

X-press

The IPPF newsletter by and for young people

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ICPD AT 10

A series of national and regional events and activities are being planned for the tenth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) to renew and strengthen support for the ICPD Programme of Action (PoA) for the next ten years and beyond.

If you would like to be involved in these activities please contact the IPPF Member Association in your country or your IPPF Regional Office. More information will be available on www.countdown1025.org from January 2004.

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In this issue of X-Press, you will read the views of young people on Abortion.

It is very easy for us to condemn other people because we do not want to be seen as someone with a different opinion. We say abortion is a sin or murder because that is what society expects us to say. But take some time and reflect on the following questions. What would you do if you were in a similar position; faced with pregnancy and you do not want to miss your education, you are not ready to have a child, too young, dependent or alone and you just cannot support the baby, you really did your best to prevent it - you used contraceptives but they failed this time, your parents might disown you when they find out, or the pregnancy is a result of rape - by a stranger, a close relative - a father or an uncle. What if it is you, your sister, your friend, what will you do?

For many young people, the dilemma of deciding whether or not to terminate an unwanted pregnancy is probably one of the biggest decisions they will ever face. This is why care and support for young people is so important. It is even more difficult because many of us have no idea what abortion is like, what to do or where to go. Even in countries where it is legal, the shame, stigma and guilt attached to abortion is greater for young people than adults. Young people who choose abortion are still blamed for being irresponsible and not taking sufficient care. This is based on the false notion that all young people have access to contraceptive services and are always able to protect themselves.

Abortion – a Sexual and Reproductive Health Right

Access to safe and legal abortion is not about being pro or anti life, it is about choice and respect for the rights of the young woman involved. Deaths and injuries from unsafe abortion mostly affect young, poor and other socially excluded groups of women. Denying a young woman access to safe and legal abortion is a violation of her basic human rights, in particular her right to life and her right to control her reproductive life.

IPPF believes in a young woman's right to access safe abortion and will continue to fight to eliminate unsafe abortion. IPPF encourages all its member associations to offer safe, sensitive, non-judgmental and affordable abortion-related services as part of a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health package to young people. In countries where abortion is illegal or severely restricted, member associations can concentrate their abortion-related services on post-abortion care and management of abortion complications. All member associations have a strong advocacy role to play in defence of a woman's right to choose.

IPPF's stance on abortion forms an integral part of its commitment to meeting the sexual and reproductive health needs and rights of all young people particularly those who are most vulnerable. The next IPPF Youth Working Group meeting will discuss Young People and Abortion and we will keep you informed.



International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF),
Regent's College, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London NW1 4NS, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 7487 7911/7866. Fax +44 (0)20 7487 7865.
E-Mail: xpress@ippf.org Website: <http://www.ippf.org>

Facts... about Abortion and young people

A review of unmarried young women aged 15 – 19 years in developing countries showed that 32 – 93% of births were unwanted or mistimed. Even among married young women, up to 61% of the last births were unwanted or mistimed (source: International Journal of Gynaecology and Obstetrics 2001). The majority of these abortions are unsafe. Young women are more likely than adults to delay an abortion, resort to unskilled persons to perform it, to use dangerous methods and delay seeking care when complications arise. World Health Organisation estimates that in several African countries, up to 70% of all women who receive treatment for complications of abortion are under 20. In some countries, complications of unsafe abortion are the leading causes of death among young women. In Nigeria, a study found out that 72% of all deaths among young women under 19 were due to consequences of unsafe abortion.

Unfortunately there is a general lack of knowledge among young people regarding abortion. Even in countries where the law is relatively liberal, young people are made to believe that abortion is strictly illegal. The table below is intended to clarify this issue.

COUNTRY	To save the life of the woman	To preserve physical health	To preserve mental health	Rape or incest	Foetal impairment	Economic or social reasons	Available on request
Brazil	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Cameroon	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
DR Congo	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Cote D'Ivoire	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Ghana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
India	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Latvia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Malawi	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Namibia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Nicaragua	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Nigeria	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Philippines	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Swaziland	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Uganda	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No

Source: Abortion Policies - A Global Review UN 2002

Young people and Abortion

Abortion, up to 12 weeks of pregnancy, is legal in India. Despite this, there are 4 million unsafe abortions every year in this country. There are a number of different reasons for this. Of these, social stigma is a major cause. The discussion of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) is considered taboo. This is especially so in the case of adolescents and young people.

