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**AN ANALYSIS OF COVERAGE OF THE DECRIMINALIZATION OF ABORTION
FOR MINORS ON NON-STATE RADIO STATIONS IN RWANDA**

By

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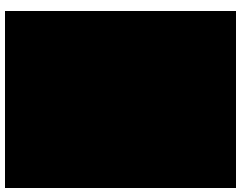


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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the people who saw me struggling, witnessed my sleepless nights, and were kind to me even when I ignored them during all these three years.

I dedicate this work to my daughter

Irakunda Shimwe Archange Nelly Favor,

my mother,

and my brother Ndereya.

Thanks so much for your support. God bless you!

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ABSTRACT

With its focus on radio stations' coverage of the revised law expanding access to abortion for women and girls under certain circumstances in Rwanda, this thesis explores the role of the media in communicating about this seemingly controversial issue, in a context with a high rate of early unintended pregnancies. Early and unintended pregnancies are recognised as a concerning phenomenon, resulting in serious consequences for the health and wellbeing of girls and young women (Choonara *et al.*, 2014). Further, unintended pregnancies are often linked to an increased risk of unsafe abortions (Mohamed *et al.*, 2023). Adolescent pregnancy rates in the East and Southern Africa region are estimated at twice the global average, with 92 births per 1000 girls (UNFPA, 2021). It is in this context that Rwanda revised its penal code in 2018 to expand access to safe abortion services for girls under the age of 18, and women under certain circumstances. While the amended law may be driven from a concern about protecting children rather than advancing Sexual And Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), abortion is among the recognised SRHR services, and respecting women's rights to safe abortion and their SRHR is linked to respecting women's right to life (African Union, 2003; Durojaye, Mirugi-Mukundi, and Ngwena, 2021; Starrs *et al.*, 2018; WHO, 2022). Research indicates that there are significant gaps in protecting and respecting SRHR in Africa, specifically in sub-Saharan countries (Durojaye *et al.*, 2021; Poku, 2020; Starrs *et al.*, 2018). This may be a result of restrictive laws and policies as well as prevailing religious, cultural beliefs and attitudes related to SRHR.

The media has a key role to play in shaping public discourse and impacts attitudes toward SRHR and abortion access as a health service and a right (Fraile and Hernández, 2024). Recognising the role that radio plays in Rwanda as a trusted source of information (Nduhura and Prieler, 2017), in this study I analysed 36 broadcasts collected from eight non-state radio stations, which covered the legal reform of 2018 expanding access to abortion for minors in Rwanda. I also analysed eight in-depth interviews with key informants from these radio stations. Through Harbemas' (1989) theory of the public sphere and Cohen's (1972) moral panics theory, qualitative content analysis (QCA) (Schreier, 2014) showed that the selected radio stations served as an inclusive public sphere where citizens held honest and, in some

instances, reasoned discussions about issues of concern such as the legal provision of abortion for minors in Rwanda. However, it also showed that some more powerful members of the society, predominantly religious leaders, men and parents, expressed themselves opposing the legal reform, where the radio coverage aligned with moral panics. The data also showed that the legal reform was challenged because of prevailing socio-cultural and religious beliefs that oppose abortion, with some citizens considering the law as encouraging immorality, particularly for girls. The analysis showed that gender inequality and discrimination against girls and women play a role in challenging the implementation of the law allowing abortion for minors and the realisation of SRHR. The analysis of the coverage of this issue shows the role of radio stations and the media in general in offering opportunities to citizens to realise their right to expression regarding issues of concern affecting society.

Keywords: *Abortion, decriminalisation, minors, coverage, media, representations, moral panic, public sphere.*

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADEPR	Association des Eglises de Pentecôte au Rwanda
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ASRHR	Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights
AU	African Union
CLADHO	Collectif des Ligues et Association de Défense des Droits de l’Homme au Rwanda
DHS	Demographic Health Survey
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ESA	East and Southern Africa
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HDI	Health Development Initiative
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICPD	International Conference on Population Development
IDI	In-depth Interviews
KT Radio	Kigali Today
MHC	Media High Council
MIGEPROF	Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion
MoH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NISR	National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda
NORHED	Norwegian Programme for Capacity Development in Higher Education and Research for Development.
NUR	National University of Rwanda
ORINFOR	Office Rwandais d’ Information / Rwanda Office of Information
PRB	Population Reference Bureau
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
RBA	Rwanda Broadcasting Agency
RBC	Rwanda Bio-Medical Centre
RDHS	Rwanda Demographic Health Survey

RGB	Rwanda Government Board
RLRC	Rwanda Laws Reform Commission
RMB	Rwanda Media Barometer
RPC	Rwanda Penal Code
RPF	Rwanda Patriotic Front
RTL	Radio-Télévision des Mille Collines
RURA	Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority
RWF	Rwandan Francs
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SMS	Short Message Services
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UR	University of Rwanda
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1

THE CONTEXT AND AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

Introduction

This study provides an analysis of radio coverage of the decriminalisation of abortion for minors on non-state radio stations in Rwanda for the period from 2018 to 2022. In this research, I analysed radio content from eight selected non-state radio stations across the country. Data were also generated using eight in-depth interviews conducted with key informants from each radio station. In this introductory chapter, I provide some background to understanding the social context in Rwanda, the history of radio in Rwanda, the situation regarding early and unintended pregnancy, and access to sexual and reproductive health and services (SRHR) and abortion in Rwanda. This context is necessary to understand the problem that the current study explores. After providing this background, I identify the gaps in understanding the role of radio in covering SRHR issues in this context, outline the research aims and objectives, and define the key terms used in this thesis.

Definition of key terms

Abortion

For the purpose of this study, the term ‘abortion’ is used to mean “induced termination of pregnancy” as defined in the ministerial order No.002/MoH/2019 of 08/04/2019 determining the conditions to be satisfied for a medical doctor to perform an abortion (Republic of Rwanda, 2019, p. 4-5). Hence, legal abortion suggests terminating a pregnancy under the conditions defined by the law (Nguyen, 2018).

Safe abortion

A safe abortion is when abortion is performed:

Using methods that are appropriate to the pregnancy duration, and when the person carrying out the abortion has the necessary skills. In addition to non-specialist and specialist doctors, a wide range of health worker cadres such as auxiliary nurses, auxiliary nurse midwives, nurses, midwives, associate/advanced associate clinicians, pharmacists and doctors of complementary medicine; can provide various aspects of medical abortion services (WHO, 2020).

Unsafe abortion

Unsafe abortion is an abortion which is not performed using the various methods for safe abortion (WHO, 2020).

Decriminalisation

Decriminalisation refers to the act of ceasing to consider something or an action as illegal or a criminal offence (Nguyen, 2018). The decriminalisation of abortion is concerned with:

Removing abortion from all penal/criminal laws, not applying other criminal offences (e.g. murder, manslaughter) to abortion, and ensuring there are no criminal penalties for having, assisting with, providing information about, or providing abortion, for all relevant actors (WHO, 2022, p. 24).

Legal reform

Legal reform is a “process of examining existing laws and advocating and implementing changes in a legal system, usually with the aim of enhancing justice or efficiency” (Vemic, 2017, p. 101).

Media

Media refers to the various forms of media facilitating communication to a large and dispersed audience, including among others newspapers, radio and television, and online media, magazines, billboards, and films (McQuail & Deuze, 2020; Wimmer and Dominick, 2013, p. 2).

Media coverage

The term media coverage in the media context means “the relative priority, time, or space given to a particular event” (Chandler and Munday, 2011, p. 56). The current study reflects on the way the legal provision around access to abortion for minors was discussed in radio stations, and the type of broadcast content (news reports, magazines, and live talks) produced on this issue.

News reports

A news report in radio programming refers to a short format whereby a journalist collects information about a single event and mixes interviews from various sources to provide balanced information (Kustiawan *et al.*, 2023; Kuyucu, 2024, p. 5830). News reports are classified into hard stories and soft or feature news stories (Reinemann *et al.*, 2012). Hard stories are stories covering new events or new occurrences that require urgent coverage because if they are not covered timely, they are outdated (Reinemann *et al.*, 2012, p. 224). Soft or feature news stories report on existing issues, they are analytic and centred on human interest (Reinemann *et al.*, 2012; Zdovc, 2009, p. 321).

Radio magazine

Radio magazine programmes are longer than news reports. They are pre-recorded programmes and include many sources, depending on the topic under discussion. These radio magazine programmes are a “combination of various forms of information, which are put together in an event, with a specific topic and have a strict structure” (Kustiawan *et al.*, 2023, p. 5830). Chignell (2009, p. 30-31) avers that radio magazines are advantageous for their ‘flexibility’. He notes that “historically, the radio magazine is associated with a female and domestic audience” (Chignell, 2009, p.31). Radio magazine programmes are regular and have their specific day and time in a week to be broadcast.

