**South Africa’s Contraceptive Control**

Abigail Detwiller

*Puberty is a crucial step as girls prepare for the decisions and responsibilities of sexuality and reproduction*.

Faridah Nalubega, a 26 year-old woman intended to have just two or three children, the most she felt she could afford by selling fried fish in Kampala, Uganda, according to PAI, a U.S.-based family-planning advocacy group. But she ended up with six children—in large part, she told PAI, because her husband forbade her to use contraceptive pills and her local family-planning clinic offered no suitable alternative. In this area of Uganda, men often become violent with their partners who show an interest in using contraception.

Two barriers that limit the access to and use of contraceptives is southern Africa are the myths and misconceptions of young people, and the attitudes of adults in these communities. If these can change then the use of contraceptives will increase and the number of unwanted pregnancies will decrease. The first step would be to expand the learning and accessibility of information on the many different methods of contraceptives. The young people need to understand that the myths and misconceptions that they are taught by their peers and adults are incorrect and hold no scientific grounds. If they could meet others who use contraception and ask questions it could be a very good experience for the youth, and for the adults who have the misconceptions. It is one thing to be able to reach the youth, but if you do not change the view ofthe adults have then all the work you did can be easily reversed because of the place they hold in their society over the younger generations. After being able to teach and give more factual based information on contraception they would need to focus more of their time focused on the older generation. If the older generation views contraceptives as bad and refuse to provide the youth with them then all the work teaching the youths would be of no use. The youth would not be able to get the contraceptives so their knowledge would be no help because without contraception’s no matter what they try it will be unsuccessful. Young people are seen by societies around the world as needing to be guided by the older generations to make sure they are not making immature decisions. Though sometimes the problem stems from the older generations decisions that are being forced upon the youth.

In South Africa the traditional view against contraceptive use is held by the men, so if a man does not want his wife on contraceptives then she cannot unless she hides it. Engelman writes that “unfortunately, helping women plan their families stealthily—by using contraceptive injections, for example—is a leading strategy because many male partners believe childbearing decisions are theirs alone to make. Men also tend to want one to three more children than women do, not surprising given who gets pregnant, gives birth and handles most of the child care.” Traditional values are taught to the next generation through multiple ways, but some traditional values are oppressive towards others and should not be implemented. If these traditions are stopped it does not mean that it is lost the tradition will be a part of the people’s history, and generations will be taught why they changed, and how it has helped the people grow. Just because people no longer apply that tradition does not mean they have lost who they are it just means there might have been a healthier way for them to celebrate.

When introducing new ideas and concepts some people can create myths and misconceptions about the information and make it so that the general population is against something without learning all the facts. Most youth are uneducated in the correct procedures, heavily influenced and trusting of their peer members, and so believe false information easily because of misplaced trust. In a study, Ochaco et al. found that “Many fears were based on myths and misconceptions. Young women learn about both true side effects and myths from their social networks” Most myths and misconceptions that were taught to the young girls is that if the use any contraception they will not be able to have children later. By creating these myths and misconceptions many girls are then later pressured to get rid of pregnancies that come from not being able to use contraception’s. To combat the myths and misconception education for both males and females is important. By continuing to go to school both genders will be able to learn the importance of contraception and how big of a role they all play. Though, at the moment, since South Africa is a patriarchal society, females are not seen as important enough to continue their education most of the time passed elementary level.

It is important to teach the younger generations because without access to contraceptives, unwanted pregnancies increase.. Hoopes et al. report that “Approximately one-quarter of women aged 15–19 years in South Africa report having been pregnant. Although teen fertility has mirrored a decline in fertility among all women in South Africa, South African teens experience a birth rate of 54 per 1,000 women aged 15–19 years, twice that of teens in the United States.”

 Though Africa has been more progressive in their abortion laws such as, “…nurses and midwives are trained and permitted to perform abortions, paving the road for accessible abortions at conveniently located facilities” (“Common Reproductive Health Concerns in Anglophone Africa.”), many girls have resort to extreme measures to get rid of unwanted pregnancies aborted because of the limited number of professionals.

If men and women are not taught the true information pertaining to contraceptives they will continue to have problems. Traditional values can still be part of who the people are but will just not be implemented. Women deserve the same education opportunities as men. By having these options available the knowledge about birth control will be more widely available and not seen as something bad, instead a positive.

*Abigail Detwiller has an associate’s in Science and attends East Carolina University pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in Sociology. After graduation she plans to enroll into a Dental Hygienist program to obtain her license and work in the dental field helping others.*