Adolescent girls do not know about their bodies and cannot discuss their ongoing physical changes with anyone. Traditionally, parents and teachers have not thought it important to discuss SRH with young people. Closed societies create a wall of misinformation around both young women and men and as a result, they resort to incorrect information through peers, pornographic films and magazines or they learn after marriage.

In urban areas, a large number of abortions stem from lack of awareness about contraception. Some sexually active young people are shy about broaching the subject of contraception with their partners. In other cases they are apprehensive about procuring contraceptives due to the attached social stigma.

In light of these issues, the immediate need is for widespread education on SRH for adolescents as well as their families. In addition, information on abortion laws and legal, safe methods of abortion must also be provided. The removal of the stigma associated with SRH and young people is a long-term process. Counselling and education are a must to stimulate this process.

The Family Planning Association of India, together with the Youth Education on Sexuality Project, Agra and Adolescent Health Care Project, Panchkula, is setting examples for the kind of information points required. More information on these projects can be obtained from www.fpaindia.com.

Arushi Singh

Youth Volunteer, Family Planning Association of India

Definitions

Abortion is the termination of pregnancy before the fetus is capable of sustaining an independent life outside the uterus. An abortion can occur either spontaneously when it is called spontaneous abortion or miscarriage, or it can be brought about by deliberate interventions – induced abortion.

Unsafe abortion – a procedure for terminating a pregnancy either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking the minimal standards or both.

Safe abortion – a legal and accessible high-quality service performed by skilled professionals in a suitable environment to terminate an unwanted pregnancy.

Source: WHO 1997 and 2003



Young people from Mexican Family Planning Association (MEXFAM) raising awareness about sexuality and condoms. September 2003.
Sent in by Gustavo Garcia Sarmiento gentejeventuxfla@hotmail.com

In my country a large proportion of young girls between 13-28 years die from unsafe abortions. The Bible forbids abortion and considers it a sin or a criminal act, but my concern is about the risks of unsafe abortions such as, haemorrhaging and infertility.

It would be better to teach young people to be sexually responsible and to provide them with the information and services needed to prevent an unwanted pregnancy.

Elvis Buhendwa Bieshero, Democratic Republic of Congo, ABEF-ND

I have heard about abortion in different ways; at school as the termination of a pregnancy, within the family as a regretful loss of an unwanted baby; and at the church as a sin that will condemn us.

I learned that unsafe abortion or an abortion practiced by health workers without the appropriate knowledge or training can cause the death of the mother and other serious illnesses, including damage to the reproductive system.

I also learned that it is possible to avoid an abortion by using dual protection, which prevents unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. This way, you and your girlfriend have the security of knowing that you are both protected.



Cristhian Alexander Medrano L.
Youth Club of Managua, Nicaragua

I am half naked, my clothes in tatters. Bloodstained and wrung with pain.

I lean against this wall where he cornered me and abused me. It is horrible. I want to forget and to believe that it was only a dreadful nightmare!

But no I cannot... He raped me...

What can I do? What do I say to my parents? What if I have AIDS? What if I am pregnant? God don't let it be the case!

This child is the same innocent victim as I am. But I cannot and will not live with the memory of my assault.

Only one solution for me: abortion.

Tell me what would you do in my place?

**Mamadou BAYOKO and Gisèle KOUAME-MIDA
AIBEF Ivory Coast**

Manifesto Corner

IPPF/YOUTH Manifesto Goal 1

"young people must have information and education on sexuality and the best possible sexual and reproduction health services (including contraceptives)"

Abortion is a crime, WHY?

Allow me to voice my concerns about the non implementation of international conventions and programs of action and the resulting punishment of the general populace who are the intended beneficiaries of those commitments.

The ICPD Program of Action sets out all the rights and freedoms on Reproductive health and Leaders from 179 countries pledged to protect and promote the reproductive rights of women, men and young people as stated in Chapter VII of the ICPD Program of Action 1994.

It is the 21st Century and people want to know and practice their rights and freedoms, yes we know it

comes with responsibility, but these decisions are up to us, it's a matter of CHOICE! We need to challenge and lobby our governments to give us 'options', to give us contraceptives, and have children if and when we want to, and to have safe abortions performed by professionals. Making abortion illegal does not stop it from happening. What takes place are unsafe backstreet abortions. People should not have to plead to get help from health workers - it's our human right to health and they have a duty to provide such services, especially having committed themselves to international conventions.

Many countries including Swaziland with well managed NGO's and dedicated personnel now

provide family planning and reproductive health information and services for women, men and young people. Such voluntary services help individuals make informed decisions. Yet, unmet needs and widespread misperceptions remain.