Live talk shows

A talk show is a “program where three or more people talk about a problem. In this program, invited speakers can talk to each other and express opinions and be guided by the host as a moderator” (Kustiawan *et al.*, 2023, p. 5831). Live talk shows are broadcast in the form of interpersonal conversations. They reflect on various topics and are more interactive than pre-recorded programmes because they allow the public to participate directly via phone and social media platforms. The participation of the audience via phones in live talk shows also known as radio phone-in or call-in, afford the audience the opportunity to provide their opinions live in the radio programme.

Minors

In the context of the current study, minors are children. The Rwandan law defines a child as any person whose age is below 18 years (Republic of Rwanda, 2018, p. 47). Although the law allowing abortion for minors mentions that abortion is allowed when a pregnant person is a 'child' (Republic of Rwanda, 2018, p. 122), this study uses the term 'minors' instead of 'children' to avoid the connotation of vulnerability and incapacity that the words 'child' or 'children' often carry.

Public sphere

The notion of the public sphere, as defined by Jürgen Habermas, is the domain of social life where public opinion can be formed, and where citizens can freely share their opinions (Habermas, 1989, p. 398). It is explored extensively in this thesis and used as a reference for the analysis of the collected data.

Moral panic

The concept of moral panic is based on the definition by Stanley Cohen of the phenomenon where media coverage exaggerates an event that is represented as a threat to societal values and interests (Cohen, 2002, p. 1). This concept is explored extensively in this thesis. It is used as a reference for data analysis.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

SRHR encompasses fundamental human rights which are recognised at the international and national levels for all individuals to control and decide on matters concerning their own sexuality, to access a wide range of sexual and reproductive health services, and the rights to control their own reproduction and to take decisions concerning their own reproductive health (WHO, 2022).

Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (ASRHR)

ASRHR are about adolescent reproductive rights which suppose a life free of:

Sexual coercion and intimate partner violence; lack of education and information; high rates of early and unwanted pregnancy; lack of access to health services, especially for contraception and safe abortion; gender inequalities and harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child, early and forced marriage; and risk of STIs (including HIV). (WHO, 2024d).

Culture

In the context of this study, the term culture is understood to explain “all that individuals learn from others that endures to generate customs and traditions, shapes vast swathes of human lives.” (Whiten et al., 2011)

An introduction to Rwanda

Rwanda is a landlocked country in central Africa, sharing borders with Uganda in the north, Burundi in the south, Tanzania in the East, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the west. Rwanda acquired East African Community (EAC) membership in 2007. The total population is 13.3 million, and minors aged from 0 to 17 years make up 5.9 million (45%) of the total population. Most Rwandans (72%) live in rural areas, while 27% live in urban areas (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR), 2022, p. xvii).

Figure 1: Map of Rwanda



Source: Rwanda Education Board (2022)

Administratively, Rwanda is divided into five provinces with four provinces allocated according to the cardinal points: the Northern Province, Southern Province, Eastern Province, and Western Province. The fifth province is Kigali, which is the capital city. Each province is divided into 30 districts (Government of Rwanda, 2024). Rwandans have the same culture and they speak the same language, which is Kinyarwanda.

Kinyarwanda is a unique language spoken across Rwanda. However, there are other official languages, namely English, French, and Kiswahili.

Rwanda's history of conflict

The current state of Rwanda resulted from the ancient Kingdom of Rwanda and the colonial division of Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1885 (Longman, 2010, p. 34). After the Berlin Conference, the Kingdom of Rwanda found itself under the colonial rule of Germany from 1894 to 1916 after its defeat during World War 1. Rwanda was then colonised by Belgium, together with the two neighbouring countries, namely Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004). During the pre-colonial era and afterward, Rwanda was seen to be inhabited by three 'social' groups which were Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa. These three were distinguished by their main economic activities. The Tutsi were synonymous with occupying the political ruling class and comprised cattle herders; the Twa was a community of hunters and potters; and the Hutu were a community of farmers (Longman, 2010, p. 35; Vansina, 2004, p. 135-136). However, some research shows that belonging to either group was not definitive, because people could change their socio-economic status (Longman, 2010, p. 35-36; Vansina, 2004, p. 135-136).

During the colonial era, Germans and Belgians ruled the Kingdom of Rwanda with the existing political institution, which was represented by the King (Caplan, 2007, p. 20). At that time, discrimination among the three social groups increased because of racist colonial theories and an "ideology of ethnic cleavage and racial rankings" (Caplan, 2007, p. 20). These overt discriminations later transformed into violent conflicts in the 1950s between the elite Hutu who claimed their rights as the majority against the minority of Tutsi who occupied the political authority and were considered outsiders (Caplan, 2007, p. 21). The exclusion of the Hutu from political life added to the discontentment among the Hutu and encouraged opposition to the monarch (Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004). These divisions resulted in the 1959 revolution, which was characterised by generalised violence across the country. Many Tutsi were compelled to flee to neighbouring countries, mostly Uganda (Li, 2004).

Belgium granted independence to Rwanda in July 1962 (Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004, p. 2) after having established the first republic in 1961 with Grégoire Kayibanda, the first

president (Caplan, 2007, p. 21). However, conflict continued, and in 1973 the Head of the Rwandan army, Juvenal Habyarimana replaced Kayibanda after a putsch (Caplan, 2007, p. 25). The two pre-genocide regimes were characterised by further discriminations against the Tutsi, in politics, education, access to employment and many areas of life (Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004). The situation culminated in further discontent. The refugees who had fled Rwanda in 1959 created the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) rebels in Uganda and attacked Rwanda in 1990 (Caplan, 2007, p. 3; Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004, p. 3). The crash of the plane of President Habyarimana and his death in April 1994 was followed by the historical genocide which killed an estimated a million Tutsi Rwandese (Caplan, 2007; Dallaire, 2007; Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004; Thompson, 2007).

The post-genocide republic

On the 4th of July 1994, Kigali fell under the jurisdiction of RPF and started the process of establishing a new government of coalition headed by President Pasteur Bizimungu as the new President and the Vice-President and Minister of Defence, Major General Paul Kagame (Government of Rwanda, 2024). The newly formed government had to deal with intense work in the area of reconstruction of the country in general, healing traumas, and peace-building (Caplan, 2007). In 2000, Paul Kagame replaced President Pasteur Bizimungu who was voted out of parliament. President Kagame continued to lead the transition until the elections of 2003 when he was elected for the first time as the President of the Republic of Rwanda (Government of Rwanda, 2024). Under President Kagame, the government is called the “Government of National Unity” (Caplan, 2007, p. 29). Amendments to articles of the Rwandan constitution resulted in President Kagame being re-elected for a third term in 2017 for a term of seven years (Jjuuko, 2018), and he continues to hold this position in 2024. The legal amendments that are discussed in this research were all made under President Kagame’s rule.

Religion and Catholicism

Before the colonial era, Rwandan society was animist, with a variety of traditional religions mainly characterised by adoring spirits, accompanied by a variety of customs and practices (Linden, 1977, p. 44). During the colonial era, Roman Catholic “Missionaries of Africa” known as “White Fathers” were the first to be installed in

Rwanda in 1900 (Longman, 2010, p. 38). These Catholic missionaries were followed by other Christian churches, which transformed the Rwandan society into a Christian society, where Christianity replaced in part or was combined with existing traditional beliefs and customs (Linden, 1977, p. 44). At their arrival, the Catholic missionaries helped the colonialists to rule alongside the monarch (Linden, 1977, p. 3). They also started schools and further education and Christianity became key elements defining nobility (Linden, 1977, p. 3). This highlights the importance of religion, especially the Catholic church in Rwandan society and in the governance of the country.

Currently, 92% of the Rwandan population is recognised as being Christian; where Catholics make up 40%, Pentecostal churches (ADEPR) 21%, Protestants 15% and Adventists 12% (NISR, 2022, p.11). Muslims make up 2% of the population, and traditional religions make up 1% and 3% of the total population (NISR, 2022).

Belonging to these religions influences current social and cultural norms and the acceptance of new policies aiming at protecting human rights. An example is the legal access to abortion under some circumstances.

