

# Perceptions of Abortion Within the Context of Unhu/Ubuntu Philosophy, Reproductive Health Education and Educational Leadership

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## ABSTRACT

There are several contentious issues that have remained on the international agenda for many decades now. These include the death penalty, legalization of euthanasia, legalization of homosexuality and legalization of abortion. There are general disagreements on the need to abolish the death penalty and or to legalize abortion. Some countries in Africa have laws that allow for abortion for specific reasons, while others prohibit abortion altogether. Some of the reasons that have found acceptance for abortion in some African countries include rape, poor health, and socio- economic reasons. Among the countries that have legalized abortion without any restrictions are Cape Verde, Mozambique, Tunisia and South Africa. Among other reasons, legalization of abortion is premised on the recognition of women's rights to make decisions on matters that affect them. In Zimbabwe, there is an on-going debate on whether abortion can be legalized without restrictions. The paper examines the implications of abortion within the context of cultural practices, the *Unhu/Ubuntu* Philosophy, reproductive health education and educational leadership. The study used mixed research methods. A sample of one hundred and twenty participants was opportunistically selected. It comprised parents, school heads, university lecturers, university students and teachers. The participants were sampled from Harare and Chegutu in Zimbabwe. The sample was categorized based on age, gender, and educational qualifications. These three variables were considered important as they were assumed to have a bearing on the respondents' views and opinions on abortion. Interviews, questionnaires and focus groups were used to generate data. These views and opinions were analyzed guided by the *Unhu/Ubuntu* Philosophy. The study concluded that abortion was generally perceived as some form of murder and culturally unacceptable within the context of *unhu/ubuntu* philosophy. The study noted that while reproductive health education is important in improving people's perceptions, culture and religion remain central to people's perceptions of abortion. Abortion remains a contentious issue that requires wider consultation in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** *Unhu/Ubuntu* Philosophy, Abortion, Culture, Rights, Pregnancy, Reproductive Health Education

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In Zimbabwe, abortion is illegal despite advocacy for legalizing it. This is supported by several Acts of parliament which include the Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1977 (Chapter 15:10) and amendments Act 6/2000 and Act 8 of 2001 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2001). The Acts and the revised sections prohibit the termination of pregnancy except in special cases. The special circumstances include cases where the baby is conceived because of unlawful intercourse and when the health of either the mother or baby or both is at stake. Unlawful intercourse refers to rape, incest, mental handicap and intercourse with a minor. In the case of Zimbabwe, anyone below the age of 18 is regarded as a minor and does not have the right of consent to sexual intercourse. There are at least two positions that can be adopted from the above. First there appears to be concern for the health of the woman who is carrying the pregnancy. What it therefore means is that the life of the mother takes precedence over the life of the unborn child. However, the second reason advanced for