My question is 'why is abortion in the legal field rather than the medical field?'

After all, it is not a matter of good or bad but a matter of choice.

**Sicelo Maziya,
Swaziland**

Think About This!

Abortions are sometimes performed under unsafe and hazardous conditions by 'quacks', putting the young woman at high risk of injury or death. Despite the risks involved many young girls still end up having unsafe abortions as they panic over what their families will do if they find out about the pregnancy.

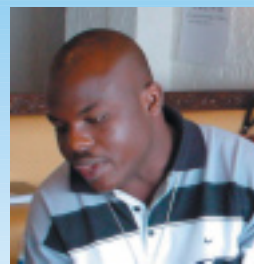
Young people must be made aware of the risks of unsafe abortions and that the earlier the abortion is carried out, the safer and less harmful it is for the young woman.

It is important that the man involved supports the young woman to have a safe abortion.

In conclusion, the best way to protect yourself against the consequences of abortion is to avoid getting pregnant by mistake.

Charles Nii Ayiku

Youth Volunteer/Peer Educator, Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana



Horrifying stories of unsafe abortions are innumerable in Kinshasa. Why?

The answer is simple, our society does not want to look reality in the face, the reality that;

We are sexually active, whether you admit it or not,

We have no information on SRH;

We do not have access to contraception;

We are stigmatised if we have a child before marriage;

We do not have the right to abortion.

What a dilemma!

How can we not die if we are exposed to risky abortions?

How can we not resort to abortion if a child before marriage is a sacrilege?

How can we avoid having children when there are no contraception services?

How can we call for these services if we have no knowledge of SRH?

How can we solve our problems if you do not want to admit we are sexually active?

We wish to affirm that one of the best weapons in the fight against risky abortions among the young is to respect our rights, starting with the right to information.

Thus it is nearly 2 years since our group "ELDORADO" began, informing young people in a forgotten commune of Kinshasa called Kimbanseke. Our association is alone in this area and we need your support.

Brison EBAYA

Secretary General of the

"ELDORADO" Group

Association for Changes in

Behaviour in the battle against

HIV/AIDS and for education in SRH for the young. Kinshasa/DRC

This is the story of a 14-year-old girl as narrated during a counselling session:

'My parents never talked to me about sexuality, it is completely a taboo. But when a young girl in our neighbourhood became pregnant my father said this to me: "mokolo oko zwa zemi na ko boma yo" which means 'the day that happens to you, I'll kill you'. Despite this, I became pregnant after my first sexual experience with a boy my age. Knowing what my parents' reaction will be, I decided I was going to have an abortion. Before the process, I came in contact with young people from an association called SOLIDARITE JEUNES POUR JEUNES/VIH/SIDA (Solidarity young people for young people/HIV/AIDS) and they told me about the dangers of illegal and unsafe abortion. As a result, I decided not to go through it.'

Many young girls have abortions for a variety of reasons. Our association is intensifying its campaign efforts in the struggle against illegal and unsafe abortions by responding to questions about sexuality and reproduction. In addition, we lobby authorities to enable young people have access to family planning services.

Djo Matangwa

Président, Solidarity Association for young people/HIV/AIDS

soljeunes_jeunes@yahoo.fr

Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo



A personal experience with Abortion...

In June this year I got a call from my best friend to say that "Rita died yesterday, she died while undergoing an abortion." He was in tears.

Rita and my friend had been dating for 4 years and they loved each other. I had met both of them just a week before her death.

Rita's death was very painful and my friend is still quite traumatised.

Sadly, Rita's death is just one of the 55,000 deaths from unsafe abortion that takes place everyday- 95% of them in developing countries.

Abortion, either safe or unsafe is still a taboo here, an abomination to our cultural and religious beliefs. This is why whenever a young woman is faced with an unwanted pregnancy she hides it from everybody (sometimes even her boyfriend) and adopts dangerous methods and procedures to induce abortion due to her lack of information and knowledge on abortion related services.

Our governments should keep to their promises and commitments reached at different international conventions and meetings (CRC, CEDAW, ICPD, WSSD, WCW, WCHR) by reforming laws and policies to support and ensure access to family planning, reproductive health and abortion-related services.

All stakeholders (Governments, NGOs media, individuals) should also work tirelessly to educate communities about reproductive health and rights and unsafe abortion.

All the while we should not forget that unsafe abortions are easily preventable and treatable.

