



HOW TO IMPROVE YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO SAFE ABORTION:

Using a buddy system

STRATEGY:

Creating a **'buddy system'** to support young women to access safe abortion services

MEMBER ASSOCIATION:

The Association for Sexual and Reproductive Health XY (Association XY) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H)



STRATEGY OVERVIEW:

A buddy system, in the context of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, is a process in which a nominated volunteer or staff member - the 'buddy' - supports a client throughout their engagement with the service. A buddy can be a health professional or peer counsellor who is trained in providing accurate information and support to address the needs of young people. A buddy has the ability to build rapport and earn trust with a client to help them feel reassured and confident to make informed decisions about their care.

BENEFITS OF A BUDDY SYSTEM

THE PROVISION OF A BUDDY SYSTEM CAN:

- Increase young women's access to safe abortion services by providing a youth friendly service.
- Minimise young women's anxiety about abortion by preparing them for the procedure with correct information about what to expect at the clinic, during the procedure, as well following the abortion.
- Reduce stigma that can negatively impact on women's experience of abortion, by providing an opportunity for young women to discuss their feelings about abortion in a safe and supportive environment and refer them to other support services if required.
- Educate young women about fertility, prevention of STIs and contraceptive methods.
- Increase the uptake of post abortion contraception and effective use of contraceptive methods.
- Provide assurance that a comprehensive abortion care service for young women is offered.

BARRIERS TO ACCESS

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite the existence of liberal laws on abortion, young women still experience many barriers in accessing safe abortion services due to fear, stigma, cost, poor comprehensive sexuality education, and service provider bias. As a result, with a high rate of unintended pregnancies due to an unmet need for contraception, unsafe abortion is common. Young women are further limited by their choice of abortion method. Medical abortion, which may be a more affordable, convenient and accessible option for some young women, is neither registered nor available in B&H. Contraception is very limited¹ and difficult to obtain, particularly for young, poor and ethnic minority women, with only 12% of women in B&H reported to use a modern method of contraception.²

1 Contraceptive methods are only available on prescription and are expensive or not even available (i.e. implant, injection and patch)
2 Population Reference Bureau, 2015 World population data sheet. PRB, Washington DC, USA.





USING A BUDDY SYSTEM FOR ABORTION SERVICES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Association XY offer pre and post abortion counselling at its facilities, following which clients are referred to partner government clinics for clinical abortion services. To ensure young clients' experience at the partner clinic is as positive and stress-free as possible, Association XY provides an innovative element to its referral service: a 'buddy' support system. The intent of this system is to ensure that young women receive quality counselling to help them in their pregnancy decision-making, to allay fears, help manage the impact of abortion stigma and to discuss post abortion contraception.

Following their consultation, if a young client decides to have an abortion they are asked if they would like to access the buddy support, which is provided by Association XY's counsellor. Following optional pre-abortion counselling the counsellor then accompanies the young woman to the clinic. Using interpersonal skills to build trust and a good rapport with the young client the counsellor can act as the young woman's advisor and advocate for the period in which they are at the clinic. The 'buddy' also offers counselling following the abortion procedure, and with the young woman's consent, provides additional support with a follow up telephone call in the days following the abortion procedure.

"The main achievement of this approach is the high satisfaction of our clients and the fact that we are sure she receives the best and complete service possible to help her through a difficult time."

Association XY staff member

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

1. While it is not necessary for a 'buddy' to be a professional counsellor, they should be trained in information support-giving and have good basic counselling skills. They also need to have knowledge of abortion time limits, procedures and outcomes, as well as contraceptive methods and referral support services for young people.
2. Following an abortion, before a client leaves the clinic, is a good opportunity to discuss contraceptive options. Post-abortion, all women should be informed about the full range of contraceptive methods available to them and provided with their chosen method of contraception as soon as possible following the procedure. With clients' consent a follow up telephone call or text message serves as a good reminder about contraception or a mechanism to provide additional support post abortion.





HOW TO DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE 'BUDDY SYSTEM'

Step 1:

Conduct an assessment of what young women want from an abortion service. To ensure your service is client focused and a buddy system is the appropriate intervention to strengthen abortion care for young women, investigate what types of problems and issues are important to young women in accessing abortion services.

Step 2:

Review your organization's capacity and resource needs. Assess the staffing and time required to provide an effective buddy system that addresses young people's needs. A 'buddy' needs to be someone with good counselling and interpersonal skills, and who is able to engage with a diverse group of young clients.

Step 3:

Deliver values clarification training to all staff. Conduct training with all service providers and staff to ensure everyone has a full understanding of the SRH needs of young people in the community and non-judgemental and confidential care is provided.

Step 4:

Plan awareness raising activities. Consider effective ways to inform young women about the buddy system and how to access these services, such as including information in awareness raising events via existing community or education work, or displaying posters in service delivery points.

Step 5:

Include follow up care and post abortion contraception services. Identify cost effective ways to follow up with young clients (with their consent) after they have left the clinic to provide additional support and information post abortion.

Step 6:

Monitor young people's feedback. To have confidence that your buddy system is working ensure systems are in place to receive feedback from young clients on the quality of care they receive. Using comment boxes or client satisfaction surveys are a good way to know if your buddy system is responding to the needs of young women.




THE ROLE OF A "BUDDY" IN B&H

A BUDDY IS A NOMINATED CONTACT FOR THE PERIOD IN WHICH THE YOUNG WOMAN IS AT THE CLINIC AND WILL:

1. Upon request attend the initial consultation session with the young woman (includes pregnancy test and decision-making about pregnancy).
2. Offer voluntary pre-abortion counselling, that can be more than one session if needed.
3. If a young woman decides to have an abortion, explain what to expect at the abortion clinic, including information about the procedure.
4. Accompany the young woman to the clinic for the abortion procedure.
5. Provide post abortion counselling and support, including advice on contraception and the prevention of STIs.
6. Offer a follow up phone call and/or visit for additional support.

Association XY Bosnia & Herzegovina 2015 SERVICE DATA



	Number of SRH services provided in 2015	29,473
	Proportion of SRH services provided to young people	96%
	Proportion of abortion related services provided to young people	94%
	Proportion of contraceptive services provided to young people	100%



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