

# Tackling abortion stigma and supporting stigma-free services for young people in Benin

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# Introduction

- The Association Béninoise pour la Promotion de la Famille (ABPF) - leader in SRHR, family planning and safe abortion services
- ABPF works with young people to provide youth-friendly services and address challenges they face in accessing SRHR services
- Youth Action Movement (YAM) - network of young volunteers trained on SRHR topics, including sexual rights and abortion

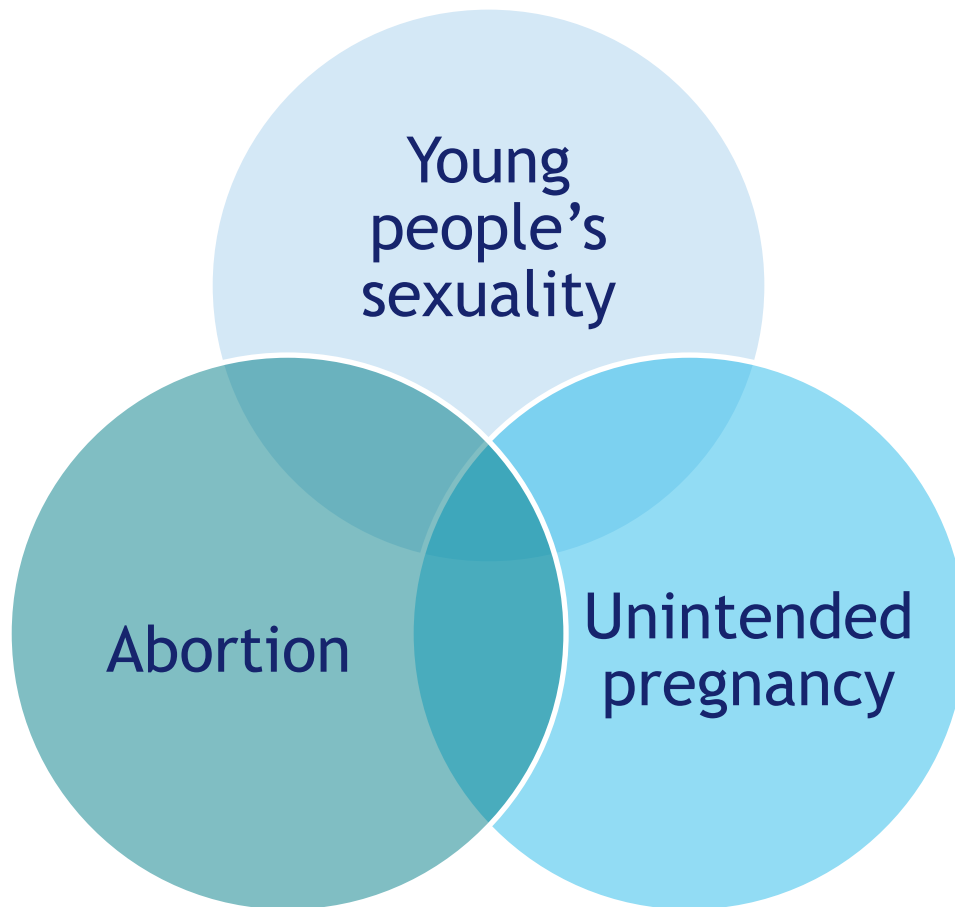
# Introduction

- Youth (10 -24 ) are 33%
- Access to abortion is restricted, but accessible under a number of conditions
- Abortion is highly stigmatized leading to high rates of unsafe, in particular among young people
- 1 death of unsafe abortion out to 5, is adolescent one.

# ABPF work to address abortion stigma

- Objective: To address the manifestations of stigmatization at the individual, community and the organizational level, which prevent young women from accessing safe abortion information and services
- Research to assess the extent and impact of abortion-related stigma, to inform programme design
  - Qualitative study involving YAM members - interviews and focus group discussions with service providers, young abortion-related clients, young people from the community and religious leaders
  - Adapted Stigmatizing Attitudes Beliefs and Actions Scale (SABAS)

# Compounded stigma



*“A young girl will hesitate [to access services] more than an adult woman as the education system in Benin blames young girls for falling pregnant, even more so when they have an abortion.” (Pastor)*

