

# I DECIDE

Young women's journeys  
to seek abortion care





This publication is part of IPPF's Girls Decide: Stand Up for Choice on Sex and Pregnancy initiative. Girls Decide was launched in 2010 with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Netherlands' Strategic Alliance with International NGOs (SALIN). It is a rights-based initiative that aims to address girls' and young women's sexuality and pregnancy-related issues by improving youth-friendly services, empowering girls and young women, and influencing policy processes.

## About IPPF

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is a global service provider and a leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. We are a worldwide movement of national organizations working with and for communities and individuals.

IPPF works towards a world where women, men and young people everywhere have control over their own bodies, and therefore their destinies. A world where they are free to choose parenthood or not; free to decide how many children they will have and when; free to pursue healthy sexual lives without fear of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. A world where gender or sexuality are no longer a source of inequality or stigma. We will not retreat from doing everything we can to safeguard these important choices and rights for current and future generations.

## Acknowledgements

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## What's inside

The diaries

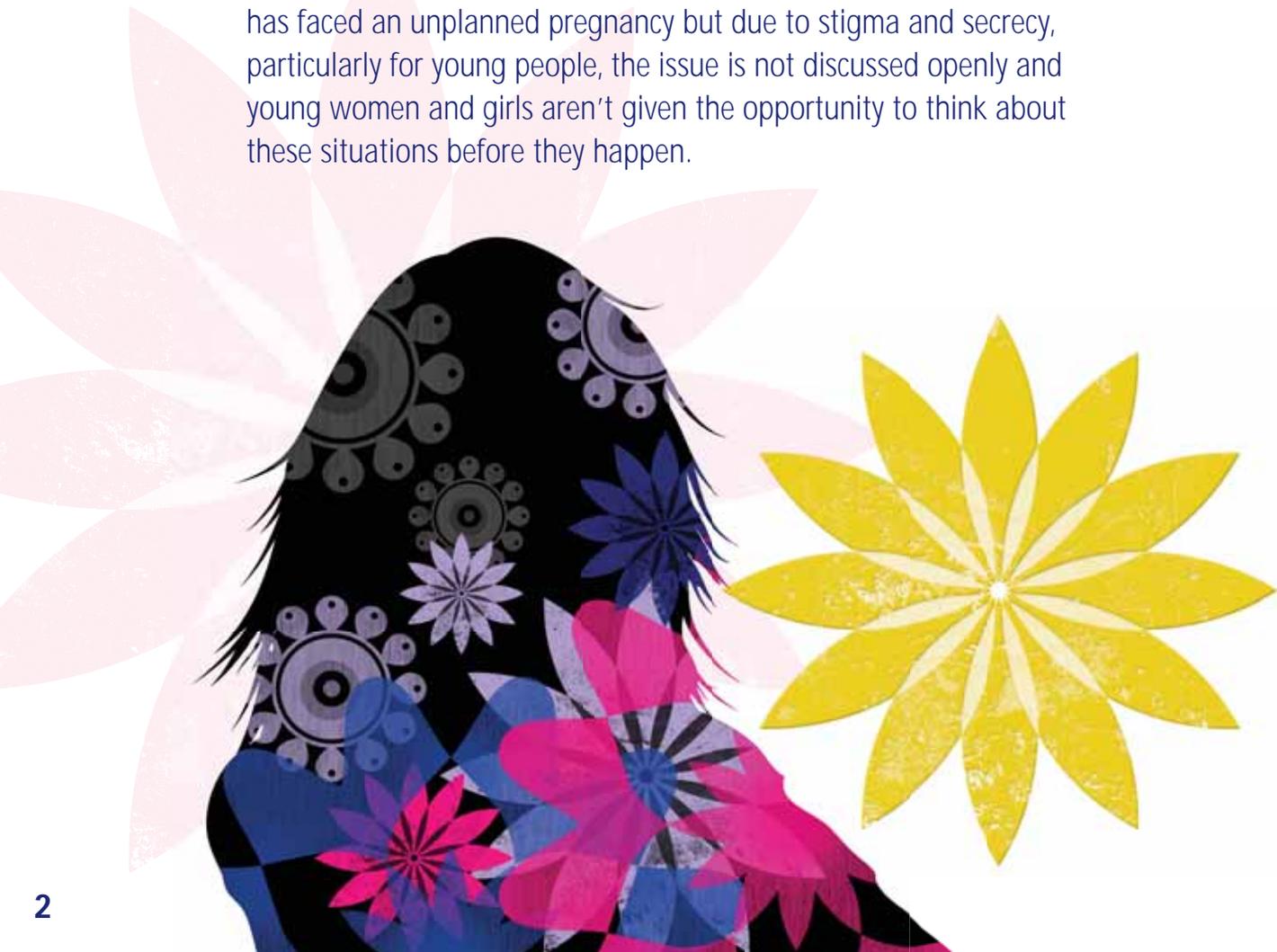
Things to know about pregnancy and abortion

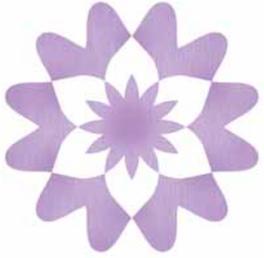
Tips on preventing pregnancy, on safe abortion and on contraception

Useful websites



Unsafe abortion is a major public health and human rights problem that disproportionately affects young women and girls. In light of the overwhelming global statistics – 70,000 deaths due to unsafe abortion every year with 40 per cent of unsafe abortions occurring in women under 24 years of age – it is easy to lose sight of the story of the individual girl with an unplanned pregnancy within the context of varying legal and socio-cultural barriers and her journey to access safe abortion services. Nearly everyone knows someone who has faced an unplanned pregnancy but due to stigma and secrecy, particularly for young people, the issue is not discussed openly and young women and girls aren't given the opportunity to think about these situations before they happen.



