student at the National University of Rwanda, I have been in prison since last year 2009. When I got pregnant I told my boyfriend about it but he said he was not ready to take the responsibility because he was also a student.

I decided to have an abortion because I also was not ready to be a mother plus I was still in school. I also had no means to raise the baby so I went in some village where I was given local herbs for abortion, that day I went back to school and I started to bleed heavily, I couldn't stand the pain and my friends reported to the university administration and I was taken to the hospital where police found me later.

I had little information on contraceptives at that time but had difficulties on where I could get those services. I was remaining with only two years to complete my university studies and now I have no hope at all of going back to school.

I really think the government of Rwanda should revise the law considering the family planning strategy and the ability of people to raise their children".

"My name is Claire, I am 29 years old and am a former student in one of Kigali secondary schools. I was in form 2 when my boyfriend got me pregnant. I am a Genocide orphan and used to stay with my elder sister when this happened. When I told her, she got so mad and chased me from home. I started staying with a friend but life was not easy. I know that I could have used condoms but my boyfriend had never suggested using them and I always felt like it is a guy's decision to make and I did not know that even young girls can use contraceptive pills to prevent pregnancies. My boyfriend had promised to support me if I decided to give birth but later disappeared and I never heard from him again. I knew what the law says on abortion but did not care because I was so determined to end the pregnancy after all life would be worse if I gave birth in the situation was in. Some friend of mine got me some tablets for abortion and I took them, after a few hours, I started bleeding and the 4 months fetus came out later that day. My friend later got scared and reported me to police. I have not yet been tried in court. I think the abortion law in Rwanda is too harsh, I really wonder why boys are not implicated in such a situation yet they are also involved in getting girls pregnant. I wish there could be access to legal abortion services.

"My name is Maria, I have been in Kigali central prison for 2 years now, I have three more years to live in this horrible place. It was not my choice to be here. I am 27 years old now, I used to do small scale business in Nyamirambo before I got imprisoned for abortion. Being the last born in the family of 5 boys and me as the only girl, I grew up with limited information on sexuality and reproduction, the little information that I got was from some friends who I managed to ask sometimes. The first time I had sex with my boyfriend is the time I got pregnant. My boyfriend denied responsibility and left me. For 10,000Frw and at 3 months, I managed to get abortion from an old lady who used traditional methods. I had serious complications after but I went to the hospital and I got treatment before I was taken to prison. I think abortion should be legalized since many young girls get unwanted pregnancies due to lack of information and especially due to poor standards of living they are tempted to have sex for money and prison is not and should not be the solution".

"My name is Rose, am serving a 5 year imprisonment sentence. I am 23 years old and a former secondary school student, I got pregnant when I was in form three by my boyfriend who was a bit older than I. At that time, I was living with my mum in Gikondo and my mum expected a lot from me after I completed my education. But this was not my first pregnancy because at 18 I had given birth to a baby girl with the same man and he agreed to take care of the baby at that time. Since he was helping me to raise the baby, he constantly demanded to have unprotected sex with me against my will and since I did not have any other option, I accepted. That's when I got another pregnancy by the same man. I had never before heard about contraceptive pills and I only used the natural method of managing my menstrual cycle by counting safe days. I didn't dare tell my mum because I knew she would be disappointed. Secretly through a friend of mine, I got some pills and I aborted at 5 months. Someone leaked the story to police and the following day I was taken to prison. My mum has never come to see me. Prison has added to my trauma and I have been learning a lot of bad behaviors from other prisoners. I really think prison should not be the solution to solve the problem of unwanted pregnancies that end in unsafe abortions, this could be resolved if these abortion services were made legal. Imprisonment only punishes young girls terribly but does not remove the habit of having unprotected sex.

PERSONAL STORIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT UNIVERSITIES

Abortion is done, despite the strict law. Unsafe abortions lead to most young women ending up in Prison, others with complications and also leads to death...PAC is more expensive than providing legal abortion services. These are stories of young people in Universities:

Articles 164 to 169 of the draft bill of the Penal Code follow the same philosophy. Apart from reducing prison time, the law refuses any kind of exception even in cases of rape.

My name is Gloria and I am a student,I have been a victim to love ,I was a talented musician and was sometimes invited to shows, I was in a love relationship with a student from level 4 module and I made a mistake which made me lose my control. Our sexual intercourse was unprotected. I was pregnant by ignorance, I don't know why I couldn't use condoms, some people could talk about condoms personally I found the use of condom useless to my sex life. I also feared using condoms because I feared that it could burst. Furthermore, I was not well informed about other contraceptive methods like the morning after pills—so when I got pregnant I decided to abort, and due to the lack of knowledge regarding abortion I used the traditional method. I would like to get more knowledge about sexual reproductive health and how I can avoid getting unwanted pregnancies despite being sexually active. There are no youth friendly centers in Rwanda where young people like me can get such information and it is a big problem for young people, safe abortion services should also be availed in Rwanda.

