



ABSTRACT

Background: A prior study at the University of Louisville Global Health Center showed that induced abortion ranked the highest (55% versus 12%) among Cuban refugee women resettled in Kentucky compared to all other nationalities combined. The purpose of this study was to identify the reasons for high abortion rates among Cuban refugees.

Methodology: A secondary analysis of data from the Newly Arriving Refugee Surveillance System database was done. From October 2013 through December 2014, Cuban refugee women who had had an abortion were interviewed as part of their domestic health screening to understand the reasons for their abortions.

Results: Among the 120 Cuban women who stated they had had an abortion, 64 (53%) participated in an interview. Economic hardship was the primary reason for their elective abortion. The Manual Vacuum Aspiration (MVA) was the most commonly used method for pregnancy termination (59%). At the time of conception, 60% of the women were not using any contraceptive methods and 22% stated they used abortion as a form of birth control.

Conclusion: The most common reason for the high abortion rate among Cuban refugees was economic hardship. In our screened population, the majority of the women were not using any form of birth control and 22% had relied on abortion as a form of birth control instead of prevention. Sexual education and women's health programs are therefore essential in decreasing the number of abortions among this population.

INTRODUCTION

- Among one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goal's is to improve the maternal health and reduce maternal mortality.
- Unintended pregnancies and induced abortions are associated with multiple consequences; reducing the rate of unintended pregnancy and abortions are therefore integral and essential to improving the maternal mortality rate and achieving one of the United Nations Millennium Goals.¹
- Although the rate of abortion has decreased globally in the past few years due to an increase in use of contraceptives, there were still 42 million abortions recorded worldwide last year.²
- A prior study at the University of Louisville's Global Health Center showed that induced abortion ranked the highest (55% versus 12%) among resettled Cuban refugees compared to the other refugee nationalities resettling in Kentucky.
- The Socialist government in Cuba legalized abortion practice in 1965.
- In 1979, further liberalization of existing legislation rendered legal abortion services easily accessible to adult and adolescent women in Cuba.³
- Since that time, abortion within the first ten weeks of pregnancy has been available on demand and free of charge throughout the Cuban public health-care system.
- In the United States, the induced abortion rate in 2011 was about 13.9 abortions per 1000 women⁵. The most recent statistics found from Cuba shows the abortion rate in 2009 was about 26.3 abortions per 1000 women. These numbers from Cuba do not include the manual vacuum aspiration procedure performed in the first 6 weeks of pregnancy by aspiration of the uterus, which is considered the primary abortion method used in the country.⁶
- According to some reports, Cuban abortion rates rank near the top of international rankings
- The objective of this study was to identify the reasons for high abortion rates among Cuban refugees screened at the University of Louisville's Global Health Center and to identify potential ways to prevent unwanted pregnancies in this population.

METHODS

A questionnaire was developed to interview Cuban women who reported a history of abortion as part of their Refugee Health Assessment. From a total of 120 women from our database, 63 were interviewed. A secondary data analysis was conducted from the information gathered. Data analysis was done using Tableau.

RESULTS

A total of 120 Cuban refugee women that came to our Global Health Center between October 2013 and December 2014 have had an abortion.

- Figure 1 shows that of the 120 women, 53% participated in a phone interview, 47% were unreachable, and 1% refused.
- Figure 2 shows the different abortion methods available. Manual Vacuum Aspiration was the most common method used.
- Figure 3 shows the method of contraception used prior to their abortion. Twenty-one percent of the women used condoms, 10% used an IUD, and 60% did not use any form of contraceptive.
- Figure 4 shows the different reasons given by Cuban women for having the abortion. The leading causes were attributed to their economic situation and educational goals.
- Figure 5 shows the different reasons given by Cuban women for having the abortion based on age bracket. Those between the ages 14-17 years old stated they chose to abort because they were still in school. Those between 18-25 years old claimed that they could not financially support a child due to economic pressures in Cuba.
- Figure 6 shows the likelihood of having an abortion again in the case of another unplanned pregnancy; a significant 21% of the interviewed women stated that they would have another abortion.
- Figure 7 shows the varying attitudes among Cuban women regarding abortion. Thirty-two percent of the women feel abortion is bad for their health, while 22% think it is bad because they are killing a baby.
- Figure 8 shows the knowledge Cuban women have regarding sexual education and use of contraceptives. The majority of the women claim they did not have adequate access to sexual education in the school system or at home (49%).
- Figure 9 shows the percentage of women that practice abortion as a form of birth control (22%).
- Figure 10 shows that 76% of the population want to participate in sexual educational programs.