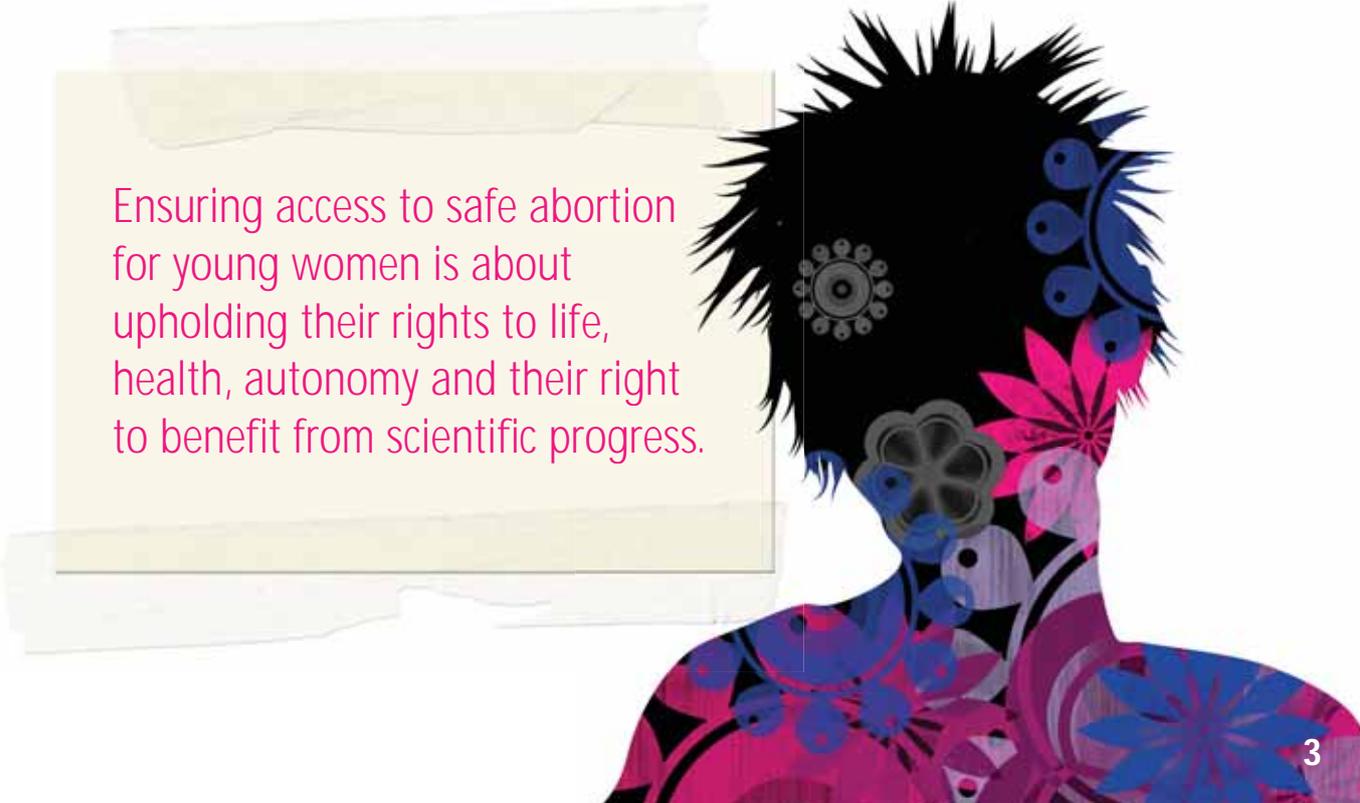


This is a collection of stories based on real life experiences of young women in different parts of the world who were faced with an unplanned pregnancy. It follows their journeys, from discovering the pregnancy, considering the options, making the decision and ultimately seeking an abortion service. The diaries remind us that regardless of how diverse young people's lives are when it comes to sex and family relationships and the use of contraception, one thing is clear: when young people have the opportunity and support to make their own decisions about a pregnancy, and to access safe and affordable services, the impact on their lives is likely to be positive.

Therefore, this publication is an opportunity. An opportunity for putting a young woman's feelings and decisions about a pregnancy first and an opportunity for us all to stand up for the sexual and reproductive rights and well-being of young people all over the world.

**If you are a young person**, reflect on these stories and find out more information about the abortion situation in your county so that you can be better prepared in case you are ever faced with an unplanned pregnancy or to support someone who may need you. Along with each story and at the end of the booklet, you will find some facts and helpful information on pregnancy, abortion and contraception.

If you are reading these diaries as a parent, provider or advocate of safe abortion, think about how you could have made the authors' journeys better.



Ensuring access to safe abortion for young women is about upholding their rights to life, health, autonomy and their right to benefit from scientific progress.

# Esther

**28th April**

I have been avoiding S., I don't want to tell him that my period is late. I'm sure that I am worrying over nothing but I am really afraid ... what if I am pregnant? I can't believe this is happening to me – we only had sex once! I need to find a clinic.

**29th April**

I spent the day in the internet cafe looking for information on family planning clinics (the idea of 'family planning' makes me feel old!) and finally found a place that is a bus ride away. I thought it might be better to go somewhere that is not too close to home. They are only open once a week and said to come tomorrow. I will have to miss school and wait in a line, but that should be ok as long as I am back by the afternoon.

**30th April**

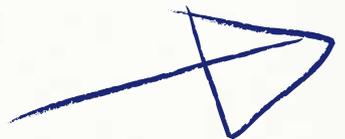
I went to the clinic. I was afraid they would tell my parents but they said they wouldn't. The nurse was friendly and asked me lots of questions. I was embarrassed to tell her about sex with S. but she needed to know. When I told her that he wasn't good at putting the condom on she explained that condoms only work when put on and taken off properly. Then she told me the pregnancy test was positive. I felt hot and thought I would faint. She was nice to me and waited till I was ready to speak. I told her no one knew that I was there and she helped me think about what I wanted to do. She told me there would be help whatever my decision. I talked for a long time, we discussed the different options – should I have a baby – maybe have it adopted? I just don't know what to do. I don't want to have to decide anything. I hate making decisions. How can I tell anyone this has happened?

**2nd May**

We have talked and talked and cried and I still don't know how S. feels or what he wants me to do! He just says it is my decision and that he still loves me but that doesn't help me to make this decision. I need him and he is not there for me ... I am so confused I can't go on like this. I feel so ill and tired. I don't want a baby. The thing is I don't know how we will get the money for an abortion. S will have to do something. He says he can.

**6th May**

Called the clinic today. They were so calm even though I was in a bit of a panic. I am going to have an abortion tomorrow. They've reduced the cost for me because I don't have much money so that's helpful. It should just take a day and I will need someone to take me home. I am going to tell Auntie K. I am sure she will help me and won't tell my parents until I am ready to tell them. They explained that the treatment takes about 15 minutes and that I need to wait after that to make sure I'm ok to travel home without being sick from the anaesthetic, or having too much bleeding. When she said that I got even more nervous! I am trying not to think too much about it ...



7th May

It was a long day! Aunty K. was completely surprised when I told her but she was still cool and just held my hand when I needed her to be near me. She pretended to be my mother when the nurse asked her to fill in a form which was needed to show that my parents agreed to the abortion. S. was waiting outside the clinic and later said he was relieved I had an abortion but that he didn't want to tell me what to do but wasn't ready to be a father. I am so tired and just need to rest. I am so glad I don't have to spend any more days and nights thinking about this.

Later ...

Things are very different for me now. There have been a few times when I have wondered how things would have been. S. and I enjoy having sex without worrying about getting pregnant because I had an IUD inserted at the time of the abortion. I definitely don't want to be pregnant until I am ready.