# Perceptions of pregnancy and abortion

- Pregnancy in young women shameful, and worse if it is out of marriage
  - “It is a disaster to fall pregnant, above all when you are still at school, you’ll die of shame if it happens.”* (Young woman)
  - “One girl came to school even though she was pregnant because she wanted to complete her studies. But whenever she set foot in the classroom there was someone laughing [at her].”* (Young man)
- Induced abortion associated with crime, shame, sin and risk
  - “It is a bad thing, murder according to religion and banned by the life rules of our society.”* (Priest)
  - “It’s not a good thing and a lot of people think that, but there are certain situations that force you to go down this road against your will.”* (Young woman)

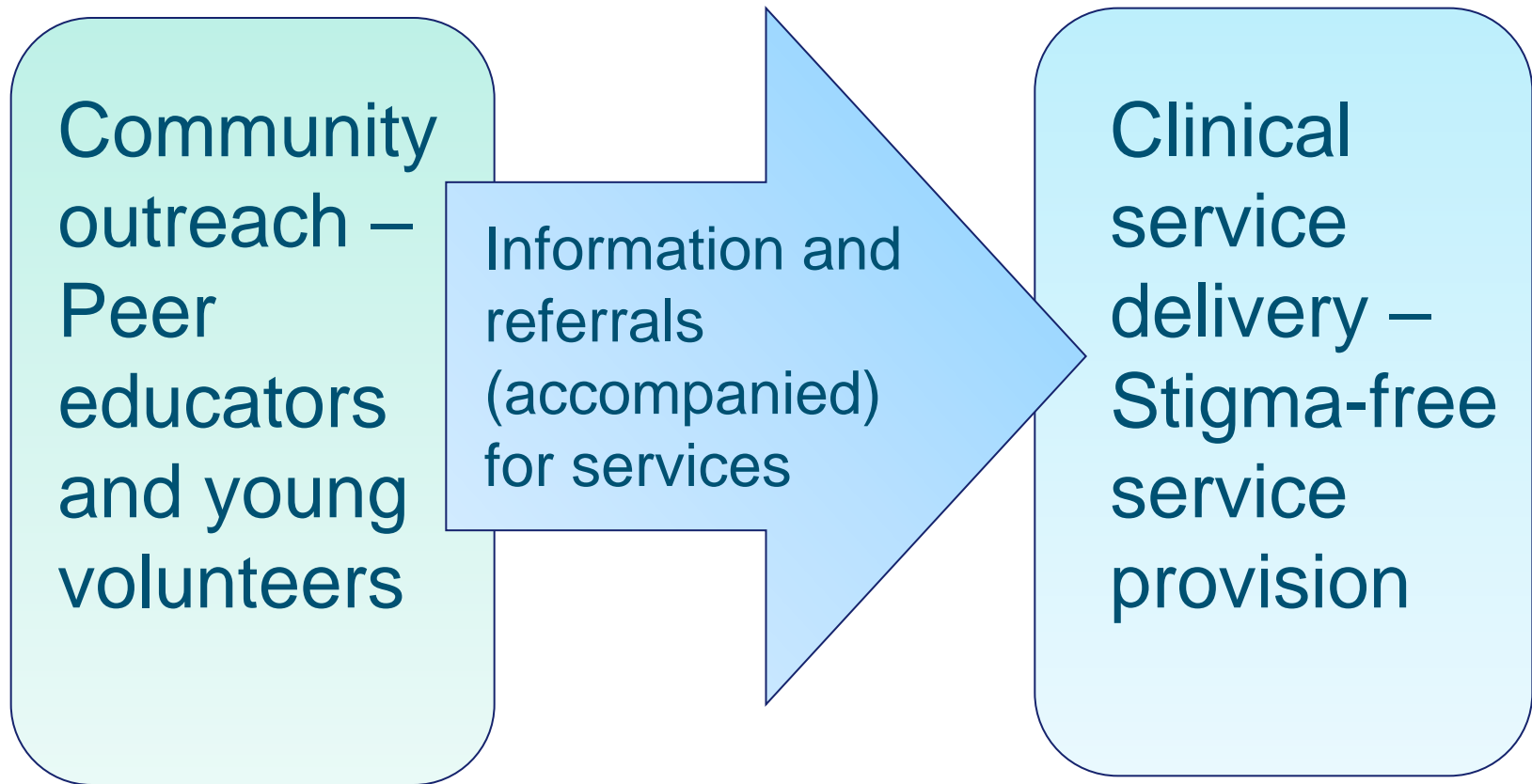
# Stigma as a barrier to access

- Stigma causes young women to hide pregnancy and abortion and can prevent young people from accessing abortion-related services

