

Transforming Cultural and religious leaders' attitudes to abortion: Impacts of VCATs

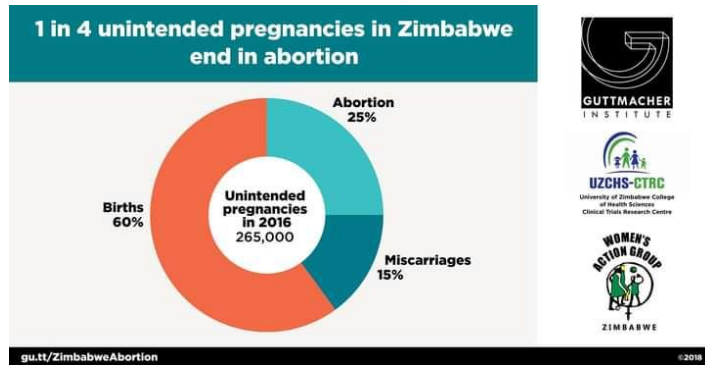
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Objective

To share experiences from Zimbabwe on the effectiveness of Value Clarification and Attitudes Transformation in transforming societal attitudes towards abortion



Factors fuelling unsafe, illegal abortion in Zimbabwe

- Economic – due to poverty, some women and girls resort to 'cheaper' options for termination, which in turn may harm their health and wellbeing.
- Social – girls and women are not socially expected to fall pregnant under circumstances e.g. when they are still in school or unmarried. Due to shame, some succumb to the pressure to abort.
- Policy – The Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1977 only permits abortion on 3 grounds and therefore does not provide for safe, legal abortions outside of these grounds, forcing women to 'improvise'.

SAT Zimbabwe's efforts: Methodology

SAT led a consortium of 3 consortium organizations supported by Amplify Change, promoting equitable access to safe abortion for all women and girls in Zimbabwe:

- Addressing stigma and discrimination associated with abortion through adoption of theatre methodology (at community level) and Values Clarification and Attitudes Transformation sessions with key stakeholders such as traditional, religious and cultural leaders.
- Promoting access to SRHR services (contraceptives) as a preventative measure to unintended, unplanned pregnancies – SAT Zimbabwe Outreaches in collaboration with Population Services Zimbabwe.

Results

- There has been progressive change in attitudes as the traditional, cultural and religious leaders began to see how their roles, through their attitudes contributed to unsafe abortions.
- Though they were not all fully "converted" to support abortion as a woman's right to choose, they were convinced about supporting women who sought abortion under the specified legal provisions which are incest, rape and health of the mother.
- Cultural leaders committed to ensuring that cases of incest and rape were reported and the women supported to access abortion orders through the court system whilst the religious leaders committed to not condemning their congregants who sought abortions.
- The expression was, *"we will support the women to access safe legal abortions but we will not condone abortion otherwise we stop being Christians"*.