

Young women's decision making regarding  
contraception and Induced abortion:  
Research on socio-ecological factors in  
Maputo and  
Quelimane cities, Mozambique

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## SUMMARY

Abortion is a major public health concern. It can have medical, social and economic consequences not only for the woman's life and her family, but also for the wider society. In Mozambique, while the availability and knowledge of contraceptive methods is increasing among adolescents, contraceptive use among sexually active adolescents is still very low, at less than 16%, and approximately 4.2% of adolescents 15-19 years have had an induced abortion.

The main objective of this PhD is to improve our understanding of induced abortion practices among young women (15-24 years) in Maputo and Quelimane cities, thus contributing to improve maternal and child health.

This research was conducted in Quelimane and Maputo cities in Mozambique, using multiple methods.

- **A cross-sectional household survey** among women aged 15-49 using a multi-stage sampling design. In total, 1657 women participated, of which 816 were young women.
- **Two qualitative studies**, using in-depth interviews (with 14 young women who reported having had an induced abortion) and focus groups discussions (involving 45 adult women).
- **A pilot intervention study**, which consisted of three weekly one-hour coached sessions in which female adults and young women interacted about sexuality. Interviews were conducted with 13 participants and realist evaluation was used to assess context, mechanisms, and outcomes of the intervention.

## KEY FINDINGS

The **cross-sectional household survey** found that the proportion of young women having had an induced abortion was 9.2% (10.6% in Maputo and 4.5% in Quelimane). 28.8% of respondents knew that abortion was legal in Mozambique. Women living in Maputo city, women who experienced pregnancy, unmarried women and students were more likely to know the abortion law.

The majority of respondents (69.2%) did not consider the new abortion law to be beneficial to women's health. Women with a high level of education and those who already knew the new abortion law were more likely to see the benefits of legal abortion services.

The **in-depth interviews and focus groups discussions** showed that in none of the abortion cases included in the study, the legal procedure was followed. Lack of autonomy was the most important factor influencing abortion decision-making among young women, elucidated by the fact that the abortion decision was mostly taken by others, such as the partners, the mother, or the health providers, rather than by the young women themselves. There were generational conflicts characterized by lack of dialogue between young women and adults.

During **the intervention** adults and young women learned from each other and that this learning process changed the way they looked at sexuality and sexuality communication. They practiced safe, equitable and respectful sexual communication, which is not a practice for most families in the country, because of lack of or low economic autonomy.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis points i) to the need for making sexual and reproductive health and rights a political priority, ii) to the critical importance of safe, equitable, and respectful sexuality communication, and iii) to the importance of autonomy of female adolescents and young women.

Considering all the research results, power imbalances and gendered relationships between mothers, partners, and providers are the most important determinants influencing young women's decision-making regarding contraception and induced abortion in Mozambique. Young women are economically and socially dependent on others, and they live in a context where cultural and social norms do not allow them to discuss and negotiate sexual matters.

The successful pilot intervention shows that strategies enhancing free and respectful communication between generations might offer a way out to empower young women regarding their sexual decisions.

## About the author

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