



Brief communication

## Abortion among rural women in north Ethiopia

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Recent global estimates indicate that as many as 53 million pregnancies are terminated by induced abortion each year. However, in most developing countries documented information is scarce [1]. Abortion was reported to be among the major causes of maternal mortality in Ethiopia [2,3]. In Ethiopia where over 85% of the population are rural inhabitants and access to health-care facilities is very limited, no published report is available on abortion. The objective of this study was to describe the magnitude of abortion in rural communities of north Ethiopia.

The study was conducted in the rural district of South Gonder in north Ethiopia from February to April 1997. Study subjects were currently married women of reproductive age (15–49 years). A multi-stage sampling procedure was followed to select study subjects. Study clusters were selected

randomly, followed by systematic identification of women in households. Data were collected by female high school graduates using a structured questionnaire. Data were processed using the Epi Info version 6.4 statistical program.

A total of 1158 women were involved in the study. Lifetime history of abortion was reported by 241 (20.8%) of the women (Table 1). The mean number of abortions per woman was 1.8 (S.D. = 0.41) with a range of 8 (minimum = 1; maximum = 9). Out of the reported abortions the majority (91.4%) were spontaneous. Induced abortion was mainly related to avoidance of pregnancies too close together and poverty (having no land to till). Self-introduction of hard material in the vagina and chloroquine over-dosage were the main methods used for inducing abortion. One-third of the respondents, 343 (29.6%), disclosed that they have known someone in their family who died of abortion. A history of STD ( $P < 0.01$ ) and the lifetime number of marriages of more than once ( $P < 0.01$ ) were associated with an increased risk of abortion. The majority, 128

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Table 1  
Reported abortion prevalence by selected socio-demographic characteristics of the women ( $n = 1158$ )

Variable	Sample in the category	Number of reported abortion cases	Percent
<i>Women's age group</i>			
15–19	78	7	9.0
20–24	237	28	11.8
25–34	469	84	17.9
35–49	374	122	32.6
Total	1158	241	20.8
<i>Age at first marriage</i>			
< 15 years	804	170	21.1
15 + years	354	71	20.1
<i>Marital frequency &gt; once</i>			
Present	562	134	23.8
Absent	596	107	18.0
<i>History of STD</i>			
Present	105	38	36.2
Absent	1053	203	19.3

(53.1%), of abortion cases sought no treatment during the last abortion incident.

Though the abortion prevalence in this study is high, it is still believed to be an underestimation. First, abortion is a very sensitive and secretive issue and women are likely to under report [4]. Second, cross-sectional surveys pick only survivors; those who died from abortion are missed. The study indicates that with the rapidly growing population size and declining agricultural land size per capita in Ethiopia, the rate of induced abortion in rural communities may increase remarkably in the near future. Thus, urgent public health measures such as wide-spread public education programs and improved access to family planning and medical services must be initiated and/or strengthened through appropriate chan-

nels that are readily accessible to the rural population.

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