## Useful to know

- ✓ Penetrative sex without contraception can lead to pregnancy and/or a sexually transmitted infection.
- ✓ Using condoms is the only way to protect yourself against pregnancy and STIs.
- ✓ If you are using condoms for contraception, practice using them before having sex.
- ✓ It can help to talk through your feelings about the pregnancy with someone else. If it is not possible to talk to your parents, you can ask another adult for help.
- ✓ In some countries, clinics ask for parental consent before providing an abortion service for a young woman. It would be useful for you to find out what the requirements are in the clinic you choose to go to so that you are prepared.
- ✓ Many clinics offer services for young people at a reduced price.
- ✓ A surgical abortion (vacuum aspiration), as described here, is done in a clinic or hospital and you are given an anaesthetic to reduce the pain. You should be able to go home within two hours depending on how you feel. See page 19 of this booklet to learn more about surgical abortion.
- ✓ Long-term methods of contraception like implants (very small tube(s) put just under the skin) and intrauterine devices (IUDs, also called coils, put inside the uterus) work very well to prevent pregnancy and can be started immediately after an abortion. Some providers don't think about long-term methods for young people but they are safe for most women of any age. Be sure you ask about all of your contraceptive options. See pages 22-23 for more information on contraceptive methods.



# Jenny



## June

16th ... All set for the last day of term - we are off to the beach!!!!

18th ... Met a new crowd. Had a great time, we're meeting up Monday.

20th ... He is hot!!!! I'm seeing him again Wednesday.

22nd ... Had a great time. He gave me some beer – my first time. Felt REALLY cool, seeing him again Saturday.

29th ... Getting close, spent all day together, I like it when it's just him and me.

30th ... Bit drunk – didn't mean to go all the way ... still fun though. Must see the nurse to get some protection if this carries on!!!!

## July

2nd ... Nurse was lovely to me – treated me like an adult for a change. Going on pill after next period starts, must be careful till then.

4th ... Has asked me to go camping with his friends. We leave next week!!!!!!

14th ... We are in a fantastic spot everyone is having fun. Shame my period is due ... still plenty of ways to have a good time!!!

21st ... No sign of my period, worried, told him; he said to do a test.

22nd ... Finally got a test. Didn't realise they were so expensive. Told the pharmacist that it was for a friend.

23rd ... Oh no! What shall I do? How can I tell him? What will my parents say ... HELP! I tried to find information online but it was so confusing – there is way too much info out there and I don't know which ones are right.

24th ... He was shocked but so caring. Offered to come with me to tell mum and dad but I said no.

25th ... Well they were pretty quiet about it and have said I should make the decision for myself. Dad doesn't think I am old enough to be a mum. Mum reminded me that I have just met him. I think they are right. I have made an appointment to see someone at the family planning clinic tomorrow.

26th ... The counsellor said I should think long and hard about my decision! What does she think I have been doing?!! I'm going to the clinic next week to start the treatment. I wanted to start today but they said I have to wait for an appointment because the doctor wasn't there – it was so frustrating, it's just a pill, why couldn't she have given it to me?!

## August

1st ... They were nicer than I expected at the clinic. No one made any comments – just very kind and straightforward. Have taken the first pill going back for the second tomorrow – he is coming with me.

2nd ... Horrible people outside the clinic – a loud woman, a nun and two old men praying – they made me very frightened. I was so glad he was with me. We just ran past on the way out. Have to go back in two weeks for a check up to make sure everything is ok.

3rd ... It took a bit longer than I expected but it has all calmed down now, it was like my period – but a bit worse – a lot of bleeding with clots but nothing as bad as I thought it might be.

16th... All fine again the check up was to make sure that it was all complete. I had an injection last week for contraception and that isn't giving me any bother either so all is good.

... A year on and we are still together. I wouldn't recommend anyone start their relationship in the way we did, but I am happy I involved him in the whole thing. I have always been pro-choice and so were my family. I never thought I would need to think about an abortion, but am glad I was able to make that decision and that everything worked out well.

## Useful to know

- ✓ You can start taking the contraceptive pill anytime during your cycle but if you don't start on the same day as your period, you should use an additional method of contraception (like condoms) for seven days. **Remember, the pill does not protect you against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV.**
- ✓ You can buy a pregnancy test from a pharmacy or get it at a family planning clinic or from your nearest health centre. The test can be done at home the day after your missed period or three weeks after having unprotected sex. All you need to do is urinate (pee) on a small stick. The stick will detect any pregnancy hormone in your urine and display a positive or negative sign almost immediately.
- ✓ Checking for information online about choices related to pregnancy can be confusing. It is important to visit web sites that offer an equal amount of information on **all** the options available (abortion, continuing the pregnancy, adoption) rather than just one.
- ✓ A medical abortion, as described here, is done using pills which will cause bleeding, like during your period (menstruation) and that will end the pregnancy. See page 18 for more information about medical abortion.
- ✓ Injectable contraceptives work for one, two or three months, depending on the brand, and they are very effective at preventing pregnancy.
- ✓ If you have had sex without a condom, even with just one person, it is best to be aware that you might have a STI. Some symptoms of STIs appear within two to 14 days, while others can take up to four weeks and some others (like chlamydia) do not have any symptoms at all. So it is best to get regularly tested at a clinic.

# Amina

When the test was positive I knew I had to do something. The main reason was I didn't know who the father was. I'd had sex with three different boys that month and I didn't have any condoms although, they didn't want to use them anyway. There was no way I could think of having a baby. It is illegal to have an abortion here so I looked on the internet and found a good website with details of how to get pills that can make an abortion happen without anyone knowing.

I read the information a hundred times so I knew exactly what to ask for. The pills would have the right chemicals in them to make an abortion happen. It was really scary. I went to a small pharmacy and told them my grandmother was ill with stomach troubles and couldn't come to see them. They looked at me suspiciously but I quickly promised she would come when she was better, hoping they would believe me.

The questions on the internet were like a check up with the doctor so I felt ok. They said I should tell someone else what I was doing and that I should be no more than an hour from a hospital – these were the hardest things. I told my cousin Sara that I was coming to stay for two days. I said I was meeting a boy my parents didn't approve of so they mustn't know. She was fine with that. It took me four hours to get to her house and the train ticket cost a fortune, but I felt more comfortable doing this away from home so it was all ok.

I wrote Sara a letter explaining what was going on and left it under her pillow – just in case anything did go wrong. I took the pills when everyone was out of the house. The website said to place the pills under my tongue for 30 minutes before swallowing. I'd heard some women have a lot of pain so I was very afraid – but the cramping was just a bit more intense than what I get every month with my period. Three hours later I took a second dose of the pills. After the second dose the cramping and bleeding lasted for about two hours. I took a pain killer that I usually use for a headache, which helped. The pain wasn't as bad as I expected. I was relieved that when I looked at what came out I couldn't see anything that looked like a baby. I took the letter from Sara's bed – I felt I was safe again – and went into a deep sleep. The next day I went home.

