

MY HONOR BODY HEALTH

FULFILLING **YOUNG PEOPLE'S** SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS



There are more than 1.7 billion young people aged 10–24 years in the world*—the largest population of young people in history. As the global population continues to grow, young people face changing environments and circumstances that can affect the likelihood of unwanted pregnancy and abortion. Between 2.2 and 4 million adolescent girls aged 10–19 in developing countries undergo unsafe abortions each year.*

THE GOOD NEWS? Young people have ideas for change and hold solutions to problems that they face. With information, support, and opportunities to act, young people can improve their own sexual and reproductive health and advance their rights.



THE CHALLENGE

WORLDWIDE, unsafe abortion affects girls and young women disproportionately:

- + Young women aged 10–24 account for approximately 46 percent of unsafe abortion-related deaths each year.*
- + Adolescent girls aged 10–19 make up 70 percent of all hospitalizations from unsafe abortion complications.*
- + When girls and young women obtain abortion care they tend to access it later in the pregnancy than adult women for many reasons.*
- + Young women aged 10–24 are more likely to delay seeking help for abortion-related complications than adults.*

GIRLS are reaching puberty earlier now than in previous decades.* Globally, many young women are staying in school longer, migrating farther away from their birth places, entering the workforce in larger numbers, and marrying later. This means the time period during which a young woman may be unmarried while also able to become pregnant is expanding.* At the same time, youth sexuality, pregnancy and motherhood outside of marriage continue to be stigmatized in many societies, and girls and young women experience higher rates of gender-based violence. Because of this, many girls and young women experience unwanted pregnancies and seek abortions.



*“Unsafe abortion has eaten into our society, gradually **destroying the lives of young women**, as people have closed their eyes at the issue hoping it will disappear.”*

— Young woman, Nigeria*

DID YOU KNOW?

Pregnancy and childbirth-related complications, including unsafe abortion, continue to be one of the leading causes of death for adolescent girls 15–19 years old.* The United Nations estimates that more than 14 million young women give birth each year, and more than 90 percent of them live in developing countries. Prevention of unwanted pregnancy among young women is essential to reduce complications and deaths related to pregnancy, unsafe abortion and childbirth.

OUR GOALS

IPAS WORKS with youth to enhance the ability of girls and young women to prevent unwanted pregnancy and obtain safe abortions—and to fulfill their sexual and reproductive rights.

Our goals are to ensure that girls and young women can:

- + Make and act on their own decisions about sexual and reproductive health
- + Prevent unwanted pregnancy, including through access to information and contraception
- + Recognize the early signs of pregnancy
- + Access comprehensive abortion care when they need or want it
- + Educate themselves and their peers
- + Become leaders who advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights

Definition:

YOUNG PEOPLE

Ipas defines “young people” as everyone aged 10–24 years, irrespective of their sex, gender, marital status, school attendance, work situation, parenthood or any other characteristic.

Definition:

ABORTION CARE FOR YOUNG WOMEN

Ipas defines abortion care for young women as care that respects their rights; enables them to participate in design, implementation and evaluation of services; and is accessible and clinically appropriate. Comprehensive abortion care for young women includes contraceptive options counseling.

“Some grown-ups think that we are too young to know. They should know that **we are too young to die.**”
— Young person, Honduras*



photo: © Richard Lord

WHY DO YOUNG WOMEN RESORT TO UNSAFE ABORTION?

BECAUSE of the many barriers to safe abortion care, young women who decide to terminate a pregnancy often find no alternative than to resort to unsafe abortion—even in settings where safe abortion is legal. Barriers also cause young women to delay obtaining abortion care until later in pregnancy than adult women and to delay seeking help for abortion-related complications.

Girls and young women face many barriers to safe abortion care, including:

SOCIAL BARRIERS such as gender and age discrimination, gender-based violence, stigma attached to youth sexuality, abortion stigma, and lack of information and social support

LEGAL BARRIERS such as prohibitions on abortion or requirements for adult or spousal consent or notification

ECONOMIC BARRIERS such as lack of transportation or financial resources

HEALTH SYSTEM BARRIERS such as high cost of services, facilities with limited hours of operation, lack of privacy and confidentiality, and judgmental provider and staff attitudes about youth sexuality and abortion



photo: © Richard Lord

“The person in the health unit is well known to everyone — and if I go there to get a condom, I will be tagged as a wrong person in the community because our society is not yet fully open to discussing sex freely.”

