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Book Review

Monograph on Abortion

Reviewer: Friday Okonofua

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Authors: Lukman Yusuf and Jennifer L. Potts
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This is an important contribution to the subject of abortion. Although the monograph has been prepared within the context of Ethiopia, many of the points raised in the monograph are applicable to many countries in Africa. Thus, the monograph would be of interest to the rest of sub-Saharan African countries, where abortion continues to be a major cause of morbidity and mortality among women.

As the authors allude to in the preface, the monograph has been prepared for pre- and in-service training programmes, and as a reference material for health service providers. This is an important focus for this kind of work, as many health workers in Africa, especially middle level providers, continue to lack information about current methods of managing abortion and post-abortion complications. This orientation justifies the simple outline of the monograph and the use of a pleasant and easy-to-read diction.

The monograph began with an introduction that placed the subject of abortion within the context of reproductive health in the global community. It then went on to describe the anatomy and physiology of the female reproductive system, which included an elucidation of the symptoms and signs of pregnancy. It then defined the various kinds of abortion including spontaneous and induced abortion and provided a detailed outline of the
methods of clinical recognition and management of the various types. It made conscious efforts to explain the concept of "post-abortion care" and the need to counsel women experiencing abortion about family planning as a way to prevent another abortion. This was followed by a simple summary of currently available methods of family planning and an exposition of the ways in which health workers can meaningfully promote their use to reduce the rates of unplanned pregnancies and unsafe abortion. In the final part of the monograph, the authors summarised a number of controversies and ongoing debates, which are continuously being used by opponents to deny women access to safe abortion services in Africa. Fortunately, they also cited several international documents such as recommendations from the ICPD and the Fourth World Conference on Women, which counter the arguments of those opposed to providing safe abortion services to women in Africa.

This is an extremely well written monograph that would appeal to a wide reading audience and clientele in Africa. It should primarily be used by health workers (doctors, midwives and paramedical workers) and students in health-related disciplines, as it tends to provide detailed medical information on the subject. However, policymakers and social activists interested in knowing more about the scientific and medical aspects of abortion will also find the book very useful.

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