The history and role of the media in Rwanda

The history of media in Rwanda started with the introduction of the newspaper *Kinyamateka* in 1933 by the Catholic church to provide believers with information about the church (Kamilindi, 2007; Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004). However, when Gregoire Kayibanda (who later became the President of Rwanda) was the editor, the newspaper was used for propaganda, criticising the colonial rule and the Catholic church's support of the injustice against the Hutu. The newspaper usurped that opportunity to spread the Hutu party's ideologies (Longman, 2010, p. 70). *Kinyamateka* was the sole newspaper until the 1960s when the government newspapers *Imvaho* (written in Kinyarwanda) and *La Relève* (written in French) were introduced. Additional newspapers were introduced during the period 1990 to 1994 (Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004).

Radio Rwanda a government-owned radio station started operating in 1961 serving as the mouthpiece of the government (Kamilindi, 2007; Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004). It remained the unique radio station broadcasting most of its programming in Kinyarwanda, with news programmes presented in all official languages namely

French, Kiswahili and English (Kamilindi, 2007; Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004). In 1974, all state-owned media were placed under Rwanda Office of Information (ORINFOR) after a decree law of 9/10/1974 (Republic of Rwanda, 2006). In 1991, the government established the first television station, *Rwanda Television* (Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004), and in 1993 the first private radio-television, *Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLTM) was introduced (Kamilindi, 2007).

In Rwanda, oral tradition is important (Linden, 1977), which makes radio a particularly accessible medium (Nduhura and Prieler, 2017). This is a reality not only in Rwanda but also in Africa in general (Tetty *et al.*, 2011). Radio has been most influential media platform among the Rwandan population since Radio Rwanda was established (Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004; Nduhura and Prieler, 2017). Research shows that Rwandans used to receive important information on Radio Rwanda, which justifies why they trusted media messages as truth without any analysis (Thompson, 2007). During the genocide, both Radio Rwanda and RTLTM succeeded in encouraging the population to participate in genocide with their hate messages and propaganda against the Tutsi (Kamilindi, 2007). A former Radio Rwanda journalist and genocide survivor testified that RTLTM was able to identify specific people and where they were hidden so that the Hutu militia could find and kill them (Kamilindi, 2007, p. 139). This proves the extent to which radio is important in Rwandan society, and the way it can affect people's beliefs and behaviours.

While a big part of the media disappeared during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, after the genocide, Radio Rwanda, as a state-owned station continued to operate as the sole broadcaster, alongside Rwanda Television until 2004 (Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004). Given the accusations pending over the role of radio stations in encouraging listeners to participate in genocide, in 2006, the government reviewed the missions and responsibilities of ORINFOR (Republic of Rwanda, 2006). The publication of media law, which regulates media functions in Rwanda was published in 2002 (Kimonyo *et al.*, 2004; Republic of Rwanda, 2013b); and the constitution of 2003 recognised the freedom of information (Republic of Rwanda, 2015, p. 50). These two laws prompted the creation of new private radio stations since 2004, followed by television stations, and many newspapers, both print and online (RURA, 2024).

Currently, Rwanda has 39 local radio stations on its airways, with two international radio stations, 18 local television stations and three international television stations (RURA, 2024). There are eight state-owned radio stations, which are Radio Rwanda with its seven affiliated radio stations; among them, five community radio stations broadcasting from five districts of rural provinces, and two radio stations based in the capital city, Kigali. The remaining 31 local radio stations are private stations. The city of Kigali is home to 23 of these non-state radio stations, and the eight remaining non-state radio stations are based in the four provinces (RURA, 2024).

Rwandans access radio messages in many ways mainly through their own radio sets, mobile phones, or by listening to their neighbours' radio sets (NISR, 2016). Radio is the first means Rwandans use to access information; and 64% of Rwandan households own radio sets, in comparison to 54% who have access to mobile phones, and only 8% have access to televisions (NISR, 2022, p. 97-100). It follows then that generally, radio is a widely used medium for the broadcast of messages of public interest in Rwanda, and health-related messaging is particularly common on local radio.

Since the establishment of private radio stations around 2004 (Kimonyo et al., 2004), non-state radio stations have been preferred by Rwandans as reliable sources of information as they cover sensitive topics concerning issues affecting society. Further, they promote open and authentic debates around those issues more than state-owned stations do (Nduhura and Prieler, 2017). For this reason, the current study, which analyses the coverage of legal reform expanding access to abortion for minors in Rwanda focuses on non-state radio stations, rather than state-owned stations. Apparently, non-state radio stations are recognised for their authentic debates and advocacy on issues affecting Rwandan society (Nduhura and Prieler, 2017).

Early and unintended pregnancies in Rwanda

Early, unintended pregnancy is an issue of concern in developing countries (Mohamed *et al.*, 2023). This phenomenon has major consequences for adolescent girls' physical and mental wellbeing, and it affects children's rights in general (Choonara *et al.*, 2024). The high increase in early unintended pregnancies is mostly observed in African countries particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). An analysis of the Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) of 32 countries between 2010 and 2018 revealed that

adolescent pregnancy ranged between 44.3% and 7.2% of girls whose ages ranged between 15 and 19 years (Ahinkorah *et al.*, 2021, p. 2 & 5). The East and Southern African (ESA) region's adolescent pregnancy prevalence is also alarming, with an estimated rate ranging "between 66.9 and 85.9 live births per 1000 adolescent girls aged 15 –19 years" (Choonara *et al.*, 2024, p. 1). This rate is almost two times the global 15-19 adolescent girls' birth rate which is 39 births per 1000 per year (Choonara *et al.*, 2024, p. 1). Early pregnancy is also an issue of concern in Rwanda (Uwizeye *et al.*, 2020), where analysis of DHS reports between 2007 and 2020 showed that teenage pregnancy varied between 5.7% and 7.2% among Rwandan girls (Uwizeye *et al.*, 2020: 2; NISR, 2020: 74). There are many factors contributing to early pregnancy. These include child rape and poverty (Mohamed *et al.*, 2023; Uwizeye *et al.*, 2020), and the inaccessibility of SRHR information and contraceptive and abortion services (Coast *et al.*, 2019; Choonara *et al.*, 2024). Further, there are restrictive laws and socio-cultural attitudes and religious beliefs towards young peoples' sexuality and early pregnancy, which cause stigma associated with early pregnancies and abortion (Ahinkorah *et al.*, 2021; Wado *et al.*, 2019).

The effects of early pregnancies on girls are mainly observed in the context of individual wellbeing, where many are forced to drop out of school (Mohamed *et al.*, 2023), health issues including birth complications, which in some cases result in death, trauma, and other long term disabilities and morbidities such as fistula (Wado *et al.*, 2019). Early pregnancies also affect minors' futures because early motherhood prevents some from continuing their education, which could help them to access job opportunities in the future (Coast *et al.*, 2021). Economic hardship, inexperience in taking parental responsibilities, and the social stigma associated with early pregnancy and early motherhood also affect these young people's mental wellbeing (Niyonsenga and Mutabaruka, 2021).

In addition, early pregnancy is a concern for child rights (Kassa *et al.*, 2018). The international documents relating to child rights protection note that "every child without distinction by gender or any other characteristic has the right to grow up free from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices" (UNICEF, 2024, p. 2). Rwanda's Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) integrated child rights abides by this policy, where it offers to protect child's right to "health and

standards of living, education, protection, justice” among others (MIGEPROF, 2011, p. 9). However, the reality of early pregnancies and their consequences is proof that the child's rights are violated in these areas.

Even if the law is against rape and includes increased punishment for child abusers (Republic of Rwanda, 2018, Art 133, p. 128), the increase in early pregnancies in Rwanda shows a gap in protecting minors from sexual violence (Uwizeye *et al.*, 2020). In addition to rape, limited access to contraceptives and SRHR information may culminate in early and unintended pregnancies (Coast *et al.*, 2019; Tuyisenge *et al.*, 2018). Rwanda is characterised by gender inequality, socio-cultural attitudes and religious beliefs among family members and society encourage the stigmatisation of pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers. Sadly, some are chased away from families and schools and start to take parental responsibilities alone which can expose them to abuse of their rights and other forms of sexual violence (Coast *et al.*, 2021, p. 1276).

Early pregnancy and early marriage are among the key elements causing school dropouts among girls, with a limited chance to resume school (MINEDUC and UNICEF, 2017, p. 147). Further, children born to young mothers are likely to be affected by malnutrition, and economic hardship does not allow teenage mothers to send their children to school (Coast *et al.*, 2021, p. 1276; Uwizeye *et al.*, 2020). The various hardships and discrimination faced by young mothers are among the reasons some minors prefer to resort to unsafe abortions before their pregnancy is known about in the community (Coast *et al.*, 2021; Mohamed *et al.*, 2023, p. 1276). This violates the right to a life free of coercion, discrimination and harmful practices, the right to education, and healthcare, and several other rights mentioned above (UNICEF, 2024). Unsafe abortions and early pregnancies are among the main causes of maternal mortality, especially among minors (Wado *et al.*, 2019).