— Young person, Uganda*

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS FOR FACTORY WORKERS IN NEPAL'S KATHMANDU VALLEY

At a class for young women factory workers on sexual and reproductive health, one woman sat cradling her week-old infant. The classes were so informative and interesting, she told the

facilitator, that she wouldn't miss one for anything.

Thousands of young women work in the brick, handicraft and textile factories scattered across Nepal's Kathmandu Valley. Multiple economic and social barriers—such as the widely held beliefs that young women should not be sexually active and that reproductive health services are only for older and married women—greatly limit the access these young women have to comprehensive information on

sexual and reproductive health and rights, including their right to a safe abortion.

In collaboration with two community partners in Nepal, Ipas helped create a series of sexual and reproductive health classes for factory workers that our partners now run, plus trainings for young women who wish to become peer educators in their factories and communities. Because of the classes and trainings, factory workers increased their knowledge and skills. Many also started participating in other community and partner events, through which they continue accessing information and care.



BARRIERS: A COMPLEX WEB Many barriers to girls and young women accessing safe abortion care are interrelated. For example, abortion stigma and lack of respect for young women's sexual and reproductive rights contribute to multiple other barriers, such as prohibitive laws and policies and judgmental health-care provider attitudes.

YOUNG WOMEN HAVE A RIGHT TO HEALTH

ALL PEOPLE—including girls and young women—have a right to health. The right to health is dependent on other human rights—such as the right to information and education, to freedom from discrimination and to benefit from scientific progress. Governments and communities frequently do not recognize or protect these rights, but without them, girls and young women cannot attain a high standard of health and wellbeing.

At Ipas, we believe that girls and young women have the right to comprehensive and accurate reproductive health information and services, including safe abortion care. We believe that young women can be actively involved in—and consent to—their own health care. We also recognize young people's right to private and confidential medical counseling.

photos: © Richard Lord



“We do not have access to contraception. We are stigmatized if we have a child before marriage. We do not have the right to abortion. What a dilemma!

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

— Young woman, Democratic Republic of the Congo*



PARTNERING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

YOUNG PEOPLE have a right to participate meaningfully in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs that address their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Their participation increases programmatic effectiveness and improves quality of care.

Through partnership with adults, young people can build leadership skills to promote youth-appropriate sexual and reproductive health information and care, including safe abortion. This ensures that young people are not just beneficiaries of services but also key stakeholders in their own health care.

photo: © Richard Lord

Youth leaders might:

- + Gather information from and engage peers in the design of appropriate services
- + Lead a youth advisory council that makes decisions about community health services
- + Help provide services such as pre- and postabortion counseling or contraception counseling
- + Serve as a young patients' advocate within a health facility or district



*“Listen to me, no one else, listen to me. It’s my body, listen to me: it’s my life, **listen to me.**”*

— Young person, United Kingdom*

STRENGTHENING YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES

YOUNG PEOPLE are qualified experts on the experiences of today's youth. At Ipas, we trust that young people can best identify their own needs and desires. And we recognize their desire to participate in—or lead—the conversations that determine their realities. Ipas aims to promote young peoples' active engagement in communities and programs worldwide by:

- + Supporting their participation in skills-building events
- + Involving them at all stages of community advocacy and outreach projects
- + Inviting them to conferences and high-level meetings
- + Providing networking opportunities for youth leaders

Definition:

PARTNERSHIP

In a true partnership between adults and young people, each party has the opportunity to make suggestions and decisions and the contribution of each is recognized and valued.*

Ipas believes:

- + Adults should work with young people rather than simply for them.*
- + Young people should be supported to take on responsibility so they can transition from being beneficiaries of programs to partners and leaders.*

HOW IS IPAS WORKING TO REDUCE UNSAFE ABORTION AMONG YOUNG WOMEN?

