

Short Fictional Story:

Based on
research findings
on safe abortion
access

Research Questions

What are the **impacts of the implementation** of the amended law?

What **changes have been observed** in abortion services in Ethiopia?

What factors affect abortion and post abortion service utilization in Ethiopia?

What are the **challenges and successes of abortion and post abortion care** service provision in Ethiopia?

What are **policy and implementation bottlenecks of abortion** services in Ethiopia?

What lessons can be drawn as an input to improve further abortion policy and practice in Ethiopia?

Summary of the key findings Gains

The **proportion of abortions that occur outside of health facilities has declined dramatically**, suggesting that women with unintended pregnancies now have greater access to safe abortions than they did prior to 2005

There is **greater access to the service** through out the country at various health services

Summary of the key findings

Gaps

A full range of abortion services is not readily available to women due to range of factors including **accessibility of services, shortage of supplies and shortage of skilled providers.**

Despite legal reform, **the knowledge and attitude of women towards abortion services is quite low/negative**, resulting in reduced demand for services.

Leadership and governance

Lack of openness in communication and different views can affect the views of providers, may contribute to **conscientious objection** and lack of awareness of the public in general and women in particular.

Service delivery

Inconsistent service availability due to **lack of trained health workers, restriction on the lower level private facilities, not allowing HEWs to provide the service, donor dependant program** and etc.

Rising number of conscientious Objectors as **providers feel that the law is not clear enough** and, in some circumstances, they are **afraid of being prosecuted, stigmatized, or discriminated against** for offering such services.

Lack of comprehensive and quality data capturing and monitoring
Serious underreporting or no reporting at all from private facilities resulting in underreporting of abortion in national documents

Stigma

There is **stigma associated with abortion** despite the fact that it is a safe and common medical procedure. This has resulted in a policy of **silence among the different stakeholders, fear among providers, and guilt and shame in women and girls accessing services.**

There is a **common stereotype that abortion is only for young urban women** rather than a necessary service for all women of reproductive age irrespective of her socio-economic status

After 18 years of legal review, it is high time to develop and run a proactive advocacy strategy to build public support, and to destigmatize and decriminalize access to safe abortion services.

Policy and regulatory gaps to be filled

How far down the echelons of the health system can we task share the availability of medication abortion?

Self care of abortion as per the WHO recommendations (de-medicalization of MA)

Monitoring the extent of conscientious objection so that it doesn't prevent clients from accessing services.

Creative Direction

Key Themes:

Access to Safe Abortion: Despite legal reforms, barriers persist in accessing comprehensive abortion services due to a myriad of factors including stigma, shortage of supplies, and lack of skilled providers. We aim to explore how these barriers impact individuals seeking reproductive healthcare.

Stigma and Silence: The pervasive stigma surrounding abortion results in a culture of silence among stakeholders, fear among healthcare providers, and feelings of guilt and shame among women seeking abortion services. Our story will illuminate the emotional toll of stigma on individuals and the broader community.

Policy and Regulatory Gaps: Through the lens of our characters, we will examine the policy and regulatory gaps that hinder access to safe abortion, including issues of task-sharing, self-care options, and conscientious objection among healthcare providers.

Advocacy and Decriminalization:

Against the backdrop of legal reviews and calls for proactive advocacy, our story will explore the importance of building public support, destigmatizing abortion, and decriminalizing access to reproductive healthcare services.

Target Audience:

The general public, with a focus on women of reproductive age, healthcare providers, policymakers, and key stakeholders. **The story should be engaging, relatable, and capable of sparking empathy and understanding among the readers.**

Storyline:

Setting: Rural Ethiopia

Tone:

The tone of the story will be empathetic and thought-provoking, aiming to evoke emotional resonance while also presenting factual information in a compelling manner. We will employ a narrative style that interweaves personal experiences with broader societal issues, creating a rich tapestry of storytelling that captivates and informs our audience.