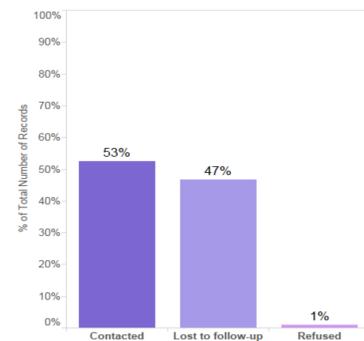


Figure 1: Percentage of the participation in the study.

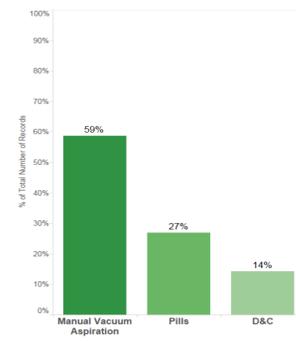


Figure 2: Preferred method of abortion.

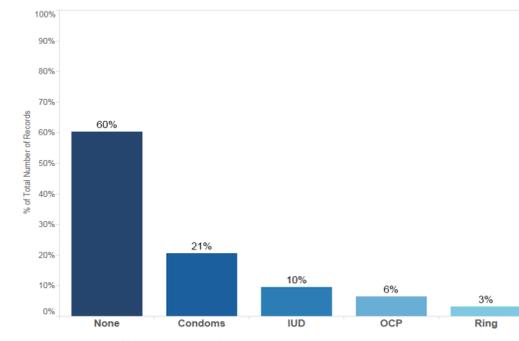


Figure 3: Contraceptives methods commonly used by women prior to abortion.

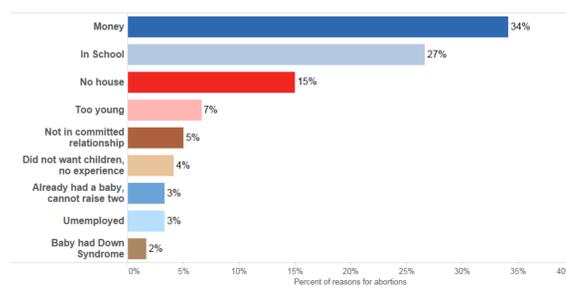


Figure 4: Most common reason for the Cuban women to practice an abortion.

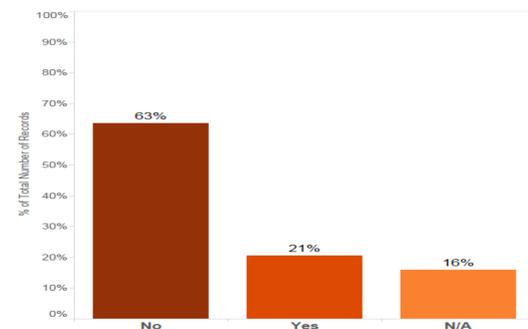


Figure 6: Percentage of women likely to abort future pregnancy.

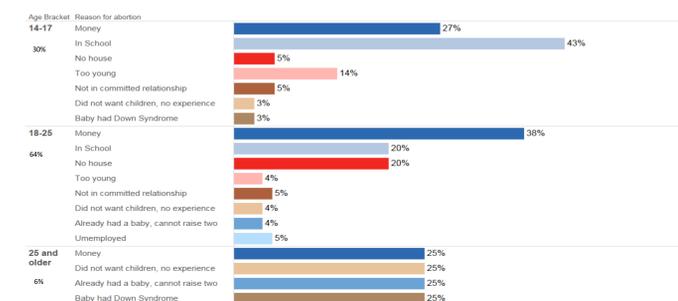


Figure 5: Reasons given by Cuban women for having an abortion Based on the bracket age.