*“I thought about it a lot and hesitated before speaking, I thought they were going to have a go at me, throw me out.”*  
(Young woman)

*“If dad found out he’d kill me, he could throw me out and tell me to go and find the boy even though he’s from a different country. Not to mention what people would say about me at school and in the neighbourhood. So I needed to keep quiet and have a secret abortion.”* (Young woman)

# Interventions to address abortion stigma - A dual approach





# Tackling stigma in the community

- Youth-led and youth-centered approach
- Values clarification training for youth leaders & journalists
  - Youth leaders capacity built to address issues around abortion
  - Journalists support through articles raising awareness about safe abortion
- Production of IEC and media material to address abortion-related stigma and to help normalize abortion
- Positive anonymous testimonies of young women who have received safe abortion services
- Messages through SMS

- Sensitizations sessions led by YAM members for teachers and students on the negative consequences of stigma
  - Teachers committed to educate students about unintended pregnancy and work to reduce and prevent abortion stigma
  - Young people referred to ABPF clinics for SRH information and services



# Tackling stigma in the clinic

- Self assessment questionnaire administered among abortion-related clients in ABPF clinics
- Interviews conducted with beneficiaries of safe abortion services to determine quality of care and experience of stigma at the clinic

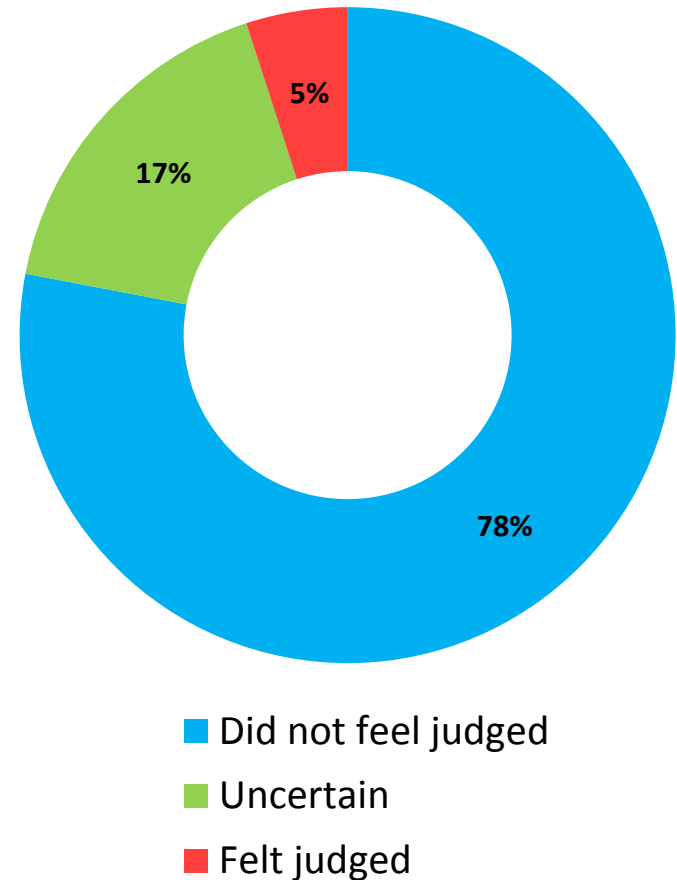
*“I thought you will judge me and send me back but instead I was supported and in addition it is a price within reach of my purse.”*  
(Young woman)

*“I am very happy with this service. If I could not have benefited from this service, my life would not be what it is today. I could continue my studies without problems and without worries of caring for a baby.”* (Young woman)

- Need to consider how client expectations impact on reported levels of satisfaction

- Activities to strengthen provider capacity
- Values clarification training of service providers to facilitate youth-friendly and non-stigmatizing safe abortion and contraceptive services
- Guide for clinic staff to use appropriate, supportive and non-stigmatizing language at all points of care - from the entry point to service delivery to aftercare

Results of client interviews



# Conclusions

- Fear of stigma from parents, the community and health care providers a major barrier to access of abortion-related service for young women
- Comprehensive approach needed to tackle compounded stigma - address all elements of SRH-related stigma that young people might face
- Integration of messages on sexual rights can help to combat stigma, empower young people and improve acceptance of young people as sexual beings
- Youth led initiatives for young people are highly effective at reaching young people with appropriate messages and support



# THANK FOR YOUR LOVELY ATTENTION