For the above reasons, the Government of Rwanda has amended the articles related to abortion in the Rwanda Penal Code (RPC) where the law allows access to safe abortion for minors and other victims of sexual assault (Republic of Rwanda, 2018). This shows the government's recognition of the need to both protect young Rwandan girls and to address their SRHR.

Access to abortion in the context of sexual and reproductive rights

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexual health as a “state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being related to sexuality” (WHO, 2024d). Further, the global watchdog highlights that attaining sexual health depends on the respect and protection of the sexual rights of individuals. Since the International Conference on Population Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, respecting and protecting SRHR have been considered an important assignment to all governments, globally (Durojaye *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, the United Nations’ (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs) relate SRHR to different goals and targets, whereby governments are committed to ensuring access to SRHR and promoting gender equality (SDG 5.6), and healthy lives and wellbeing for all (SDG 3.7) by 2030 (Munyati, 2018; Starrs *et al.*, 2018; UNFPA, 2023).

It is within this global context of protecting and advancing SRHR that abortion is included as part of a comprehensive package of recognised services for SRHR, and respecting women’s rights to safe abortion is linked with respecting women’s right to life (AU, 2003; Durojaye *et al.*, 2021; Starrs *et al.*, 2018; UNFPA, 2023, WHO, 2022). Abortion is generally recognised as a medical procedure to end a pregnancy, using either medication or a surgical procedure and is sometimes referred to as “termination of pregnancy” (WHO, 2024a). The WHO (2024a) suggests that abortion can be safe when it is performed using appropriate methods by a skilled healthcare provider and in appropriate settings. Hence, abortion is unsafe and dangerous when it does not follow these conditions. Abortion is recognised as a human right that serves to protect women’s reproductive rights and basic human rights to life in general (Rebouché, 2016).

Therefore, inaccessibility of quality abortion care risks violating a range of human rights of women and girls, including the right to life; the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; the right to benefit from scientific progress and its realisation; the right to decide freely and responsibly on the number, spacing and timing of children; and the right to be free from torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and punishment (WHO, 2024b).

Historically, abortion has been performed in human societies although its recognition as a human right is a recent development (Shaw, 2010, p. 634). Even in Africa, women in many African societies secretly performed abortions for unwanted pregnancies in general, maybe resulting from rape, or when it is about a child's pregnancy, among others. The common methods used for abortion were basically about drinking herbals known for causing abortion (Chiweshe and Macleod, 2018, p. 53). Even though international human rights instruments and protocols recognise abortion as a right where countries are required to decriminalise abortion in their respective legislations, there has always been a concern about pregnant women's and foetus' right to life (Shaw, 2010). The discussions have split the world into two camps where some support the woman's choice to keep the pregnancy or terminate it and others, who are mostly influenced by cultural values and religious beliefs, arguing for the protection of the right to life of the foetus and oppose women's right to abortion (Shaw, 2010; Vanderford, 1989). Therefore, while all UN member states are required to ease access to legal and safe abortion as a way of respecting women's rights, there is a gap in the implementation of this obligation, depending on countries' social, cultural and religious norms and their geographical positioning (AU, 2003; Chiweshe and Macleod, 2018; WHO, 2022).

Rwanda is a country within the EAC, a region where SRHR is contested. Since 2017, the proposed EAC Sexual and Reproductive Health Bill to protect and advance SRHR has been discussed and rejected by some of the East African Legislative Assembly, with some member states raising concerns about the contents and wording of the Bill (EAC, 2021). This has resulted in concerns that SRHR is under threat in the region.

In the global context, abortion continues to be a controversial and political subject, more than a health issue (WHO, 2024a), where many countries are reluctant to liberalise safe abortion as a human reproductive health right because of the socio-cultural and religious beliefs opposed to abortion (Durojaye and Nabaneh, 2021; EAC, 2021). This suggests that women or girls who have unwanted pregnancies are at risk of either keeping those pregnancies to birth or resorting to traditional means for unsafe abortions (Choonara *et al.*, 2024).

Existing data show that 73 million abortions take place every year and 45% of them are facilitated by unskilled practitioners and those in inadequate health conditions for

abortion all of them occur in developing countries including African countries (WHO, 2024a). In 2021, the African continent had the highest rate of unsafe abortions, which was estimated at 8 million per year, and the highest rate of abortion-related deaths which is approximately 15 000 each year (Population Reference Bureau (PRB), 2021, p. 4-5).

Access to legal and safe abortion is limited by the fact that in many countries, abortion is considered a criminal offence (WHO, 2022). There is an established direct correlation between a woman's safety and a country's legal provisions on abortion, whereby in countries where safe abortion is on request, abortion-related deaths are below 1/100 000, while in countries with restrictive laws, deaths due to unsafe abortions are above 200/100 000 (WHO, 2024a). However, many unsafe abortion complications and deaths are not well known because of the secrecy involved to avoid prison (Kane, 2015).

Access to safe abortion in Rwanda

The Maputo Protocol (2003) was the first African human rights instrument to grant women the right to abortion on certain grounds (Durojaye *et al.*, 2021). In this Protocol, AU member states are required to protect the reproductive rights of women by authorising medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the foetus (AU, 2003, Article 14.2.C). For example,

Eleven African countries prohibit abortion altogether. Others have restrictive legislation that allows abortion under conditions. [...] Four countries permit abortion on request (within gestation periods), and one on a wide range of grounds (Chiweshe and Macleod, 2018, p. 52).

Rwanda is among those countries where abortion is strictly regulated by the law. The law punishes abortion with a sentence that ranges from one year to a maximum of life imprisonment (Republic of Rwanda, 2018, p. 121).

The penal code of 1977, which was amended in 2012, Article 327, stated that abortion was only allowed when it was “established by two doctors, after examination and discussion, that continuing the pregnancy seriously endangers the woman's health” (Republic of Rwanda, 1977, p. 78), among other conditions. This law was in force until

2012, when Rwanda met the Maputo Protocol recommendations by repealing previous restrictive laws and taking appropriate measures to expand access to abortion (Republic of Rwanda, 2012a) (See details on the revision of the penal code in Appendix A).

The abortion articles in the Rwanda Penal Code (RPC) were revised according to the Maputo Protocol, authorising medical abortion in limited circumstances (Republic of Rwanda, 2012b, p. 211). According to the article 165:

There is no criminal liability for a woman who commits abortion and a medical doctor who helps a woman to abort if one of the following conditions is met:

1° when a woman has become pregnant as a result of rape; 2° when a woman has been subjected to forced marriage; 3° when a woman has become pregnant due to incest in the second degree; 4° when the continuation of pregnancy seriously jeopardizes the health of the unborn baby or that of the pregnant woman (Republic of Rwanda, 2012b, p. 211).

The above suggests that since 2012, legal access to abortion has been no longer only on medical grounds but also on other legal grounds. The first revision was seen as a success in the eyes of activists who contributed to the change by gathering public opinion supporting access to abortion and testimonies of women in prison for self-induced abortions, to show the extent to which abortion was a needed medical service (Umuhoza et al., 2013). However, the last paragraph of Article 165 suggested that abortion was provided only after the person requesting abortion first engaged in the process of approving the abortion:

The exemption from criminal liability under items 1°, 2° and 3° of Paragraph One of this Article shall be permitted only if the woman who seeks abortion submits to the doctor an order issued by the competent Court recognizing one of the cases under these items, or when this is proven to the Court by a person charged of abortion (Republic of Rwanda, 2012b, p. 211).

Research conducted in some hospitals in Rwanda soon after the law was amended in 2012 in gender-based violence (GBV) centres and the courts to evaluate the implementation of the law revealed that,

There was only one case of induced abortion where pregnancy was as a result of rape. This was the only record identified in hospitals- and triangulated with GBV and court data- between July 2012 and December 2014. It was a case of a minor, who had a court order proving rape and received a medical abortion in April 2014 (Hodoglugil *et al.*, 2017, p. 86).

The above suggests that even if the law had legalised abortion under some circumstances, it was not implemented for several reasons including fear of stigma, the need for secrecy, and the obligation to present a court order; and this prevented girls and women in the legal framework from accessing safe abortion (Kane, 2015). For example,

The challenges to follow the legal procedures to get a court order to prove that the pregnancy was as a result of rape, incest or forced marriage. Many times victims and/or their families would come forward only when a sexual assault resulted in a pregnancy, which was too late with the current legal framework to get a court order (Hodoglugil *et al.*, 2017,p. 88).