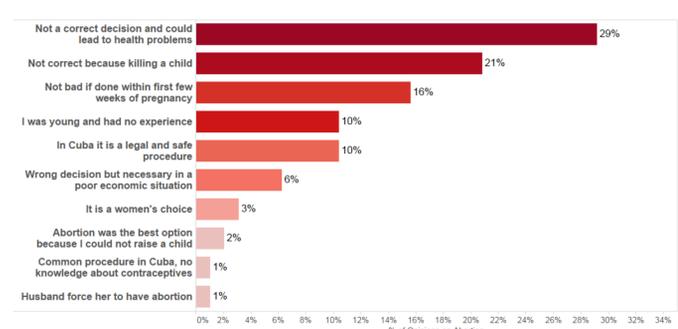


Figure 7: General opinion about the abortion.

RESULTS-Continuation

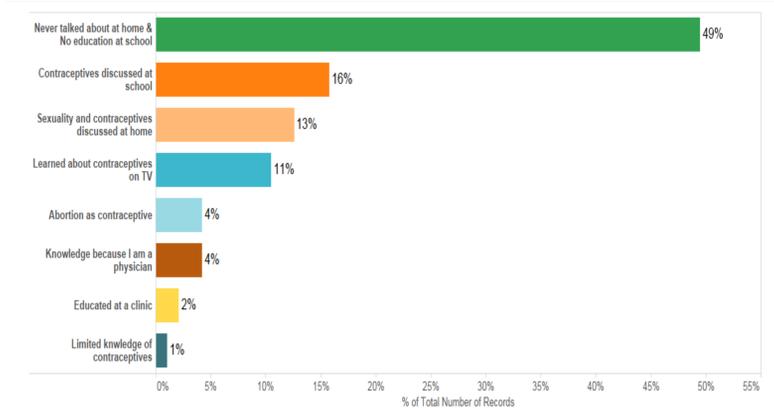


Figure 8: Sexual education and knowledge about contraceptive in the Cuban women.

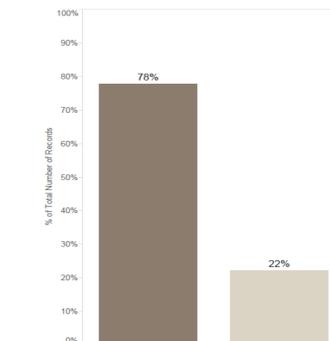


Figure 9: Cuban women that practice abortion as a form of birth control.

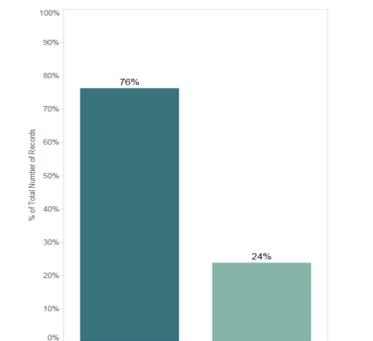


Figure 10: Test population interested in sexual educational programs.

CONCLUSION

The most common reported reason for having an abortion was economic hardship followed by being in school at the time of pregnancy. Furthermore 22% of the women relied an abortion as a method of birth control and a staggering 49% of the women interviewed never had any form of sexual education in school or at home. Sixty percent of the women never used any contraceptive methods at the time of pregnancy.

Cuban women endure many hardships and often times, unexpected pregnancy adds to the burden. Lack of sexual education combined with the easy access to abortion and low wages have led abortion to be a common practice in Cuban society.

Empowering these women with knowledge, education, and employment will alleviate the economical burdens that have often led to abortions in the past. Therefore, sexual education and women's health programs are essential in decreasing the number of abortions among this population as many indicated their willingness to attend such a program.

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