Empathetic and insightful rather than accusatory

Thought-provoking

Insightful

Perspective:

The story is told from the perspective of the main character to give an intimate view into her challenges, fears and emotions throughout the journey.

Style: Narrative-driven with emotional depth and social commentary

Show the interaction and the parts played by actors within the girls of socio economic fabric.

- Starting from her as an individual
- Her close family and friends
- The community at large
- The service accessible to her and the service providers
- The policies and laws that shapes the institutions around her

Tell a story that compels our audience to identify with our main character and can empathies with her journey. Have her experience extermine difficulties so our audience can understand what a difficult decison abortion can ultimatly be, and how often women dont make these decisons lightly.

Reference stories:

<https://positivenegatives.org/comics-animations/>

Healing scars, chasing dreams

One thing Rukia equally loves as much as she loves books is probably her village, Yebu. A rural kebele around 18 kms away from Jimma.

It wasn't easy to leave behind her village and family and what she called home for her entire life. But it was a necessary price to pay for a chance at her future.

The stretched dusty road to Jimma town welcomes her with a ray of hope and she embraces it with the excitement of a fresh affair.

On days she feels homesick and misses her tiny village she reminds herself that this is the city where dreams come true. Sometimes on her way to school she steals glances along with hopes from Jimma University.

"Soon I will earn my place in that university to fulfill my dreams of becoming a surgeon. She would repeat the promise to herself."

Besides, she has Sirgut, her childhood friend. Growing up Rukia and Sirgut were inseparable. They always wanted to live together. And when they made this move to Jimma for their final year of secondary school, they pooled together their student money and rented a cramped room in the bustling old town.

They don't have a lot of staff in their tiny room, just the basics. They brew coffee on the weekends as most Jimma folks do, Sirgut says it helps her to be alert and study. But Rukia talks like a different breed.

"but you usually go straight up to sleep after you had a cup of coffee" she would ask

"what about last week I stayed up all night for that chemistry exam" Sirgut replies comically

They both love coffee, but Rukia stays up late most nights reading whether or not she has coffee.

"you know you are a nerd right" Sirgut teases her jokingly

However Rukia's passion and determination is something she really admires.

They study together when there is an exam, but other than that Sirgut is carefree. But since the time is nearing for the national exam, she joins Rukia more often.

Rukia is pouring all her energy into preparing for the national exam that would determine her future at university.

Looking at Rukia's whirlwind of focused energy, her nose always buried in books, days filled with a blur of lectures, frantic note-taking and late night studies one would wonder how these two possibly become friends.

Sirgut, on the other hand, was more carefree, playful and often drawn to the social swirl around them.

Across the street, a few houses down to their rented room lives a young construction worker named Abdi. Abdi has always been friendly and respectful when their paths cross. One day, Sirgut gets the idea to invite him for coffee.

Another time, Sirgut leaned in close to Rukia and whispered, "Abdi has been talking about you non-stop. He has a crush on you."

Rukia didn't respond. She has her own reservation. But she somehow liked the attention. The next day, Sirgut invited Abdi over to their room for coffee. Rukia was hesitant but went along with it.

They started conversing, and Abdi started telling them about his childhood and the village he left behind to find work in the city. As conversations run smoothly and laughter starts to emerge, Abdi asks if there are any soft drinks in the house.

They didn't have any. So Sirgut excused herself and went out to the nearby shop to buy drinks.

"I will be back soon" she said smiling

But as soon as the door closed behind her, the air stifled and there was a sudden quiet that replaced the earlier laughter. Before she could process any of it Abdi's hand clamped onto hers forcefully. His grip was tight, and everything was unexpected. Shocking. Suffocating. scary, confusing all at once.

Tears welled up in her eyes, blurring the room around her. Her throat constricted, making it impossible to form a single word. Abdi's hand moved again, this time reaching for something she wasn't ready to give. Panic flooded her. She wanted to scream, to run, but her body felt frozen.