In 2018, the RPC was amended again and was published in the organic law N°01/2012/OL of 02/05/2012. Article 125 expanded access to abortion, in cases where the pregnant person is minor (under 18 years), plus the other grounds of the previous provisions of 2012 (Republic of Rwanda, 2018, p. 122). Article 125 states that,

There is no criminal liability if abortion was performed due to the following reasons: 1° the pregnant person is a child; 2° the person having abortion had become pregnant as a result of rape; 3° the person having abortion had become pregnant after being subjected to a forced marriage; 4° the person having abortion had become pregnant as a result of incest up to the second degree; 5° the pregnancy puts at risk the health of the pregnant person or of the foetus. Abortion is performed by a recognized medical doctor. Conditions to be satisfied for a medical doctor to perform an abortion are determined by an Order of the Minister in charge of health (Rwanda, 2018, p. 122).

To complement the abortion articles of the penal code, the Ministry of Health (MoH) published a ministerial order N°002/MoH/2019 of 08/04/2019 determining the specific criteria to be satisfied for a doctor to perform an abortion (Republic of Rwanda, 2019). The ministerial order removed the condition of the court order and emphasised the right of minors to request and receive abortion services (Republic of Rwanda, 2019). Article three of the ministerial order states that,

Abortion is performed on the following grounds:

1° the pregnant person is a child; 2° the person requesting for abortion became pregnant as a result of rape; 3° the person requesting for abortion became pregnant after being subjected to a forced marriage; 4° the person requesting for abortion became pregnant as a result of incest committed with a person to the second degree of kinship; 5° the pregnancy puts at risk the health of the pregnant person or of the foetus.

Without prejudice to the provisions of Article 11 of this Order, the person requesting for abortion is not required to produce evidence of the grounds she invokes (Republic of Rwanda, 2018, p. 122).

This change suggests that safe abortion would become easier for girls and women in the legal framework. While the Rwandan law does not specify the age of consent to medical treatment for children (Binagwaho *et al.*, 2012), the provision of abortion for minors has generated much debate and discussion in Rwanda, with some people requesting the government to review and change the new law (Rugema *et al.*, 2023). The legal reform raised concerns in society because it was perceived as acting against cultural values and religious beliefs (Hodoglugil *et al.*, 2017, p. 90: Rugema *et al.*, 2023, p. 10). Some debates suggested that it is inappropriate to allow minors to have abortions, as it could encourage immorality among the youth (Rugema *et al.*, 2023). It is against this background of legal reform that this study was conducted to analyse the way radio stations covered the legal provision of abortion for minors in Rwanda and how this issue has been represented through radio coverage.

Table 1.1: Legal grounds to abortion in Rwanda from 1977-2019

Law decree establishing the Penal Code 1977	Organic Law N° 01/2012/OL OF 02/05/2012 Instituting The Penal Code Pages 209-214
Article 127: Exemption from criminal liability for abortion	Article 165: Exemption from criminal liability for abortion
<p>However, by way of derogation from articles 325 and 326, there is no criminal liability for a doctor who has performed the abortion, or for a woman who has consented to it, if the following conditions are met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. that it be ascertained by two doctors, after examination and discussion, that the continuation of the pregnancy seriously endangers the woman's health; 2. that this statement be made in writing, in four copies signed by each of the doctors Consultants; 3. that one of the copies of the consultation be given to the person concerned, and that a second copy be addressed to the doctor in charge of the medical sector in whose jurisdiction the abortion is to be performed, other copies kept by the consulting physicians; 	<p>There is no criminal liability for a woman who commits abortion and a medical doctor who helps a woman to abort if one of the following conditions is met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1° when a woman has become pregnant as a result of rape; 2° when a woman has been subjected to forced marriage; 3° when a woman has become pregnant due to incest in the second degree; 4° when the continuation of pregnancy seriously the health of the unborn baby or that of the pregnant woman. <p>CONDITIONS</p> <p>The exemption from criminal liability under items 1°, 2° and 3° of Paragraph One of this Article shall be permitted only if the</p>

<p>4. that the abortion be performed by a State doctor or accredited by the government, and that it takes place in a public hospital or in a private polyclinic accredited by the government (Republic of Rwanda, 1977: 78)</p>	<p>woman who seeks abortion submits to the doctor an order issued by the competent Court recognizing one of the cases under these items, or when this is proven to the Court by a person charged of abortion.</p>
<p>Law n°68/2018 of 30/08/2018 Determining Offences and Penalties in General Pages 120- 124</p>	<p>Ministerial order N°002/MoH/2019 of 08/04/2019 determining conditions to be satisfied for a medical doctor to perform an abortion Pages: 5-8</p>
<p>Article 125: Exemption from criminal liability for abortion There is no criminal liability if abortion was performed due to the following reasons: 1° the pregnant person is a child; 2° the person having abortion had become pregnant as a result of rape; 3° the person having abortion had become pregnant after being subjected to a forced marriage; 4° the person having abortion had become pregnant as a result of incest up to the second degree; 5° the pregnancy puts at risk the health of the pregnant person or of the foetus.</p> <p>CONDITIONS</p> <p>Abortion is performed by a recognized medical doctor. Conditions to be satisfied for a medical doctor to perform an abortion are determined by an Order of the Minister in charge of health.</p> <p>If, after abortion, it is evident that the person on whom abortion was performed applied for it with no legal basis, such a person is punished as a person who performed a self-induced abortion.</p>	<p>Article 3: allowed grounds for abortion Abortion is performed on the following grounds: 1° the pregnant person is a child; 2° the person requesting for abortion became pregnant as a result of rape; 3° the person requesting for abortion became pregnant after being subjected to a forced marriage; 4° the person requesting for abortion became pregnant as a result of incest committed with a person to the second degree of kinship; 5° the pregnancy puts at risk the health of the pregnant person or of the foetus.</p> <p>CONDITIONS</p> <p>Without prejudice to the provisions of Article 11 of this Order, the person requesting for abortion is not required to produce evidence of the grounds she invokes.</p> <p>Article 6: Procedure by which an application for a child to abort is made</p> <p>If a person who wishes to abort is a child, the application to do so is made by her legal representatives after agreeing upon it. If her legal representatives disagree among themselves or if they disagree with the child, the wish of the child prevails.</p>

Source: The author

Problem statement

Numerous researchers have investigated the challenges to enabling access to safe abortion in sub-Saharan Africa in general (Durojaye *et al.*, 2021; Kafu *et al.*, 2021;

Poku, 2020), and in Rwanda in particular (Hodoglugil *et al.*, 2017; Rugema *et al.*, 2023; Uwizeye *et al.*, 2020). While Rwanda has recently expanded access to abortion, the fear of stigma and the need for secrecy leads many women and girls, particularly minors, to seek help from untrained people for unsafe abortions even when abortion is provided for in the legal framework (Kane, 2015, p. 9), with risks of death, disability and legal punishments (Påfs *et al.*, 2020).

In Rwanda, the negative social attitudes against abortion and religious beliefs stand as barriers to girls and women to seek or access abortion services (Hodoglugil *et al.*, 2017; Kane, 2015). Another identified challenge is the way in which abortion is covered in the media (Kafu *et al.*, 2021). Media plays a crucial role in communicating health messages at a large scale and has been effectively used to communicate about SRHR (Kafu *et al.*, 2021; Lewis and Lewis, 2015; Schiavo, 2007). However, media houses are influenced by the social norms of the society in which they operate, because those social norms play a role in determining what is perceived as right and wrong (Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018).

Media messages are also capable of creating or reinforcing representations of how society portrays reality (Lewis and Lewis, 2015; Orgad, 2012; Schiavo, 2007). When media are used to promote the negative discourse around some elements of SRHR such as abortion, this can create misconceptions or promote stigma (Lewis and Lewis, 2015; Orgad, 2012). As the media is a space where issues concerning society are openly discussed in public debates (Chiumbu and Motsaathebe, 2021; Kafu *et al.*, 2021), the way those issues are discussed, constructed and portrayed in media may play an important role in reducing or adding to the stigma around sensitive issues such as abortion (Purcell *et al.*, 2014).

The legal reform allowing abortion for minors and women in limited circumstances in Rwanda has attracted researchers' attention in the area of public health (Hodoglugil *et al.*, 2017; Rugema *et al.*, 2023; Uwizeye *et al.*, 2020), however, little academic attention has been directed to exploring how Rwandan local media, specifically radio stations cover and represent the legal reforms and how they may reduce or add to the stigma around access to abortion.