Since then everything has been ok and I feel back to normal. The bleeding lasted about two weeks, but that is over and I got my period last week.

I am glad that there are these women on the internet or I would have had to have a baby I didn't want and couldn't care for. I am going to find a way to get contraception. I know that pills will protect me from pregnancy in the future and it is important that I take more control. I feel I was brave and am a strong person now. Thank goodness I have been able to do something about this on my own. I wonder sometimes what my baby would have been like but am not ready to be a mother. There wasn't anyone I felt I could talk to and that was frightening. No one talks about getting pregnant or abortion – I think they should – then this wouldn't happen to so many girls like me.

## Useful to know

- ✓ In many countries the law severely limits access to abortion, and can even result in healthcare providers and/or women being fined or jailed. But in nearly all countries abortion is allowed under specific circumstances which usually relate to the stage of the pregnancy ('gestational age') and the reason (such as to save a woman's life or in the case of rape or incest). Many young women don't know they have the right to access a legal abortion, so find out what the abortion law is in your country. See page 24 for useful websites on abortion laws.
- ✓ It is important to only buy medicines from legitimate websites or pharmacies you can trust. Many websites sell counterfeit medications and take advantage of women seeking information on abortion.
- ✓ Women on Web and Women on Waves are helping women all over the world who have limited access to safe legal abortions to access safe abortions on their own: check out [www.womenonwaves.org](http://www.womenonwaves.org) or/and [www.womenonweb.org](http://www.womenonweb.org). These are websites you can trust. They run hotlines in many countries offering advice and information on all your pregnancy options, an opportunity to consult a medical professional and get information on drugs that cause an abortion, such as misoprostol and mifepristone.
- ✓ If you can it is always safer to let someone know (a trusted friend or family member) that you are using a treatment to induce abortion and it's a good idea to have a supportive adult with you during the procedure.
- ✓ You should always be within a reasonable distance from a medical facility so that if you need help you can get there quickly.
- ✓ Like Amina, if you use misoprostol on your own, you will be advised to take the tablets by placing them under your tongue and this way, no one would be able to tell that you had used drugs to induce the abortion unless you told them yourself.
- ✓ If you don't feel well after taking the tablets, don't hesitate to seek medical help immediately. Clinics have a responsibility to help you.
- ✓ See page 18 of this booklet to learn more about medical abortion.

Think about who you would talk to if you needed help.

# Carlos

## 14th February

I have finally done the deed!!!! Didn't take long, but I have that out of the way and she promised to meet again on Saturday!! I can't have been too bad.

## 25th March

It's been more than a month and we've had lots of fun – but she just told me she's missed her period! What do we do now? I don't know who to talk to. My friends are ok but not sure they'd be much help. She wants to tell her mother. I think we could be in big trouble if she does.

## 26th March

Hector was amazing. He said this had happened to him last year with a girl he hardly knew and he suggested that we go to the clinic in town where they can help. I hope he won't say anything to the boys – they have been asking how things are going with Luisa; I have told them we're cooling it off a bit. I can't believe Hector didn't tell anyone about what happened to him last year – we didn't even know he had a girlfriend!

## 27th March

Luisa and I talked for ages. Well, she talked. I said she should have an abortion – I don't want to be a dad. She said she didn't know what she wanted.

She told her mother, who really doesn't know much – she doesn't even know where to go for help or who to talk to. She just said to go to the midwife just like she did when she had babies ... We really are in trouble.

## 6th April

We finally got to the clinic that Hector mentioned. They were kind, although I stayed outside in the waiting room most of the time. They didn't really talk to me much. At least we don't have to worry about paying; it's free because we're under 18.

## 10th April

She has decided to have an abortion. We are going on Saturday – she is going to bring her mother. She said I can come too. I got a bit angry at that and I said surely I was more important than her mother! That just made her cry and say she was afraid. I felt so bad and didn't know how to make her feel better.



12th April

As I thought, they gave her all the attention and they hardly even noticed I was there. Her mother took over and treated me like I was in the way. I wished they had talked to me a little – I was feeling very anxious.

She was a bit tired afterwards but she was ok to go home. We held hands all the way – I think that helped us both. I was feeling a bit sad ... Things have cooled between Luisa and I. We will always be friends but I don't think we will go out together any more – this was too much for us. We're both ok and that's what's important.

## Useful to know

- ✓ Young men can feel more involved if they know what kind of support their partner would like from them.
- ✓ Respecting their partner's decision and talking things through can help men to feel part of the process.
- ✓ Both young men and women may want to talk through the experience of abortion together or with a counselling service if it is available.
- ✓ It is important to remember that the final decision on whether to involve the partner in the pregnancy should be made by the young woman.



Think about what you would do if your girlfriend told you she missed her period and/or was pregnant.

# Ramona's mother

## January 10th

Ramona just doesn't seem herself ... she is distant and we seem apart from each other ... I hope she isn't having a hard time at school – I know she worries so much.

## January 15th

It has been such a shock! I never expected this; she has always been such a good girl – shy and quiet. When I asked her if she was ok, it all came tumbling out – poor girl. I knew something wasn't right when she looked so miserable. I couldn't help being a little angry, it took me by surprise. I hope she will understand I just want to help her. I don't think she should continue the pregnancy, I can't imagine her with a baby. She is still a baby herself.

## January 16th

Today was a bit better, we were both a bit calmer and we really talked. She is finding this so hard, afraid of having an abortion and afraid of having a baby. I've said what I think: she is too young to have a baby. I felt bad saying that but it is how I feel. We have worked hard all our lives and have such high hopes for her. I did tell her that I had chatted with her father and that we agreed that we will look after her whatever she decides and I think that it made her feel better. What would I have done in her place? I feel torn by what I think and feel and what is best for her. The longer I think about it though, the more I feel that it is her decision. She is going to sleep on it and we will talk again tomorrow ... I don't expect either of us will get much sleep tonight.

## January 17th

I think she has made the right decision and that having an abortion is the right option for her. We found the number and I phoned the clinic, they sound ok. I suppose if I'm honest I was a bit embarrassed when they asked how old she is – will they judge me? Have I been a bad mother? I didn't even know she had a boyfriend. I just want more for her. I have always told her she was capable of anything.

## January 30th

All over now thank goodness. We had good support from the clinic, it was all straightforward and over quickly. We had a long chat today and Ramona seems almost her old self. I told her again that I was shocked and that I was sorry it came out like I was angry but that I had never imagined that this would happen to her, of all girls – my girl! We talked about how glad we were that it was all over and promised to make some time to chat together more often.