IN COUNTRIES throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America, Ipas:

- + Partners with and empowers youth groups, medical students' associations, and community organizations to raise awareness of and advocate for safe abortion
- + Supports partners that provide community-level education and health care for youth
- + Works with health professionals to build their skills and commitment to providing quality abortion care for young women
- + Advocates at international, regional, national and local levels for policies that promote girls' and young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights
- + Conducts research on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls and young women, with a particular focus on abortion
- + Creates tools that help young people participate meaningfully in projects and advocacy work focused on their health and rights



IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICA, PEER EDUCATORS ENGAGE THOUSANDS

Almost a hundred young people gathered in the morning sun outside Mafikeng's Youth Center in North West Province, South Africa, eagerly awaiting the day's sessions on computing skills, performing arts and teenage pregnancy. Enthusiastic and engaged, these youth were ready to teach, support and mentor each other.

But it wasn't always this way. In rural North West Province, young people face many challenges that result in unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions: unemployment, sexual violence, and limited access to reproductive health information. Yet the province's youth centers used to stand empty.

Through a partnership with the provincial Department of Health, Ipas collaborated with five youth centers to promote the right to education, better meet young people's needs and advocate for their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Within the project's first year, trained peer educators had reached more than 13,000 young people in formal education sessions that focused on youth rights, gender equity, positive sexuality, and violence prevention. Plus, the introduction of career development services expanded the centers' usefulness and appeal to local youth.

Best of all, every aspect of the project empowered young people to be active participants, leading some peer educators to adopt a now-popular youth mantra: **"Nothing for us without us!"**

photos: © Richard Lord

Nothing
for us
without us!



IN ECUADOR, YOUTH-RUN HOTLINES OFFER GUIDANCE — AND RAISE AWARENESS

In Quito, Ecuador's busy capital city, young women with unwanted pregnancies face a difficult situation: Abortion is illegal, except in extreme cases, and highly stigmatized. These young women may feel helpless, ashamed, alone and desperate. Without a reliable source of support and guidance, they are at risk of resorting to a clandestine, unsafe abortion—like more than 340 women in Ecuador do every day.

But thanks to the confidential Women's Health hotline (Salud Mujeres), young women in Quito and other cities have somewhere to turn. Created and operated by the youth-run non-profit organization Youth Coordinator for Gender Equity, the hotline is based on the fundamental belief that all women have the right to freedom of speech and the right to accurate, scientifically-proven and secular information about their health. Every

woman who calls the hotline receives supportive counseling and free, reliable information on sexual and reproductive health, including information on contraception and on how to safely terminate an unwanted pregnancy—if a woman so chooses—using misoprostol pills that are widely available in Ecuador.

Ipas works with Youth Coordinator to support its hotline and related work raising awareness throughout Ecuador of the need to decriminalize abortion and provide safe services. Made up of young women and men aged 18–26, Youth Coordinator aims to build a world where women—especially the youngest, poorest and most disadvantaged women—can make safe decisions about their bodies and their lives. The organization strives to make all young people's voices heard on issues that affect them, and the hotline offers a reassuring voice in return.



GET INVOLVED!

EVERYONE has a role to play in promoting the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people. Together we can support the development of an informed and empowered generation.

Learn more about Ipas and our work with youth at www.ipas.org

Our free, online resources for professionals working with youth include:

- + *Abortion care for young women: A training toolkit, 2011*
- + *Young women and abortion: A guide for conducting situation assessments, 2011*
- + *Abortion attitude transformation: A values clarification toolkit for global audiences, Activities adapted for young women, 2011 edition*

www.ipas.org



PO BOX 9990 CHAPEL HILL, NC 27515 USA
1.919.967.7052 • ipas@ipas.org • www.ipas.org

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*REFERENCES:

Iпас. (2011). *Abortion care for young women: A training toolkit*. Chapel Hill, NC: Iпас.

The training toolkit includes a full list of references for facts and quotations featured in this brochure and is available for free download:

[www.ipas.org/
abortioncareforyoungwomen](http://www.ipas.org/abortioncareforyoungwomen)