Aim of the study

This study fills this gap in the literature by exploring how Rwandan non-state radio stations have covered the decriminalisation of abortion for minors. This study investigates the coverage of the recent abortion law reform by radio stations in Rwanda, focusing on the motivations and editorial decisions and the content of the broadcasts. By analysing the constructs and content of radio broadcasts, the research seeks to understand how radio mediates public discourse on controversial legal reforms, such as the legal provision of abortion for minors, and whether it fosters inclusive debate or fuels moral panics on this topic. The study addresses a critical gap in media research on how abortion is constructed in Rwandan media, and why it is represented in that way.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyse the way non-state radio stations covered issues related to the decriminalisation of abortion for minors in Rwanda.
2. To analyse the way non-state radio stations enabled the Rwandan population to express themselves about the decriminalisation of abortion for minors.
3. To analyse the way non-state radio stations represent issues related to legal abortion for minors in Rwanda.
4. To examine how non-state radio stations' policies, guidelines, practices and other factors affected their coverage of these issues.

Research questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. How did the selected radio stations cover the legal amendments to abortion access for minors in Rwanda?
2. How are Rwandan citizen voices reflected in non-state radio's coverage of this issue?
3. How do selected radio stations represent issues related to legal abortion for minors in Rwanda?

4. How do the radio stations' policies, guidelines, practices, and other news-making factors impact the coverage of abortion for minors in Rwanda?

Location of the study

This study selected non-state radio stations from all the five provinces in Rwanda namely Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western Provinces, and Kigali City. Appendix B shows the location of the various radio stations and their geographical coverage

Northern Province: Radio Ishingiro

The Northern Province has an area of 3,293.3 km², with 2,038,51 inhabitants. For the geographical coverage of Radio Ishingiro (see Figure 2 in Appendix B)

Southern Province: Radio Huguka and Radio Salus

The Southern Province has an area of 5701 km², and it is populated by 3,002,69 inhabitants. For the coverage area for Radio Huguka and Radio Salus (see Figures 3 and 4 in Appendix B).

Eastern Province: Radio Izuba

The Eastern Province has an area of 9,813 km² and is populated by 3,563,145 (Eastern Province, 2024). For the geographical coverage of Radio Izuba (see Figure 5 in Appendix B).

Western Province: Radio Isangano

The Western Province has an area of 2 5.882 km² with 2,896,484 inhabitants. Geographical coverage of Radio Isangano (see Figure 6 in Appendix B).

Kigali City: Flash FM, KT Radio and Radio 10

Kigali is the capital city of Rwanda. The city spans an area of 730 km² and is populated by 1,745,555 inhabitants. For the geographical coverage (see Figures 7, 8, and 9 in Appendix B).

Relevance of the study and positionality

I gained interest in this study because of the controversy around abortion in Rwandan society, and the way the government struggles with developing and implementing

policies aiming at protecting human rights, especially women and children's rights. I was born in the Southern Province of Rwanda in a Christian family, and that is where I live and work. I served as a radio and newspaper journalist from 2010 to 2015, prior to studying for a master's degree in communication and media. My master's dissertation was about the image of gender equality as portrayed by radio stations.

As a Rwandan woman, I understand that generally, my society does not tolerate abortion, which means that anyone who gets pregnant must give birth. The effects of illegal and unsafe abortions are shrouded in secrecy. At least many are aware that illegal abortion is punished with a prison sentence, and the health consequences are only about death and infertility. The information about access to abortion and the negative effects of abortion is shared through the media, especially radio stations and in interpersonal communication.

In addition, living in a rural area in Rwanda helps me to witness the reality of social life in this African country. The reality of teenage pregnancies, and the associated consequences are obvious to everyone. Some teenagers fail to get an abortion, keep pregnancies and hide them until they give birth, with the risk of either killing or abandoning the babies after birth. I also know the hardships faced by single mothers when taking parental responsibilities alone without fathers' financial support; and the poverty in families, which affects the health of the babies born to minors. However, many voices on radio stations and in society in general, oppose the government's legal reforms allowing access to abortion for minors and women in other circumstances.

These negative attitudes towards abortion can make one think that even if the government would decriminalise abortion under some circumstances, those on legal grounds would not access it because of the hostility of the most Rwandans. Informed by the above mentioned social barriers to abortion access, this study aims to contribute to the knowledge about the importance of the media in general, and radio stations in particular, in encouraging open debate about SRHR issues, especially the legal provision of abortion for minors.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis includes the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction chapter introduces the thesis and provides the background to the study. It outlines the problem statement and the study's aim, objectives, and research questions. The first chapter situates the study in the social and historical context of Rwanda. It also introduces a brief discussion of early and unintended pregnancies, ASRHR and access to abortion in a global context, regionally and specifically in Rwanda. It also highlights the importance of radio as an influential medium of communication in Rwanda. The relevance of the study and its structure are also provided in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review critically explores current scholarship on the use of media to share information and fuel debate around abortion globally, in the SSA region, and in the EAC countries where Rwanda is found. It draws on extant literature examining how media serve as effective tools for the public to discuss issues regarding abortion, and how what is communicated can either highlight deviance from social norms and values; or how it can work to change those social norms to create a more favourable environment that promotes safe abortions. Finally, the chapter situates the current study in the existing literature and shows how the study helps to fill the gaps in existing literature.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

In this study, two theories are used. These are Habermas' (1989) Public Sphere Theory and Cohen's (1972) Moral Panics Theory (Cohen, 1972). On the one hand, Public Sphere Theory supposes an open space for all citizens willing to engage in reasonable debates to find the best arguments that they consider the best solution to the issues of common interest (Habermas, 1989, p. 27). On the other hand, and the moral panics theory (Cohen, 1972), which theorises how a "condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests" (Cohen, 2002, p. 1). These two theories further guide my analysis to understand how radio stations covered the controversy around the amendment of the law allowing abortion for minors in Rwanda. Chapter Three provides a detailed discussion of each theory and its theoretical concepts concerning its origin, how it has

developed over the years, critiques of the theory and how it will contribute to the analysis of the content.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The methodology chapter positions this study in a qualitative research approach with a case study as an approach to inquiry. The first part of this chapter outlines the research paradigm and gives details on data collection methods both for in-depth interviews (IDI) and data collection of archived radio content and discusses the inclusion and exclusion criteria for each sample. Limitations and strengths for each method of data collection are also provided.

The second part of the chapter gives details on how I conducted the QCA (Schreier, 2014) for both radio content and IDIs. This section shows how the analysis was conducted following the coding frame made of the main categories and subcategories (Schreier, 2014, p. 18). The main categories for analysis were also developed based on the research questions. The two theories guided the allocation of sub-categories.

Chapter 5: The radio as a facilitator of the public sphere

Chapter Five focuses on how the radio functions as a public sphere for discussions of abortion in Rwanda. The theory of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989) guides the analysis of sub-categories illuminating how radio stations were a space for public debates and deliberations (Chiumbu and Motsaathebe, 2021) on the reform of the law allowing abortion for minors in Rwanda. The interpretation of interviews and radio content and the discussions of sub-categories under the guidance of the public sphere are presented in the form of texts with quotations taken from the selected data for sub-categories.

Chapter 6: Radio as an amplifier of moral panic about abortion

This chapter includes an analysis of radio content and data generated through IDIs with the radio station staff, framed using moral panics theory (Cohen, 1972). Moral panics theory (Cohen, 1972) helped me to critically explore how abortion for minors is constructed as being a threat to Rwandan societal values, and how abortion is constructed as morally wrong in the context of Rwandan society, and its religious beliefs.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This chapter discusses the findings and concludes the study by drawing from the previous six chapters, demonstrating the way the findings provide answers to research questions and the way in which the study has an original contribution to the scholarship on radio coverage of the legal provision of abortion for minors in Rwanda and makes a recommendation for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter explores some of the challenges related to accessing safe abortion and the available literature on the potential of media to share information whereby the public is able to engage in discussions about abortion as a social issue and open up the debate around abortion; globally, in the sub-Saharan African region, and in the EAC countries where Rwanda is located.

Challenges to realising SRHR and accessing safe abortion at the global level

Protecting individuals' SRHR was among the resolutions from the ICPD held in Cairo in 1994, where it was decided that all countries should recognise people's rights to control their own sexual and reproductive health and live a life free from coercion, violence and discrimination (Durojaye *et al.*, 2021; Shaw, 2010, p. 640).

According to WHO, SRHR is delivered in a full package of five key services which are:

Improving antenatal, perinatal, postpartum and newborn care; providing family planning services; eliminating unsafe abortion; combatting sexually transmitted (STIs); promoting sexual health (WHO, 2024c).