## Useful to know

- ✓ Parents may be shocked, disappointed or angry when they hear about the pregnancy, that doesn't always mean they won't be prepared to offer their support.
- ✓ No one should force you to have an abortion if you don't want it.
- ✓ Parents don't have to know about a pregnancy. Many young people can access services without their parent's knowledge, although it is a good idea to involve an adult that knows you and can support you.

# Angele

I got permission from Ma to go with Pierre to a dance. We had a great time and left before it ended. He didn't live far away and he proposed that I come home with him for a little while before he took me home. We were alone in his room and we had sex. In general we use a condom but the shops were closed that evening and we couldn't get one and we thought we would just go ahead anyway because we were quite excited.

I worried that I might get pregnant or sick, but I was ashamed to talk about it with my Ma and my friends.

I shared my worries with Pierre and asked what we would do if I became pregnant. He reassured me saying it wouldn't happen. I was still worried and anxious as I waited for my next period.

I waited three weeks after the dance and I still hadn't got my period. My fears worsened. I talked to him and he was worried too which made me worry even more.

Ma noticed I was sad and she asked me what was wrong, so I finally told her the whole story. She went straight to the pharmacy and bought a pregnancy test and explained that I had to test my pee the first thing next morning. That night I woke up many times anxious to take the test. Finally at 5 am I did it. It was not fully clear, perhaps because I was scared, but it said I was pregnant. I cried. I stayed in bed crying. Ma came in and I gave her the test but my eyes had already told her the result. She sat down next to me and looked very sad.

"Say something," I told her. "You are such an idiot," she said. I sobbed silently. She told me to get ready and go to school and that she will think of a solution.

So I went to school but I couldn't concentrate. What would my life be like if I were pregnant? Tears kept pouring down my face. The shame at school, in my neighbourhood, the shame in church, and the shame for my family ... That's what I worried about.

Also, if I have a kid, what will I do? Who will take care of it when I'm in school? Will I have to stop school? Pierre only works in a shop and still lives with his family. He won't be able to take care of me and a baby. What will his parents say?

My friends and teachers noticed I was sad. So I pretended I had a headache and left the class. I went to Pierre's workplace and waited until he had his break. We went to café where I told him that I was pregnant. Unexpectedly, he was happy!

"We are going to have a baby and you'll stay with me forever – it's wonderful."

I asked if he was really happy and he said, "Yes, aren't you?" I asked about his parents, about money and my studies. Then he became serious – he said he hadn't thought of it like that. He said he would talk to his parents and we would meet on the weekend so he could tell me what they said.

I went back to school, happy with our meeting. He was calm and his reactions made me feel better. I started to think that we could live together with his parents support. I felt better.

At home my mother was waiting for me. My uncle, who worked at the hospital wanted to see me immediately. He gave me some pills. "Here you are, do it quickly – put it under your tongue tonight and tomorrow all your problems will be over."

Before I could say anything, he sent me home. He wished me luck and told me not to be stupid again. I told Ma about my meeting with Pierre and that we were in love and that he will be talking to his parents to get their support. She was furious. "If he wants you he should come here and ask for your hand and get married in church. That's the only way he can show he loves you."

I went to my room and stayed there until my sister called me for dinner. I washed my face so that my family couldn't see I had been crying.

I didn't take the pills. I really wanted to hear back from Pierre before I made a decision.

The next day at school I told Alice the whole story. She agreed with Ma and said that we must really focus on our studies and that it's nice to have a baby and live with a man, but not right now. She was sweet and calm and reassuring, so that evening I took the pills. The next day I had severe cramps and I was bleeding. I called Ma to help and she called my uncle. He said not to worry and to go to the youth centre clinic.

I went there and they were very unfriendly. They said I would have to wait until everyone else had been seen, as I was not a priority case. It was very worrying; I didn't understand what was going on. After about three hours a kind young nurse came to me, took me to a room and explained everything. She said that I was going to have a small operation to stop the bleeding and make sure that I was not pregnant anymore and that it wouldn't take long. She also told me to think about using contraceptive pills so that if we don't have condoms I still won't get pregnant. After giving me some pills to reduce the pain, they took me to a room, asked me to lie down on a thin bed and put my legs up; I tried not to be afraid. A small tube was put inside me, which was really uncomfortable at the start but then it got better. After about 15 minutes they took me to a room where I could lie down on a bed. I felt much better. I fell asleep and after about an hour Ma came and took me home.



## Useful to know

- ✓ With medical abortion, it may be necessary to have a surgical treatment to complete the abortion, but this is uncommon when taken as instructed by a qualified provider.
- ✓ Post abortion care, including treatment for incomplete abortion, is permitted everywhere, regardless of the law on abortion. You have the right to treatment so don't delay seeking help if you are unwell after an abortion.

# Maya

He seemed so nice, I felt excited that he had offered me a lift ... but maybe I should have known. He must have planned it all along. Instead of driving along the main road he suggested we go by the river and I didn't say no – it seemed ok. Even when he suggested we go into the woods I never thought he would push me to the ground and pull my underwear down. I should have fought harder, but he was so strong. I tried shouting but as hard as I tried no sound came out of my mouth. He was hurting me so much – I was just crushed. Getting back in the car I couldn't look at him – he seemed so pleased with himself. I couldn't wait to get into my house. I wish I had said something to Mama straight away but I needed to scrub myself clean and as the time passed it became harder to talk about it so I told no one. My friends would have said it was my fault – I always said I fancied him. Mama and Papa would never understand or support me. I felt so weird all the time. I thought the best thing to do was to carry on as usual then no one would suspect. For a while I almost forgot all about it. The only thing different was I never mentioned his name again, when friends pointed him out I didn't even look at him. Now my clothes are too tight: I am pregnant and I don't know what to do!!!

Mama found my diary and read it. In the long run that was probably the best thing that has happened in months, maybe I hoped she would. I had just got in from school and she came up to my room, sent my brothers and sister out to play and asked me to talk. We both cried and hugged and then we stopped. She became my usual mama asking lots and lots of questions. She was worried – she agreed not to tell Papa. The hardest thing was figuring out what to do. We were both confused. She had heard of a woman who helped girls like me to get an abortion. The next day we went to the woman's house, it was dirty and she was not friendly to us – just asked if we had money. We waited in a very dirty kitchen for about 20 minutes but Mama didn't like it so we left. She said it didn't look safe and it would be bad for me to be seen there. She decided that we would go to a clinic in the next town so no one would know me; she arranged it all and got me out of school.

All the other women in the clinic were Mama's age, I felt really shy and scared. Because I had left it a long time the nurse told me I was 17 weeks pregnant – I couldn't believe it! She then went through all the options with me – it was a lot of information to take in, but I felt like it was my decision and the most important thing was I didn't feel ready to be a mama myself. It was quite a long medical check up with lots of embarrassing questions. I don't remember much of what happened next – just being quite scared and Mama holding my hand all the time. I had an injection so I don't remember anything until it was all over. The nurses were nice to me but I just wanted to go home. When I was resting, the nurse came to talk to me about contraception. I told them that I didn't have a boyfriend and that I would be very sure to come and see them when I did. I had an STI and HIV test and that was ok.