Rukia was caught off guard and was at a loss for words, unable to defend herself against Abdi's forceful actions. She felt shocked and disbelief wash over her, too afraid to say no and seek help. Shame burned through her. How could she have been so naive? She'd trusted him.

In despair, she blamed herself. she thought she brought this upon herself. Despite feeling desperate and helpless, she couldn't bring herself to confide in anyone, not even her friend Sirgut. How could she explain the confusion, the fear, the violation? So, Rukia kept her secret locked away, a heavy and lonely burden in the pit of her stomach.

Rukia tried to put the traumatic incident behind her and return to her normal life, but every day was a struggle, the trauma gnawing at her. It becomes a festering wound beneath her brilliant mind. Nonetheless, She pushed herself to continue studying for her upcoming exam, and her studies became a sort of sanctuary.

Textbooks offered solace and equations provided temporary escape from the turmoil within.

Everything bad seems to vanish from her memory when she finished the National School leaving exam with a high point, which is a green pass to join medical school at Jimma University. She was ecstatic but soon came a nagging pain, and it started to consume both her body and mind.

She began experiencing bouts of weakness and stomach cramps that wouldn't go away.

To her shock and dismay, the doctor informed her that she was pregnant. The words that come out of the doctor's mouth in the sterile room, each syllable a hammer blow. Pregnant. The weight of it crashed down on Rukia, stealing the air from her lungs. Tears streamed down her face as a choked sob escaped her lips. "No," she rasped, the word a desperate plea to rewind time.

Shame burned in her throat, a bitter echo of Abdi's violation. But shame couldn't erase the truth, the reason for her visit. Taking a shaky breath, she blurted out the horrifying details of what happened. Her voice trembled, each word a shard of her broken spirit.

The doctor, however, remained impassive. His gaze held no sympathy, only a flicker of annoyance. "This clinic doesn't offer those services," he said curtly, his voice devoid of warmth. "You'll need to go somewhere else."

He seemed more intent on delivering a sermon than offering medical guidance. With a disapproving sigh, he began, "So, Ms. Rukia, you find yourself in this predicament. Did you consider the consequences of your actions?" His tone implied carelessness on her part, not the complex circumstances that led her there.

Rukia, already battling shame, felt a fresh wave of despair wash over her. Tears welled up as the doctor continued, his voice laced with judgment. "This isn't just any medical procedure, Ms. Rukia. We're talking about God's creation, a potential life lost." He emphasized "potential" as if diminishing the weight of her decision.

The sterile room felt suffocating, filled with the doctor's words rather than empathy. Rukia opened her mouth to speak, but the judgment in his gaze silenced her. Defeated, she rose unsteadily, the doctor's parting shot echoing in the sterile silence: "Remember, Ms. Rukia, these choices have consequences."

Feeling lost in a new town with no support system or knowledge of where to turn, Rukia spent the next day desperately searching for a clinic that could provide the care she needed while keeping her decision private. But without any money for transportation or medical expenses, she found herself wandering aimlessly through the city, feeling ashamed and alone.

At one health center, Rukia was told she needed an ultrasound to determine the gestation of her pregnancy, which the center did not have. She was sent to another clinic, but exhausted and overwhelmed, she decided to return to her rented room and confide in Sirgut.

Sirgut was gentle and knew exactly who could help Rukia. Together, they went to see a nurse she knew very well, who listened attentively to Rukia's story. Understanding the urgency, the nurse immediately contacted a fellow colleague who works in a hospital that provided comprehensive abortion care services. With the nurse's guidance and support, Rukia was able to schedule an appointment for the very next day.

As it turned out, Rukia was in her early second trimester and required more attention from the providers. Although her journey to becoming pregnant, realizing she was pregnant, and accessing the care she needed was filled with challenges, Rukia persevered with the help of her friend and the nurse.