My name is Charlotte and I am a student, this is a story of what happened to me this year (2011). I was moving out with some old guy who was also taking care of me, he used to give me money, lots of money in exchange I had to have sex with this man so I got pregnant. In February, I realized that I was pregnant, I decided to abort, this was not the man of my dreams and I was only having sex with him to get money to support myself at school, added to that I really wanted to complete my university aleast before I could think of raising babies. I had never before heard of contraceptive pills, I used traditional herbs to abort. I know there are many girls out there who have gone through what I went through, I got lucky that I didn't end in

Prison, but I also know that many girls/women need safe and legal abortion services in the country.

My name is Maurice, I know of a girl who had an abortion; she was 24 years old, she is the survivor of the 1994 genocide with only one brother who told her to be a good girl and not to get pregnant but by accident her boyfriend made her pregnant and he refused to support her, he denied responsibility for the pregnancy and she didn't want to give birth because she was scared of his brother. She decided to go to traditional doctors for an abortion and after that she returned to school. But she was not taken to prison because the police was not aware of the action. I think abortion should be legalized to give a choice to girls who get pregnant when they don't want to give birth....

My name is Moussa, I know of a girl who had an abortion, she was a 17 year old girl in senior 2, her uncle was a doctor so he helped her to have the abortion because one of her family members had impregnated her, she was scared of her parents who didn't know what was going on. Then the police was informed of the situation and the girl, her uncle and her parents ended up in prison...I find this sad and unfair, why can't these services be legalized in all health facilities?

My name is Moses, I know of a girl who had an abortion, we were in secondary school in 2008, she was 20 years old, her boyfriend denied the pregnancy and she decided to have an abortion, she used the traditional method, she has no parents and the police didn't know of this case, I knew because she was my classmate. She later returned to school. I have realized that girls get unwanted pregnancies and most of these end in abortion, the strict law in Rwanda only makes these girls have these abortions unsafely. Something should be done if we are to promote the health of our young sisters, let abortion services be provided.

My name is Murerwa, I know a girl who used to be a house keeper, and this couple she worked for, had problems so the husband was attracted to her because he had no job all the time he was in the house, one afternoon after taking her bath the husband came into her room and had sex with her after a while the girl found out that she was pregnant and since she was an orphan she decided to abort the child but unfortunately the process went bad, she lost so much blood and when she got to hospital they discovered that she had aborted and so she was taken to jail. I personally think abortion should be legalized in our country.

My name is Annet, we were in senior six, when a schoolmate had an abortion. She took some herbs but the abortion didn't succeed. She was staying at her boyfriend's place at the time because she had left her parents fearing that if they found out they would banish her.

A doctor who was a friend of her boyfriend helped her by giving right medicines but secretly. She knew how to use contraceptives but because she used to spend nights with her boyfriend she never used condoms. She had the abortion because she was afraid of her parents and she wanted to finish her studies, even her boyfriend was not ready to marry her.

For me I think that abortion should be legalized because many young girls stop their studies which is bad to the development of the country.

My name is Tony, I used to know this girl who had an abortion when she was in the first year of university but unfortunately, she died, she didn't know the right medicines and she had kept it a secret when she got very sick. She was a bright girl, she had basic knowledge about sexual and reproductive health but nobody knows why she practiced unprotected sex. She had an abortion because her father was very strict. I really think safe abortion services should be legalized in order to reduce the mortality of young ladies who die because of unsafe abortions.

My name is Ingabire, I know a girl who had an abortion, she was 16 years old studying in senior three, and her boyfriend was in senior five. So when she got pregnant, she decided to keep it secret, after four months, she went to a friend of hers who had once had an abortion, she gave her some medicines but it didn't work in contrary she felt very ill so they took her to the hospital and the doctor found that she had attempted to have an abortion. They asked her who gave her the medicines and she told them the truth. Her and her friend were taken to prison. She had an abortion because she feared that her parents would feel bad and be angry with her when they found out. I completely think that only safe abortion services in public and private hospitals and health centers can reduce the imprisonment of young ladies so that they can be able to finish their studies and decide to have their families at the right time.

But what does the law on Abortion in Rwanda say?

It says that abortion is only permitted to protect the woman's life and physical health. Source: center for reproductive rights, world's Abortion laws (2005)

STIGMA AFTER ABORTION:

"I deeply regret destroying my dream of becoming the secretary of the united nations, I was a beautiful girl, I could even have found a rich and better husband, but due to the abortion that I had I can't find even a security guard to marry me. I trusted a boy who cheated me promised that he would marry me, when I got pregnant, my boyfriend decided that we abort because he was not ready to be a parent, I used the traditional method, I feel bad about the decision I made about aborting, I feel like everybody around me knows it and I feel so ashamed of what I did. I need counseling so that I can stop thinking about it, but then when I look back, I know that's the only option I had, I was not ready to drop out of school and raise a baby".......Christine.