It still shocks me when I think about all that has happened. I am sure that I made the right decision to have an abortion. It let me get on with my life and studies. Mama was brilliant, she was strong and kind even when she didn't really know what to do, and I know she loves me. I wish I had told her straight away.

## Useful to know

- ✓ No one should force you to have sex. If this happens to you, try to talk to someone like a family member, trusted friend or counsellor (e.g. in a clinic, at school) so that you can get immediate help. In addition to medical help (such as emergency contraception, treatment for STIs and post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV), you may also want and need emotional and legal support.
- ✓ If you think you might be pregnant, take a pregnancy test as soon as possible. If the test is positive seek help without delay.
- ✓ The people you speak with (e.g. parents, relatives, friends) may be unaware of where to get a safe abortion if they have not had any experience of abortion. They may be more confident in using traditional methods (unsafe) than seeking medical help from professionals (safe).
- ✓ **Abortion, when provided in safe conditions by a skilled provider, is one of the safest medical procedures. However, unsafe abortion can put a woman's life at risk or damage her reproductive system, meaning she could be unable to become pregnant again.**
- ✓ A second trimester abortion, as described here, can be performed with surgery and you can usually go home on the same day as the surgery. See page 19 for more information.
- ✓ If medical methods are used in the second trimester of pregnancy, you usually have to stay in the hospital or clinic until the abortion is complete.

# Things to know about pregnancy and abortion

## Pregnancy

When a man and woman have sexual intercourse and the man ejaculates semen (or 'comes'), the millions of tiny sperm cells in the semen swim up the woman's vagina, into her uterus (womb) and then into her fallopian tubes. There, they may join the tiny egg that the woman might have released from one of her ovaries every month. After this 'joining' happens (also known as fertilization) the egg will move down towards the womb and attach itself to the womb lining. This attachment is called implantation and now the egg is called an embryo and the pregnancy has begun. Hormones produced after implantation can be detected by a pregnancy test. As the pregnancy progresses, the embryo grows and is then called a fetus. The 'gestational age' of a pregnancy usually refers to the number of weeks since the first day of the last period. Pregnancy is sometimes described in trimesters: the first trimester is up to 12 weeks, the second trimester is from 13 to 27 weeks and the third trimester is from 28 to 40 weeks.

## Abortion

Sometimes an embryo or fetus is lost naturally and this is called a miscarriage or spontaneous abortion. When a pregnancy is ended with the intention to avoid a birth, for example by taking pills or by surgery, it is called an induced abortion or just simply an abortion. An abortion, when provided in safe conditions by a skilled provider is one of the safest medical procedures. Contrary to what you may have heard, long term complications following safe abortion are extremely rare.

When an abortion is done by someone who does not have the proper skills and/or in an environment lacking minimal clinical standards the abortion is considered unsafe. Even with safe abortion, the risks increase with the duration of the pregnancy so it is best to seek services as soon as possible after you have made a decision to have an abortion.

## Medical abortion

A medical abortion is done using pills to cause the termination of a pregnancy. The most effective type of medical abortion requires the use of two different pills, called mifepristone (also known as 'the abortion pill', branded RU 486, Mifegyn or Mifeprex), and misoprostol (also known by the brand name: Cytotec, Arthrotec, Oxaprost, Cyprostol, Mibetec, Prostokos or Misotrol).

This method has two parts to it:

1. The first part involves swallowing a tablet (mifepristone). This blocks the hormone that supports the pregnancy.
2. The second part involves taking the misoprostol tablets by placing them between the cheek and the gum, under the tongue or in the vagina causing the uterus (womb) to cramp and the lining to break down.

The pills will cause bleeding, like during your period (menstruation) and that will end the pregnancy. This is similar to having a miscarriage. The bleeding lasts up to two weeks on average. In many countries, for abortions in the first nine weeks you are allowed to take the misoprostol at home after being seen in the clinic for the mifepristone. For medical abortions later in pregnancy, you usually have to wait in a clinic or hospital until the abortion is completed.



In some countries, it is not easy to access mifepristone and so a safe medical abortion can be obtained using only misoprostol. For all medical abortions, you should have access to medication to decrease the pain (such as ibuprofen), either from the pharmacy or from your provider, in case you need it.

Whatever method is offered to you by the provider, they should explain how the process works. If you are not clear, ask questions.

## Surgical abortion

### Vacuum aspiration

This method is done in a clinic or hospital and will be done with sedation or general anaesthetic (while drowsy or asleep) or with a local anaesthetic (while awake) to reduce the pain. The medication is given either as a pill or injection into the cervix or in your arm. The cervix is then gently opened and a thin tube is inserted into the cervix and suction is used to end the pregnancy. The procedure takes about 15 minutes and you will be asked to rest for a while afterwards as you will feel some cramping and will also have some bleeding (like during your period). You should be able to go home within two hours depending on how you feel.

When vacuum aspiration is used to treat an incomplete abortion, the process will be the same as above.

### Dilation and evacuation

This is a procedure used to perform surgical abortion in the second trimester of pregnancy. Different types of anaesthetic might be used, including sedation or general anaesthetic. After the anaesthetic is given a passage is gently stretched through the cervix until a narrow forceps can be used to end the pregnancy. Any remaining tissue will be removed by suction. You can usually go home on the same day as the surgery.

## Deciding which method to use

The table below shows the advantages and disadvantages of medical and surgical abortion.

|               | Medical abortion   | Surgical abortion   |
|---------------|--|---|
| Advantages    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoids surgery</li> <li>• More privacy and autonomy; can be done at home in the first nine weeks of pregnancy</li> <li>• No risk of cervical or uterine injury</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quicker</li> <li>• Emotionally easier for some women</li> <li>• Takes place in a health care centre, clinic or hospital</li> </ul>             |
| Disadvantages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can cause prolonged bleeding, cramping, nausea, diarrhoea and other side-effects</li> <li>• Requires waiting for the abortion to be complete, sometimes with uncertainty</li> <li>• Can result in more clinic visits</li> <li>• Drugs can be costly</li> <li>• Can only be used at home up to nine weeks. In later pregnancies most regimens require a stay in the hospital or clinic until the abortion is complete</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small risk of cervical or uterine injury</li> <li>• Risk of infection</li> <li>• Less privacy and autonomy</li> <li>• Can be costly</li> </ul> |