The services outlined above are recognised to be part of the fundamental human rights, which are recognised at international and national levels (Erdman and Cook, 2020). However, researchers show that there are significant gaps in protecting and respecting SRHR, especially in developing countries (Durojaye *et al.*, 2021; Poku, 2020; Starrs *et al.*, 2018).

At the regional level, the Maputo Protocol (2003) and Maputo Plan of Action (AU, 2003; AU, 2016) show that African countries are required and committed to provide rights to sexual and reproductive health. This is in line with the other commitments made in SDGs where in goal three and goal five, countries all over the world were committed to achieving SRHR by 2030 (UN, 2015). However, although sub-Saharan African countries ratify international and regional human rights instruments, these do not always translate to domestic policy, and there are still high numbers of rape, child and

forced marriages, female genital cutting, denial of the use of contraceptives for young girls or inaccessibility to contraceptive methods of choice, unwanted pregnancies among adolescent girls, forced abortion, unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted infections, and gender inequality (Achen *et al.*, 2023; Chivusia, 2021; Durojaye and Nabaneh, 2021; Poku, 2021; Starrs *et al.*, 2018; Durojaye, 2019; WHO *et al.*, 2023).

Research shows that generally, limited access to SRHR is not only due to the lack of political will (Starrs *et al.*, 2018) or to inadequate resources allocated to SRHR, but it is also due to cultural and social norms and religious beliefs, which have for a long time set social constructs of taboos around sexuality (Durojaye *et al.*, 2021; Starrs *et al.*, 2018). Most of the time, those social norms influence countries' laws in the way they respect and protect girls' and women's SRHR (Achen *et al.*, 2023; Gonese-Manjonjo and Durojaye, 2021).

Gender inequality in societies also hinders accessibility to education and information about SRHR (Munyati, 2018; Starrs *et al.*, 2018). Gender inequality impacts are observed when girls and women hesitate to seek safe abortion services and contraceptives because of the fear of stigma and discourses surrounding issues related to sexual intercourse, particularly for unmarried people, more specifically for girls (Islam and Arannya, 2023; Starrs *et al.*, 2018). Durojaye *et al.* (2021, p.xi) observed that,

Due to androcentric social-political systems rooted in coloniality, apartheid, xenophobia, Afrophobia, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, sexism and racism, many African countries still lag behind with regard to their obligations to protect, promote and advance SRHR.

Women and girls' inability to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights has serious consequences for them and their communities and on adolescent sexual reproductive health in particular. Currently, research shows that there is a particular concern about the existing gap in the realisation of SRHR among adolescents in the ESA region (WHO, 2024b). Research on access to SRHR in Ethiopia and Rwanda found that in these countries:

Adolescents' SRH and well-being is largely limited to those over the age of 15, with the needs of younger adolescents rarely addressed. Norms and customs often compel married couples to prove their fertility soon after marriage, just as

they prevent unmarried girls from accessing contraceptives (despite, in some cases, a national policy environment that supports greater access to contraception). Discriminatory norms also prevent girls from being able to negotiate contraceptive use with a sexual partner (Coast *et al.*, 2019, p. 2).

Gender discrimination is also noticeable in countries' legislations whereby adolescent sexual and reproductive health is not considered in some countries (Choonara *et al.*, 2024). Inaccessibility to SRHR by adolescents is recognised as being caused by “traditional and legislative constructs that perceive adolescents as asexual and adolescents' sexuality as taboo” (Maziwisa, 2021, p. 68).

In Rwanda, like in many other countries where social and cultural norms and religious beliefs guide people's behaviours (Chiweshe and Macleod, 2018; Rugema *et al.*, 2023), issues related to ASRHR are not well interpreted in society (Basinga *et al.*, 2013; Durojaye *et al.*, 2021; Maziwisa, 2021). Durojaye *et al.* (2021, p. xii) critically note that “in many African countries, SRHR-related laws and policies are applied to adolescents in a manner that depicts them as emotionally and intellectually weak”. This portrayal of adolescents has consequences on their capacity to make reasoned decisions on their own sexual and reproductive health.

In Rwanda, research shows that adolescents under 18 face a problem where they are considered children and “have no legal provision to participate in decisions concerning their own health” (Binagwaho *et al.*, 2012, p. 937). This prevents them from accessing sexual and reproductive services such as contraceptives and HIV treatment because the age for medical decisions is not well defined by the law (Binagwaho *et al.*, 2012). The gap in the realisation of SRHR among adolescents in the ESA region is also obvious through the high rate of early unintended pregnancies (UNFPA, 2021). However, research shows that despite the evidence of the high number of teenage pregnancies, deaths related to early pregnancies, and the increased health effects of unsafe abortions, some African governments, influenced by social norms and religious beliefs continue putting in place restrictive abortion laws (Durojaye *et al.*, 2021).

Challenges in accessing safe abortion

Offering and communicating about safe abortion as part of the package of services for SRHR is recognised as being under-developed in Africa (AU, 2003; Durojaye *et al.*, 2021; WHO, 2022; AU, 2003; Maziwisa, 2021; Starrs *et al.*, 2018). To a large extent, this is because of the controversy surrounding abortion in various African communities, whereby researchers identified “negative attitudes towards non-conforming sexuality on the basis of age, gender, sexual orientation” (Durojaye *et al.*, 2021, p. 1). In addition many countries oppose the legal provision of abortion as a way of protecting the human right to life of the foetus (Shaw, 2010).

As a result, many girls and women in countries where abortion is not legally allowed resort to unsafe abortion. The African continent alone counts more than eight million abortions per year, and high rates of abortion complications and death related to unsafe abortion (WHO, 2022). This high rate of unsafe abortions is attributed to the fact that in developing countries, there are highly restrictive laws on abortions (WHO, 2022). For example,

In countries where induced abortion is highly restricted by law or unavailable due to other barriers, safe abortion has often become the privilege of the rich, while poor women have little choice but to resort to the services of unskilled providers in unsafe settings or induce abortion themselves often using unsafe methods, leading to deaths and morbidities (WHO, 2022, p. 2).

The above implies that when safe abortion services are not easily accessible in places characterised by social inequalities, where safe abortion services are reserved for women with financial means who can afford the cost of private medical doctors while poor women in need of abortion resort to unsafe abortion from unskilled practitioners (Kane, 2015). In addition, legal restrictions, coupled with moral and societal values cause stigma associated with abortion, which also contributes to girls and women resorting to unsafe abortions (Chiweshe and Macleod, 2018; Frohwirth *et al.*, 2018). Existing research defines abortion-related stigma, as a “negative attribute ascribed to women who seek to terminate a pregnancy that marks them, internally or externally, as inferior to ideals of womanhood” (Kumar *et al.*, 2009, p. 4). Abortion stigma is mostly characterised by “worries about judgment, isolation, self-judgment and community condemnation” (Cockrill *et al.*, 2013, p. 86). Further, abortion stigma is not only directed against the person who had the abortion, but it also affects family members

of the stigmatised, and the abortion providers in health care settings (Martin *et al.*, 2014; Park and Park, 2014). Research revealed that abortion stigma is also prevalent among healthcare providers whereby some are unable to perform abortions for fear of being stigmatised by colleagues and the community (Påfs *et al.*, 2020). A study conducted in Rwanda revealed that healthcare providers might not offer abortion services to girls and women on legal grounds because of being labelled as abortion providers and stigmatised (Påfs *et al.*, 2020). Further, abortion is considered by some as 'killing' (Rugema *et al.*, 2023).

The unwillingness of healthcare providers to provide abortion services can limit girls and women who are within the legal framework from accessing a safe abortion. They may not access these services, compelling them to keep unwanted pregnancies until they give birth, while others seek help from clandestine traditional healers, exposing themselves to unsafe abortions and their consequences (Kane, 2015). Therefore, communicating about the right to access safe abortions within the confines of the law is an important step to reducing misinformation about abortion, and SRHR (Cullen and Korolczukb, 2019; Kafu *et al.*, 2021; Nyathi and Ndhlovu, 2021), and ultimately to improving the health of women and girls.

The impact of culture and religious beliefs on SRHR in Rwanda

In Rwandan culture, it is inappropriate to talk about issues related to sexuality openly, because it is considered a lack of good manners and a manifestation of immorality (Tuyisenge *et al.*, 2018; Mbarushimana *et al.*, 2022). The reluctance to discuss sexual issues becomes stronger when it comes to engaging in discussion about sexuality among parents and children, whereby some parents prefer sending their children, especially daughters, to their relatives for sexual education as they think that the latter would be free to discuss sexual matters with children who are not their own (Mbarushimana *et al.*, 2022). Some parents do not consider that children can be sexually active, or have knowledge about sexual intercourse; therefore, they avoid talking about sex for fear that their children would know its existence and then try to experience it (Hadley, 2023; Isirabahenda, 2017; Mbarushimana *et al.*, 2022; Tuyisenge *et al.*, 2018).