PERSONAL STORY OF A PARENT

Mukamana is 56 years old accused of helping her daughter (Aline) to abort. Her 17 year old daughter says she doesn't know how she got pregnant and the time she realized that the she was pregnant her mother went in the forest and collected the herbs to give her but the daughter did not know her mother was making her abort, she told her to take the local herbs saying they would cure her stomachaches and after 1 day she started bleeding and finally the fetus was aborted. The young girl got scared and talked to the neighbors about what her mum had done and that's how she was arrested. Q says she had to do it because she was already struggling to raise her daughter and therefore she didn't want an extra mouth to feed/burden. She said she agrees that she deserved punishment for what she did but the sanction is too heavy.

3. MYTHS, BELIEFS AND FACTS ABOUT ABORTION

What is a myth?

It is a traditional story or tale that has no proven factual basis. There are several myths and beliefs that also make it difficult for young people to prevent unwanted pregnancies or use services to end unwanted pregnancies. Below these myths are addressed.

> Easy access to emergency contraception encourages unsafe sex:

Emergency contraception is a way to prevent a pregnancy from happening; it is not a form of abortion. Some people think if young people have access to emergency contraception this will encourage unsafe sex. Recent studies where emergency contraception is available show that having easy access to contraception has not increased unsafe sex or promiscuity.

> Easy access to safe abortion services encourages young women to be irresponsible or promiscuous.

When facing unwanted pregnancy, a woman weighs all her options, consider their obligations and make the best decision in their particular situation. A woman may have responsibilities related to work, school, and to children they already have that affect her decision. By choosing not to have a child for which they cannot care or that would make it very difficult to care for the children they already have, they are actually making a very responsible choice.

> If you have an abortion, you may not become pregnant again

Unless a woman has problems during or after an abortion especially if it was unsafe, terminating a pregnancy will not stop a young woman from getting pregnant again or giving birth to a healthy baby in the future. The risks of problem increase abit the longer the woman is pregnant, so it is better to have an abortion as early as possible.

4. YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS ON ABORTION IN RWANDA

Youth Action Movement carried out a small assessment with the aim to find out what are the views of young people in Rwanda. The assessment mainly focused on young people in universities. 4 universities (1 in Kigali city and 3 in provinces) were randomly selected and 520 students participated in this assessment. The universities selected were Kigali Independent University (Gisenyi campus), Kigali Institute of Education (KIE), National University of Rwanda (NUR) and ISAE Busogo.

By signing petitions, the 520 young people from different universities where 57% of them were males and 43 of them were females answered a few questions regarding the issue of abortion in Rwanda.

Most of the young people in this assessment were between 21-25 years (68%) and those who were 26-30 years were 21%.

Regarding the source of information on sexual and reproductive health, most of the young people revealed that they get the information mostly from their friends (28%), from the media (25%) and from school (21%). A few number pointed parents as their source of information on sexual and reproductive health (12%). If most of the young people get their information on SRH from friends and media and yet some information from these sources may be incorrect and is incomplete, it is a big risk that increases young people's vulnerability to health issues like unwanted pregnancies and HIV and AIDS including STIs.

Responding to how they find the current law on abortion in Rwanda, 46% of them pointed that they find the law harsh, 31% said the law is very harsh and 23% said they find the law tolerant.

60% of these young people said that the law should be flexible to include situations like rape, incest and economic and social reasons where as 37% say safe abortion services should be available on demand. 3% of the young people insist that provision of safe abortion services should never be permitted in Rwanda. Through interviews, a small percentage of young people that are against provision of safe and legal abortion services are influences=d by their religious beliefs and cultural values despite the fact that they understand the need for these services.

"But thunder is not yet rain, young people themselves should realize their rights and continue advocacy for what they are entitled to"

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: List of useful websites

http://www.catholicsforchoice.org/about/default.asp : a voice for Catholics who believe that the catholic tradition supports a woman's moral and legal right to follow her conscience in matters of sexuality and reproductive health

http://www4exhale.org/index.php: An organization based in The United States that serves women who have abortions

http://www.hesperian.org/index.php: A non profit publisher of books and educational materials on health issues

http://www.ippf.org/en/what-we -do/adolescents/: An international health provider and leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health.

http://www.ipas.org/topics/youth.aspx: An international organization focused on women's sexual and reproductive rights especially with regard to preventing unsafe abortion and increasing access to safe abortion care.

http://wwwwomenonwaves.org/: The website of a Dutch non-profit organization concerned with women's human rights, preventing unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions.

http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/population/annual review.htm: a website that provides you with the information regarding the abortion laws in all countries in the world.

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