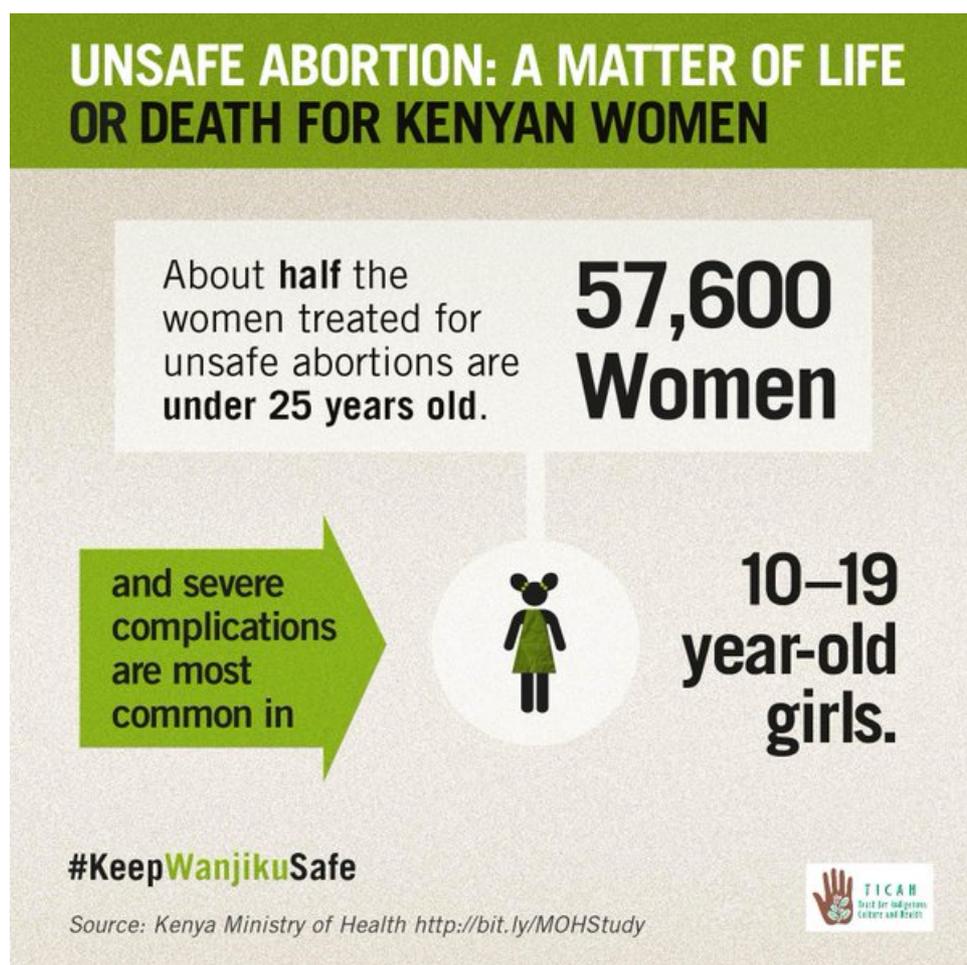


AMPATH Kenya Health Reporter investigates school counselor perspective on abortion among young women in Central Kenya

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Based on 2012 statistics, the Kenya Medical Association (KMA) estimates that nearly 465,000 Kenyan women undergo abortions each year. At least half of these are young women, many very young. Despite how common it is, young women who undergo abortions face risk of unsafe abortions and incredible stigma.

As part of the TIMBY (This is My Backyard) community reporting project, we investigated this important health issue for young women. To shed light on this issue, AMPATH Health Reporter Eunice interviewed a high school Guidance Counselor in Kerugoya about what she's learned about abortions among young women in Kenya.

The guidance counselor, who will remain anonymous, reports that she has encountered many girls and young women who have had abortions. These girls are as young as 12 years old, and many are university students, all of whom are trying to finish their education.

When asked about the reasons why young women have abortions, she says that "Most of them fear regrets and being rejected by the society and their parents, and they are not ready to take care of these babies

because most of them are still in school."

She reports that some go alone or are brought by their friends, but some, especially primary school students, are taken by their parents. She reports that parents take their daughters to have an abortion because they want them to finish their education. "They don't want society to know this because it is considered as a shame, they are bringing down their parents," she reports.

Abortion remains a controversial issue in the legal system of Kenya. Because of the unclear legal status, most abortions in Kenya are performed in unsafe environments, which leads to significant risk of complications. There have been previous attempts to make the laws more lenient and improve the safety of abortion in Kenya. An [article](#) last year outlined the many issues surrounding unsafe abortion in Kenya.

For the girls the guidance counselor has seen, she says that some of them do it by themselves at home, but most go to private health facilities. "Most of them go to health facilities, especially the private health facilities because they don't want to be known in public," she says.

She expresses that many young women who she counsels who have had abortions are being traumatized by stigma and they feel rejected, leading to low self-esteem.

This stigma can cause young women to be silent about their pregnancies, increasing the risk of experiencing an unsafe abortion and complications. [Organizations in Kenya](#) are working to provide comprehensive sex education to prevent unwanted pregnancy, fight abortion stigma, and to allow young women to open up and be supported in their experiences. Guidance counselors can play a key role in helping young women in school cope with these experiences and improve their self-esteem, leading to healthy and productive lives.