Femi Aina Fasinu

Youth activist/ coordinator, Youth Dignity International (YDI), Nigeria

*Seeming to be a solution
You are none other than a
crime
Without shame, you
decimate
Refusing the due attention
To an immense treasure,
Such a great sign of life
True values are lost
With you, sinister abortion*

Joyce Gninghaye Dulcy
Aged 15, Peer Educator
CAMNAFAW /CAMEROON

Human rights and Abortion

The impact of religious beliefs and values on abortion cannot be overemphasized. The big question is: "Is Abortion Right or Wrong?" I believe that there is in fact no clear right or wrong. If an unborn child is determined by medical doctors to be a serious threat to the pregnant mother's life then an abortion is the right thing to do. Furthermore, if the pregnant mother desires to terminate the pregnancy due to reasons best known to her, and has been counselled on her options and still wishes to terminate her pregnancy, I would fully respect her personal right and decision to have an abortion and I will support her.

The best way to approach the issue of abortion is through a human rights approach, in order to prevent the reproductive health rights of women being trampled on. Unfortunately, in many countries and societies, political rulers, laws, and religious leaders have made it very difficult for women to have safe abortions and as a result many women die from unsafe abortions. We must fight against these laws and policies such as the Global Gag Rule, which deny women their right to reproductive health services such as abortion.

I believe that society consists of different people with different religious values and beliefs and our politicians and health delivery systems should make provisions for people who want to have an abortion to do so freely and safely.

Kofi Boakye-Dankwa
PPAG- Ghana

Access to Safe Abortion = Access to Justice

A considerable number of unwanted pregnancies occur during adolescence, principally among poor young girls who, due to insufficient information about safe sex, become mothers too young and face many social problems thereafter.

Economic dependence and sexual violence are two factors which are very closely linked with abortion. The financial situation of most women leads them to a loss of subjective rights - life, liberty, dignity - and they become the object of sexual violence.

Social politics have to be revalued to bring in an education

that is more effective, clearer, closer to everyday life, so that everyone in the world has the means to inform themselves not only on SRH but also on ALL human rights.

The state is responsible for guaranteeing the quality of life for its citizens, giving them the rights of access to justice and an appropriate health system and this is key to reducing unsafe abortions and ensuring that the right to life is respected.

Leticia Pio
20, Volunteer, Youth Centre -
Family Planning Association of
Brazil (BEMFAM)

Should Abortion be legal?

The issue of whether abortion should be abolished or not has engaged the attention of many people. Many arguments have been advanced to show that the law ought not to prohibit abortion even when the life of the mother is not at stake. If abortion is justified in order to preserve the life of the mother why not also justified for preserving her health? After all how valuable is life without health?



Most religious people in my community do not support this. They suggest that the act of intentionally taking a human life is murder.

However, One of the prime functions of law is to protect and enhance the rights of the citizens. No law should violate basic human rights.

When prohibiting abortions, the problems that a baby born to an unprepared adolescent girl might face in terms of nutrition, education and parental support should also be considered.

The community as a whole should do its best to educate young people on safer sex, condom use and abstinence from sex until they are married, to prevent an unwanted pregnancy, which might result in an unsafe abortion.

Darko Samuel Dobson
Youth Volunteer, Ghana

Mauritius

Working with Youth on Abortion

In Mauritius, abortion is only permitted to save the life of the woman. The IPPF member association (MFPA) has embarked on a national campaign involving youth and adolescents, both in and out of school. Through sensitisation sessions and Radio and TV programmes on adolescent sexuality and abortion they are working to promote safe abortion services.

To commemorate the Day of the African Child, MFPA organized a national forum and debate on youth and abortion for secondary school students. The aim of the forum was to sensitize them on the abortion issue and get their support for a targeted advocacy campaign in favour of a change in the current abortion law.

The MFPA is working with the government to review and liberalise the current abortion law.

Abortion is more frequent in the sub-Saharan zone and is due to many factors such as poverty, fear of others, ignorance, traditions and many more.

It is a phenomenon which undermines our society and concerns everyone. We need to fight against abortion in our country not only by increasing awareness among the young but also among the parents.

Eric Guemne Kapche
Aged 17
Peer Educator
CAMNAFAW/Cameroon

I am concerned about the dangers of unsafe abortions. Abortions performed by unskilled persons in unsanitary conditions can result in infections, infertility, and even death.

The cultural and religious aspects within our community and the lack of legislation on the matter are the biggest obstacles to accessing safe abortion services.

