Access to emergency contraception and safe abortion services for survivors of rape and defilement in sub-Saharan Africa: A regional overview

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SVRI FORUM 2013: Evidence into action
14 – 17 October, Bangkok, Thailand
16 countries purposively selected
- PC regional network or STEP UP projects
- PC offices
- Revising policies/guidelines

Desk review:
- Published and grey literature
- Global/regional instruments
- National legislation
- National policies and guidelines/protocols

Key informant interviews in 10 countries
International Human Rights instruments


“Protect the reproductive rights of women by authorising medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest…” Article 14(2)(c).

57th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (2013):

“States must address all health consequences....of violence against women and girls by providing accessible health-care services that are responsive to trauma and include...emergency contraception, safe abortion where such services are permitted by national law, ...” (Agreed Conclusions 22 and 34(iii))

SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008)

“State parties shall, by 2015, ensure that laws on gender based violence...shall include emergency contraception...” Article 20, 2(a)
WHO guidelines on EC and abortion for SV response


Recommendation 14

If a woman presents after the time required for EC (5 days), EC fails, or the woman is pregnant as a result of rape, she should be offered safe abortion, in accordance with national law.

Remarks
Where abortion is not permitted, other options such as adoption should be explored with the survivor.
What is available on EC in SV guidelines?

- 10 / 16 countries have SV guidelines
- Pregnancy prevention and EC in all 10 SV guidelines
- EC for SV also in some FP/RH guidelines, usually implicitly, sometimes explicitly
- Generally follows WHO 2003 guidance, but not always updated
What guidance is available on abortion after rape?

- Abortion mentioned in SV guidelines
- Abortion mentioned in SV guidelines, but legal status left unclear
- SV guidelines do not explicitly address abortion
- Abortion after rape allowed in abortion guidance or legislation
Pregnancy and abortion guidance

- Latest WHO guidance does not mention pregnancy testing, during or after post-rape care
- Several national guidelines include pregnancy testing as part of SV, with follow-up testing at 2-6 weeks and 3 months
- Variable and somewhat vague guidance on pregnancy counseling
- Some countries require certified evidence for abortion from rape
- No evidence on rates of termination of rape-induced pregnancies
Conclusions

✓ EC provision recommended in all SV guidelines
  ➢ But variable detail and accuracy
✓ Pregnancy testing recommended, although with variable timing
✓ Pregnancy counseling vague and variable
✓ Abortion guidance confusing or deliberately vague

Countries would benefit from support to update and consolidate guidance