## Some useful tips

### Preventing an unwanted pregnancy

- Use contraception every time you have sex to prevent an unwanted pregnancy and condoms to prevent STIs including HIV. Trying to calculate a 'safe' time to have sex without using contraception is often an unreliable way of preventing pregnancy as it requires commitment from both partners to avoid sex during a predicted fertile time, which can be difficult. An irregular menstrual cycle also makes this method more unreliable as it is more difficult to predict your fertile time. The 'withdrawal' method, where the penis is taken out of the vagina before ejaculation is also much less reliable and does not prevent against STIs.
- If you have sex without using a condom or other effective contraceptive method, you need to take emergency contraception. Emergency contraceptive pills are effective if taken within three days of unprotected sex, and may be effective as many as five days after. Another option for emergency contraception is to have an IUD inserted by a trained provider which can be done up to five days after unprotected sex to help prevent pregnancy. Emergency contraception is more effective the earlier you take it after unprotected sex.
- Remember, emergency contraception cannot cause an abortion, it can only prevent a pregnancy after unprotected sex.
- If you have had sex without using a condom, you should also look out for any unusual discharge from your vagina or pain in your lower abdomen as these can be signs of an STI and you should get tested and treated. Keep in mind that many STIs do not have symptoms so it's best that you get checked regularly anyway.
- Look here for clinics in your country and where you can find help.  
[www.ippf.org/en/Where](http://www.ippf.org/en/Where)  
[www.cecinfo.org/database/pill/viewAllCountry.php](http://www.cecinfo.org/database/pill/viewAllCountry.php)  
[www.mariestopes.org.uk/documents/travelguide.pdf](http://www.mariestopes.org.uk/documents/travelguide.pdf)  
[www.womenonwaves.org/article-456-en.html](http://www.womenonwaves.org/article-456-en.html)

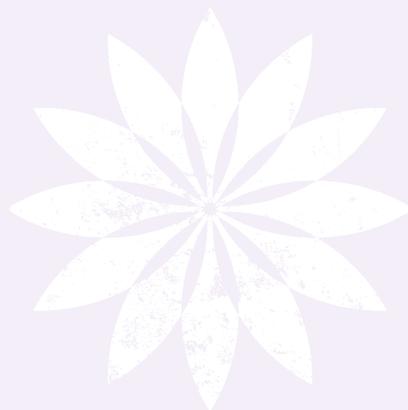
### Identifying a pregnancy

- If you had sex without a contraceptive method and if you were not able to get emergency contraception, then it's a good thing to look out for your period. If your period is irregular, you can look out for other signs of pregnancy such as tender breasts, feeling sick or vomiting at any time of the day or night, feeling very tired and needing to urinate often.
- If you think you may be pregnant, a pregnancy test is the most reliable way to confirm you are pregnant. Most pharmacies sell home pregnancy tests but you can also get them from your local health centre or a family planning clinic where they might be free. These are reliable so long as you follow the instructions carefully. A pregnancy test will usually be positive one to three days after a missed period. If a first test is negative, and you still don't get your period for another week, do another test or visit a clinic.
- If you think you may be pregnant, it is important to confirm that you are pregnant as soon as possible so that you have time to make a decision about your pregnancy and are able to seek medical services early, regardless of which decision you make.
- If you haven't had a period for eight weeks, and you have had sex without a contraceptive method during this time, it may be a good idea to take a pregnancy test whether or not you've had pregnancy symptoms, just to be sure.



## Deciding what to do

- Don't panic
- Whatever decision you make, it's important to take action as early as possible.
- Remember, it's your decision.



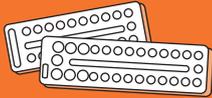
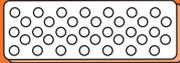
## Finding a safe abortion service

- This is extremely important. You can look at reliable websites or ask friends or family for help. Be sure to go to a place that offers modern methods of abortion such as those described on pages 18-19. Traditional methods such as herbal remedies or sticks that are sometimes provided by alternative healers are not safe and can be extremely dangerous. The clinic should be clean and they should explain everything to you and answer all of your questions before the abortion. If you feel worried or unsure about the clinic or the provider for any reason, trust your instincts and leave!
- If you do not feel well after having an abortion, you should go immediately to the nearest health clinic or hospital. Post-abortion care and treatment for incomplete abortion are permitted everywhere, regardless of the law on abortion. In countries where abortion is restricted, this service may not be widely available or youth-friendly. But, you have the right to treatment so don't delay seeking help.
- If your sexual experience was not something you wanted or agreed to, you should talk about it with a counsellor, a nurse or someone you trust.
- If the service provider does not offer you an STI test, ask for one or ask where you can get one.



# Choosing contraception

It's important to use a contraceptive method. There are many to choose from and most can be started immediately after an abortion. In the table below\* are some details of the different methods you can use.

|                         | Combined pill (oestrogen and progestogen)<br>   | Progestogen only pill<br> | Male condom<br>  | Female condom<br>  | Diaphragm and caps<br> |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|---|---|
| How effective is it?    | Over 99% effective if taken according to instructions.   | Over 99% effective if taken according to instructions.   | 98% effective if used according to instructions.   | 95% effective if used according to instructions.  | 92-96% effective if used according to instructions.   |
| Advantages              | Reduces bleeding, period pain and pre-menstrual tension.<br>Protects against cancer of the ovary and womb.                       | Useful for women who cannot take the combined pill.  | Free from family planning clinics (in some countries) and also sold widely.<br>Men can take responsibility for contraception.                        | Can be put in any time before sex.  | Can be put in any time before sex (if more than three hours, extra spermicide is needed).                 |
| Disadvantages           | There may be temporary side effects, such as headaches and feeling sick.<br>Rare, but serious, side effects include blood clots. | Periods may be irregular with some bleeding in between.  | May slip off or split if not used correctly.<br>The man needs to withdraw as soon as he has ejaculated (come) and be careful not to spill the semen. | May slip.<br>Need to make sure the penis enters the condom and not between the vagina and the condom. | Some women get urinary infections.<br>Extra spermicide is needed if you have sex again.                   |
| Protection against STIs | No   | No   | Yes  | Yes   | Some  |

There are also permanent contraceptive methods known as male (vasectomy) and female sterilization (tubal ligation). During these procedures the fallopian tubes in women or the tubes carrying sperm in men (vas deferens) are cut, sealed or blocked. These methods should not be chosen if you are in any doubt as to whether you want to have children now or in the future.