To my knowledge there has never been a project to raise awareness about issues of abortion in our area. Some NGOs have done programmes on HIV/AIDS but have never touched abortion. Maybe it is a sensitive topic but the health and legal systems have a lot to do, to make people aware of the dangers of unsafe abortions, and to reduce the occurrence of unsafe abortions.

Hamza Mohammed, Nigeria

Abortion: a glimpse of the Philippines

The dispute on whether to treat post abortion complications or not is still a big challenge to the Philippine Congress. It is unlikely that this debate will end soon as it has turned into a great political circus staged in a poverty stricken country. The lack of political will still continues with a "traditional political drive" of our government officials controlled by the Catholic Church.

Philippines has an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 abortion cases each year. There may be a ratio of 16 abortions per 100 pregnancies. Young women aged 15-24 contribute up to 20% of this number. At least ten women die everyday because of post-abortion complications. Women who undergo abortion are not always given the right medical treatment in hospitals and clinics. They are often condemned, maltreated and abandoned by medical professionals as a consequence of their "criminal" act.

There are ongoing efforts to pass a Reproductive Health Care Act to help save the lives of those women who experience unwanted pregnancies and resort to unsafe, illegal abortions. Abortion is illegal in the Philippines and it is treated as a criminal offence. However, a large number of young Filipino women continue to seek illegal and unsafe abortion.

The Family Planning Organization of the Philippines is working in coalition with legislators, journalists, human rights activists, youth volunteers and women's and health advocates for the passage of the said Bill.

Arthur A. Ramas
National Youth Representative
Family Planning Organization of the Philippines

In many countries abortion, despite being morally reprimanded, is gradually becoming legalized. My question is why legalize abortion when the emphasis should be put on education and prevention. Isn't it encouraging the practice to say that a girl can decide to or not to have an abortion? Young people can have rights in SRH, but in the case of abortion should it not be restricted? Why not put emphasis on programmes which enable adolescents to assert their rights and prevent unwanted pregnancies?

Luc Fongang Kontcheu
Aged 23
Peer Educator
CAMNAFAW / CAMEROON

At least one in five school-going girls choose to undergo an abortion to terminate an unwanted pregnancy so that they don't have to leave school to look after their baby.

In Ghana, thanks to the establishment of many NGO run clubs such as the Virgin club and 'Things we do for love', young people are being educated on the dangers of unsafe abortions. These campaigns also assist the government to cut the costs related to unsafe abortions, such as maternal morbidity and mortality.

David Boakye-boateng
Ghana

Let's talk about...

abortion

Abortion is legal in Latvia, but our job is to decrease the number of unwanted pregnancies which lead to abortion through sex education and information. Every week, questions like "I am pregnant, I want to know where can I go for abortion and how much it costs" are received in our hot e-mail sos@papardeszieds.apollo.lv.

Young people do not always understand the risks of pregnancy and this is why sex education and information about contraception and safe sex is so important. Sex education has to give information about contraception and safe sex before "sex happens". A young girl faced with an unplanned pregnancy feels like she is in a crisis and can't imagine other solutions. Abortion seems the only way out. Many young people can't imagine who might understand them and help them in this situation.

I don't want to make young people think that abortion has to be forbidden or blame those women who choose to have an abortion. I want to show how serious a decision it is and how important it is to discuss abortion aspects with young people and how much we can do to change the attitudes of our peers.

Lasma Lidaka,
Latvia's Association for Family Planning and Sexual Health "Papardes zieds"

Adolescents are most at risk of maternal mortality due to unsafe abortions. This is because they fear abandoning their studies or being pushed out of the family home and thus resort to extremely unsafe methods of abortion. As peer educators we must heighten awareness among young people on sexual and reproductive health and rights issues and the risks of unsafe abortion.

Buhendwa Tshombe
Peer Educator
ABEF/ND, Kinshasa, DRC

Jackson Ngyiyolwa of the Namibian Planned Parenthood Federation (NAPPA) was out on the streets of Windhoek Namibia and asked his peers what they thought of abortion.

• ESNA (female) 18

It's a matter of personal preference: You decide. It's your choice but for me, sex and abortion is okay.

• JUSTINE (female)20

It's a personal thing: if you can handle it then go ahead. I would like to make abortion legal because abortion is illegal in Namibia.

• NANDIA (female)19

Abortion should be acceptable for pregnancy that results because of rape. Because rape is a violent crime that occurs when a person is forced to have sex against his/her will.

