



The critical role of maternity hospitals in ensuring access to surgical abortion care

Key learnings

Maternity hospitals have admission and surgical capacity, meaning that abortions and any complications can be safely managed 24/7. The demand is there: in 2022 and 2023, MSI's maternity hospitals in Ethiopia provided 1.8 times as many abortions and post-abortion care as our private outpatient clinics. There is a critical role for maternity hospitals in expanding access to comprehensive abortion care and filling a major gap in access to surgical abortion care.

“I was about one month into the pregnancy, and it was a surgical abortion. It wasn't painful – it was very simple. I've never regretted it. A friend recommended the clinic to me, and I have recommended the clinic to two friends.”

MSI client in Ghana

The challenge

There's a major gap in health system capacity for surgical abortion care

Countries in sub-Saharan Africa continue to have some of the highest maternal mortality rates globally, with unsafe abortion remaining a leading cause.

Even in countries like Ethiopia with relatively liberal abortion laws and free abortion services available at public hospitals, religious norms, limited access to services, and stigma pose significant challenges that restrict women's ability to obtain care¹. In addition, many women travel long distances for healthcare and pay high out-of-pocket costs.

What we did

Integrating abortion care services within maternity care

In this context, maternity hospitals are uniquely positioned to expand access to comprehensive abortion care. Integrating abortion services with other healthcare like maternity care can help normalise abortion and reduce stigma.

Because they offer a range of services, there can be less fear and stigma than can be experienced when visiting an 'abortion clinic'. This requires thoughtful consideration of how services are designed to ensure a positive and compassionate client experience, with separate areas for maternity care and abortion care.

Furthermore, because maternity hospitals have surgical capacity, abortion and any complications can be safely managed with 24/7 support.

We analysed Electronic Health Record client data from MSI Ethiopia's maternities and core centres from January 2020 through to December 2023. MSI's Client Exit Interview survey data from 2018–2023 was also analysed to better understand client experience and quality of care among clients who received an abortion or post-abortion care service in MSI's centres and maternities in Ghana and Ethiopia.

[1] Ewnetu DB, Thorsen VC, Solbakk JH, Magelssen M 2020. Still a moral dilemma: how Ethiopian professionals providing abortion come to terms with conflicting norms and demands. BMC Med. Ethics 21:116

What we found

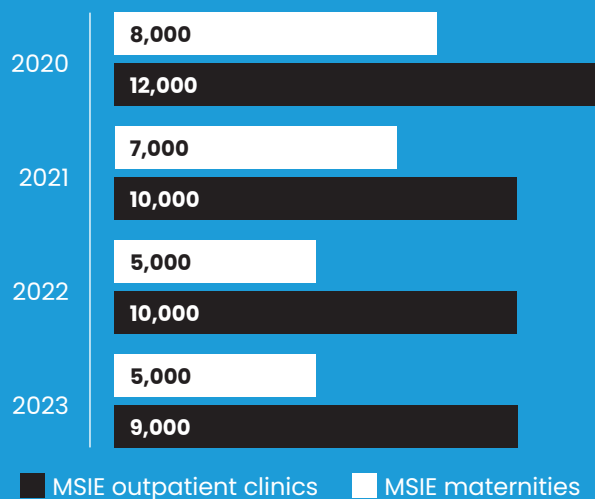
An unmet need for surgical and second trimester abortions is being filled by service provision at maternities

2 out of 3

clients in both Ghana (63%) and Ethiopia (75%) reported that MSI centres and maternities were their only known option for their abortion care service.

In 2022 and 2023, there have been 1.8x as many abortion and post-abortion care client visits in MSI Ethiopia's maternity hospitals compared to outpatient reproductive health clinics.

Trends in abortion services per type of facility



Ensuring access to surgical and second trimester abortions

In Ethiopia, medical abortion is the most common method² for both first and second-trimester abortions. However, surgical termination should always be an option and is needed for later second-trimester abortions. In MSI Ethiopia's maternities, **14% of abortion services are for clients greater than 14 weeks, and 26% of these had surgical abortion (8% overall).**

Historically, when clients were more than 12 weeks gestational age, their care has been managed in maternity hospitals. This year, MSI Ethiopia received approval from the Ministry of Health to expand surgical abortion provision for 12-14 weeks gestational age in our clinics.

Client feedback on their abortion care

- ✓ **98%** feel they are treated with respect by all staff
- ✓ **96%** are satisfied with the level of privacy during their visit
- ✓ **94%** of clients said that MSI made them feel comfortable during their visits
- ✓ **88%** believe that MSI provided enough information to help them make the best choice
- ✓ **83%** are overall satisfied with their abortion experience

What this means

Bridging gaps in abortion care provision

Maternity hospitals can expand access to comprehensive abortion care and reach clients who do not have any other options for the service, while filling a major gap in access to surgical and second-trimester abortions.

- ✓ Maternities have admission and surgical capacity so abortions and any potential complications can be safely managed 24/7.
- ✓ Clients may feel less stigmatised due to the anonymity offered by a diversity of services provided in a maternity hospital.



[2] Gebremariam FA, Habtewold EM, Degife DT, Geneti HB, Gebrekios DH. Health facilities readiness to provide comprehensive abortion care and factors associated with client satisfaction in Central Oromia Region, Ethiopia: a multilevel modeling approach. Reprod Health. 2023.

More information

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