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| <b>Injectable</b><br>  | <b>Implant</b><br>   | <b>Intra uterine system (with progestogen)</b><br> | <b>Intra uterine device (Copper T)</b><br> | <b>Contraceptive patch</b><br> | <b>Contraceptive vaginal ring</b><br> |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| Over 99% effective.   | Over 99% effective.   | Over 99% effective.   | 98% to over 99% effective.  | Over 99% effective if used according to the instructions.   | Over 99% effective if used according to the instructions.  |
| Lasts for 4, 8 or 12 weeks, depending on the brand.   | Works for three years.  | Works for five years but can be taken out sooner.<br>Periods will be much lighter and shorter.                                      | Works for at least 10 years but can be taken out sooner.<br>Can be used by women who cannot use hormonal methods.           | You don't have to think about it every day.<br>Can make periods regular, lighter and less painful.                | You don't have to think about it every day.<br>Can make periods regular, lighter and less painful.                       |
| With the 8 or 12 week injectable, periods often become irregular or stop and some women gain weight.<br>May be other side effects such as mood changes. | Periods are often irregular for at least the first year with some bleeding in between.<br>May be other side effects such as acne, mood changes and breast tenderness. | Light bleeding is common for the first three months.<br>May be temporary side effects such as acne and breast tenderness.           | Periods may be heavier or longer and more painful.  | Can be seen and can cause skin irritation.  | You need to feel comfortable inserting and removing it.  |
| No  | No  | No  | No  | No  | No   |



## After the abortion

Most young women feel a sense of relief after an abortion, some feel unhappy or confused and some feel all of these things at once or at different times. Some girls may feel sad after an abortion because abortion is so stigmatized and they don't have support. Whatever you are feeling, it is good if you have someone you can trust and talk to (friend, sibling, parent or other adult) if needed. You should make sure you have enough information on how to look after yourself afterwards and seek help if you are worried.

### Remember

An abortion performed by a skilled provider in safe conditions is one of the safest medical procedures. There is no decision about an unplanned pregnancy that is right for everyone. What is important is that you have all the information and the support you need to make your own decision and if you do decide to have an abortion, that you have access to services that respect your rights to safety, privacy and dignity.

## List of useful websites

[www.ippf.org/en/Where](http://www.ippf.org/en/Where)  
[www.cecinfo.org/database/pill/viewAllCountry.php](http://www.cecinfo.org/database/pill/viewAllCountry.php)  
[www.maristopes.org.uk/documents/travelguide.pdf](http://www.maristopes.org.uk/documents/travelguide.pdf)  
[www.womenonwaves.org](http://www.womenonwaves.org)  
[www.womenonweb.org](http://www.womenonweb.org)  
[www.4exhale.org/index.php](http://www.4exhale.org/index.php)  
[www.ipas.org](http://www.ipas.org)  
[www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)

### Websites on national abortion laws

<http://reproductiverights.org/en/document/world-abortion-laws-2008-fact-sheet>  
[www.un.org/esa/population/publications/abortion/profiles.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/abortion/profiles.htm)  
[www.hsph.harvard.edu/population/abortion/abortionlaws.htm](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/population/abortion/abortionlaws.htm)



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[www.ippf.org](http://www.ippf.org)

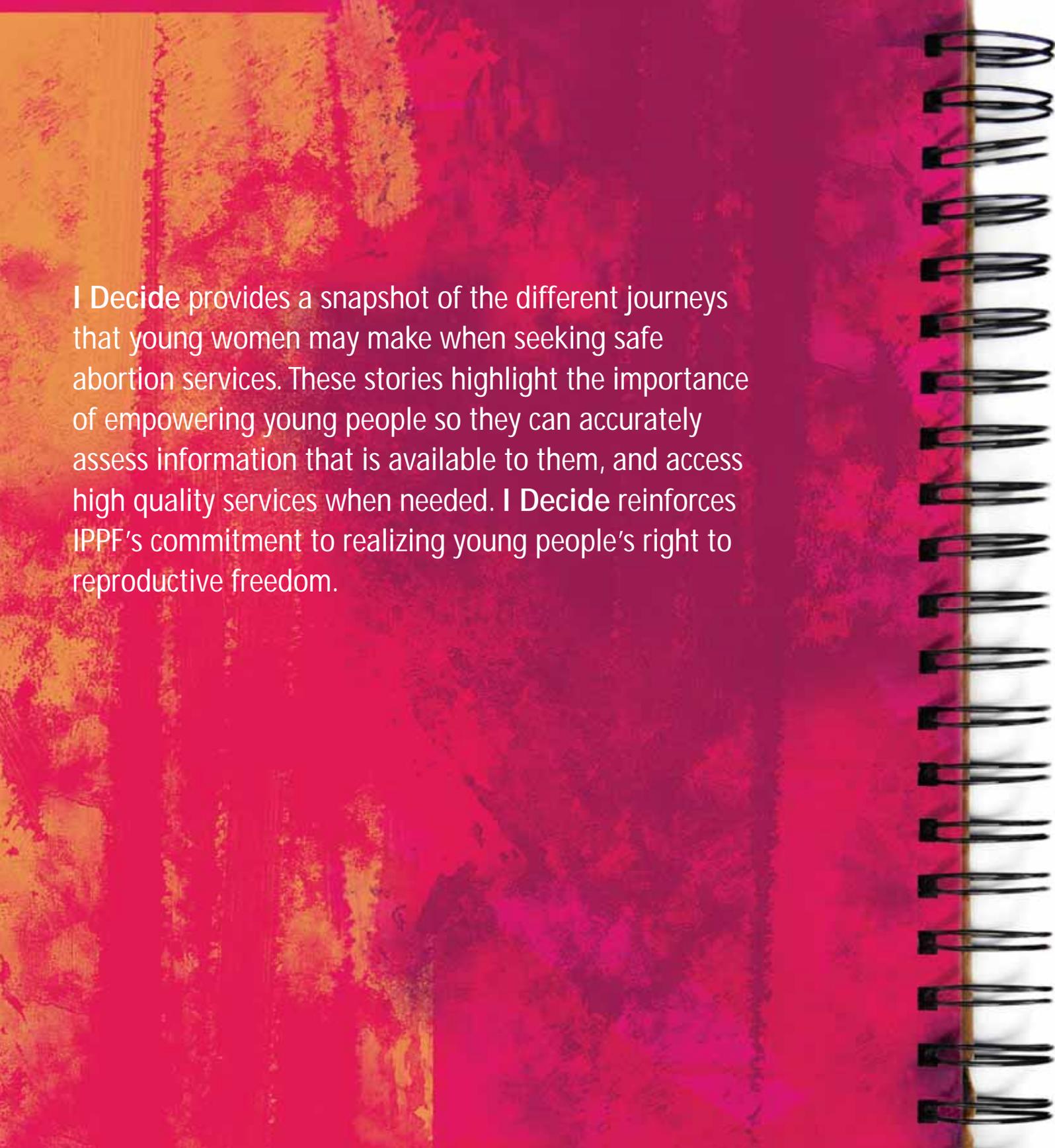


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I **Decide** provides a snapshot of the different journeys that young women may make when seeking safe abortion services. These stories highlight the importance of empowering young people so they can accurately assess information that is available to them, and access high quality services when needed. I **Decide** reinforces IPPF's commitment to realizing young people's right to reproductive freedom.