• JAQUE (Male)16

Girls can do whatever they want to do, it's their own choice and no one should say abortion is illegal.

• HESOLA GANO (Male)19

It depends on the social influence on an individual and culture. I think abortion is OK.

• CAREW (female)17

It's freedom. It's your body, your baby and your choice.

• NATHAN (Male)19

It doesn't matter what you do it's up to you to express yourself.

• KELLY (Male)25

I'm offended by abortion in any way. People use it as excuses for exercising their right. But I think it is ignoring God's word.

• PETRUS (Male)21

Different people have different views. I prefer adoption because abortion is against the culture.

• PULUS (Male)21

Adopting the baby is ok. But abortion is not good.

• SNOBIA(Female)

I think abortion is fine but in our tradition abortion is not accepted.

• STEFAN (Male)21

It's not acceptable at ALL! You are the body of Christ.



Way Forward

X-press

Legal and safe abortion is a necessity! Cultural, religious and legal barriers should be put aside in order for young people to be able to obtain safe legal abortion. Parents too should play a part in giving their children sexuality education by speaking to them about love and relationships as well as the biological processes before they reach puberty. Youthcracy International is a movement of young people advocating for sexual and reproductive health rights of young people as sexual beings.



Ehigie Osasere Joseph
Youth activist and International Co-ordinator, Youthcracy International, Nigeria

There is a saying that 'who feels it knows it'. In other words the mother has the right to determine whether the pregnancy complicates her health and life and should therefore be able to choose whether or not to terminate her pregnancy. However, the lack of societal awareness results in young people who undergo abortions being seen as cannibals! They are stigmatized and abused and this leads to early school dropouts.

Sure Health Organisation (SHO) is charged with the responsibility of creating effective and intensive health IEC strategies in rural communities of sub-Saharan Africa, and educating people on the need for safe abortion.

- ✓ We need to advocate for a change in the legal system to enact and implement laws that will make abortion legal and safe.
- ✓ Abortion services should be subsidized because the money usually charged by providers are so exorbitant that young people can not afford it and are left at the mercy of quacks leading to high rates of maternal morbidity and mortality.
- ✓ The health system like the legal system should monitor abortion related services and should provide affordable health centres which provide post abortion care services.
- ✓ Workshops, seminars and conferences should be carried out periodically for health care providers in order to keep them abreast of the latest development in safe abortion.
- ✓ Communities should be sensitized on abortion related issues to overcome cultural barriers and social stigma.
- ✓ Setting up strategies for safe abortion is crucial if we are to prevent millions of young women facing the fatal consequences of unsafe abortions.

ODOR King Obinna, Program Officer
Sure Health Organisation,
Nigeria, infosurehealth@yahoo.com

Evaluation of X-press

In the last issue, we sent out a questionnaire to find out what you think about x-press and over a 100 people responded from all over the world

About 39% of respondents were below the age of 25 and mostly males. 64% of respondents were from Africa region. Most of the respondents are staff of IPPF member associations, managers, directors and programme officers from other organisations. Only 44% were students, peer educators and youth activists. Most people are happy with the content and layout but a few raised the need to balance professionalism and youth friendliness.

There is a need to ensure that x-press reaches as many young people as possible and we are currently revising the mailing system to address this need.

Your comments will ensure that this newsletter becomes more youth friendly, relevant, accessible and global. Thank you for your continued support and interest.

X-press yourself on Reaching Young Men

The shift from family planning to the more comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights focus has brought about a great opportunity to engage men of all ages as allies in improving sexual and reproductive health globally.

It has also become clear that working with young men not only increases the chances of improving their own sexual and reproductive health but also provides the opportunity to secure their support for upholding young women's sexual and reproductive health rights as well.

Furthermore, the rapid spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic has meant that an urgent and more sustained effort which places greater emphasis on young men is of crucial importance.

Finally, if we are to promote a rights based, non-discriminatory and gender sensitive approach to sexual and reproductive health, the participation of young men is clearly essential.

How do you feel about young men's involvement in sexual and reproductive health issues? What do you think are the best approaches to involve young men – sports based, employment based, service delivery based etc. Have you taken part in any programme targeting young men and want to share your experience or share IEC or BCC materials developed to reach young men? In what ways do you think societal expectations of young men influence their involvement in sexual health issues? What are you doing to address the SRH of young men?

X-press is about sharing your thoughts and ideas. So please be sure to send in your articles, poems, photographs and drawings by the 28th of March 2004.