The study by Ndayishimiye *et al.* (2020a) on youth's perceptions of accessibility of SRHR among Rwandan youth found that they face significant barriers to accessing SRHR services. The main challenges include,

Lack of information about comprehensive SRH services for adolescents and where they can be accessed, community stigma surrounding accessibility to SRH services, unaffordable services within private health facilities, fearing parents and church leaders on what they might think about adolescents who try to utilize or request SRH services and judgmental attitudes of some health service providers (Ndayishimiye *et al.*, 2020a, p. 10).

This suggests that negative social attitudes and religious views towards youth sexuality are among the main barriers for Rwandan youth to access SRH services. The lack of information is mainly attributed to the fact that discussion on sexuality at the levels of the family does not happen therefore, the youth is exposed to various sources of information including peers and social media (Isirabahenda, 2017; Ndayishimiye *et al.*, 2020a). Research showed that parents fail to provide sexual and reproductive information because they are embarrassed to talk about issues related to sex with their own children because they lack appropriate vocabularies:

Young adolescents often perceive parents as the primary sources of SRHR information but many parents do not discuss sex with their children. There is limited communication with parents because parents lack the skills and time to engage with young adolescents, have negative attitudes towards SRHR information, and face language-related barriers and cultural norms at the family level (Mbarushimana *et al.*, 2022, p. 10).

Culturally, issues related to sex are kept sacred and they are only discussed among adults mostly among married people (Musabyimana, 2006). Apart from the sexual education that young people get from schools, traditionally, young people should be educated about issues related to sex just before marriage (Isirabahenda, 2017; Musabyimana, 2006). This culminates in the reluctance to support and realise ASRHR in Rwanda.

At the national level, emphasis is put on SRHR education in schools (Rugema *et al.*, 2023; Tuyisenge *et al.*, 2018). However, communication about safe and protected sex focuses on encouraging abstinence to prevent HIV and early pregnancies (Tuyisenge *et al.*, 2018). This highlights the role of cultural and religious beliefs opposing premarital sex whereby:

Sexual involvement by adolescents is not only considered as immoral by religious preaching but also it is against the conservative traditional norms of the Rwandan society. Youth are restricted from being engaged in any sexual relationship (Tuyisenge *et al.*, 2018, p. 9).

Tuyisenge *et al.* (2018) reflected on the challenges of providing condoms to learners, and clarified that since many schools belong to churches, it is difficult to provide condoms in schools.

In a conservative country like Rwanda, religious institutions such as the Catholic Church, occupy an important role in society and are responsible for the management of the highest number of secondary schools. As a result, they do express their position regarding extramarital sexual relationships in very strong terms (Tuyisenge *et al.*, 2018, p. 6).

While ASRHR and SRHR should be available and affordable (Starrs *et al.*, 2018; WHO, 2024c), research criticised the inaccessibility and unaffordability of contraceptives and condoms (Ndayishimiye *et al.*, 2020a; Tuyisenge *et al.*, 2018); and as result, adolescents are engaged in unprotected sex with a high risk of acquiring sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV and such encounters may result in unintended pregnancies. Research points out that poverty and gender inequality are other factors which hinder access to ASRHR. For example,

Sexual relationships that girls engage in often involve unequal power dynamics in terms of age, gender norms, economic inequality and their intersections. This may result in high levels of coercion and violence including rape, which adolescent girls report as a major concern surrounding their bodily integrity (Cressey *et al.*, 2020, p. 4).

Clearly, despite the opposition of society to sex before marriage, older men have sexual relations with teenagers because of money. Such relationships are normally considered child sexual abuse and punished with a sentence from 25 years up to life imprisonment (Republic of Rwanda, 2018, p. 128). However, even though many minors are impregnated by older men, some girls do not denounce them to justice (Kane, 2015) in order to continue to get their economic support, especially when sex results in pregnancy and child birth.

Over the past decades, Rwanda experienced an increase in teenage pregnancies (Mbarushimana *et al.*, 2022; Ndayishimiye *et al.*, 2020a; Rugema *et al.*, 2023; Tuyisenge *et al.*, 2018). The Rwandan Health Demographic Surveys (RDHS) shows that in 2020, the birth rate among teenagers between 15 and 19 was 32 births per 1

000 women and that in the period 2014-2020, the average teenage pregnancy was around seven percent of teenagers from 15 to 19 years (NISR, 2016, p. 74; NISR, 2020, p. 77).

Early pregnancies have increased while Rwanda has laws protecting children. The National Integrated Child Rights Policy (NICRP), which was conceived in 2011, aimed at protecting all Rwandan children and guaranteeing that their rights are fully protected and respected (MIGEPROF, 2011). The NICRP shows that Rwanda is committed to defending and protecting children's rights as human rights and also to establishing a system for reporting, referring, and responding to child protection in particular (MIGEPROF, 2011, p. 8-9). Rwanda also included children's rights to protection in the laws, where the law protects children from sexual abuse, exploitation, neglect, and violence (Republic of Rwanda, 2018). Despite this, teenage pregnancies continue to point to instances of sexual violence, sexual exploitation, neglect, harmful practices and stigmatisations against children (Coast *et al.*, 2021; Cressey *et al.*, 2020). The report of the NISR recognises important consequences of early pregnancies:

First, children born to very young mothers are at greater risk of illness and death. Second, teenage mothers are more likely to suffer complications during pregnancy and less likely to treat them, exposing them to a greater risk of complications during delivery and a greater risk of dying for reasons related to childbearing. Third, early childbearing seriously affects a woman's ability to pursue an education, thereby limiting her job opportunities (NISR, 2016, p. 73).

Apparently, early pregnancies and early motherhood are a challenge to girls' right to education and have negative consequences on their wellbeing and their future. The Ministry of Education report shows that early marriages, early pregnancy and early parenthood are accounted to be among the key elements leading to school dropout in Rwanda (MINEDUC, 2017). The research found that early motherhood affects minors' mental health, whereby many tend to develop depression (Niyonsenga and Mutabaruka, 2021). Further,

Teen mothers experience more life stressors and challenges than adult mothers during postpartum period that can contribute to postpartum depressive symptoms (PPDS). PPD is dangerous for both adolescent mothers and their children, it can result in maternal mental disorders, infanticide, and even suicide (Niyonsenga and Mutabaruka, 2021, p. 2).

Researchers identified the main elements causing depression for teenage mothers, which include the trauma resulting from sexual abuse,

Parenting stress, younger maternal age, academic status, parental criticism of parenting, antenatal depression, self-efficacy, economic constraints, lack of social support and weight/shape disturbances (Niyonsenga and Mutabaruka, 2021, p. 2)

The above mean that early motherhood is dangerous for the wellbeing of minors in general. In addition, researchers point out that social stigma violates pregnant minors' right to dignity, where: "girls are described as losing *agaciro* (value) when they become pregnant, and have to leave school because of the incompatibility with childcare" (Coast *et al.*, 2021, p. 1276). Given the stigma surrounding early pregnancies, both the pregnant person and her family, some families oblige minors to engage in illegal and early marriages with men who made them pregnant to avoid that stigma (Cressey *et al.*, 2020, p. 5). This violates the right to choose partners and live a life without coercion (WHO, 2024b).

It is in this context of inaccessibility to the child's rights and ASRHR for minors that the government of Rwanda amended the articles of the penal code (Republic of Rwanda, 2018; Republic of Rwanda, 2019) in order to offer broader access to abortion for minors and other limited circumstances.

Barriers to abortion access in Rwanda

In Rwanda, abortion is prohibited by the law. However, research estimates that unintended pregnancies are around 114 per 1000 women nationwide, 47% of all pregnancies are unintended, with 60 000 abortions which take place each year and 40 % of them are unsafe abortions resulting in major health consequences (Basinga *et al.*, 2012, p. 35). In addition, every year post-abortion treatment costs Rwanda over US\$1.7 million (Vlassoff *et al.*, 2016). Basinga and colleagues' study revealed:

In Rwanda, half of all abortions are performed by untrained individuals—34% by traditional healers plus the 17% that are self-induced by women. The other half of abortions are provided by physicians (19%), nurses or medical assistants (16%) and midwives (14%) (Basinga *et al.*, 2013, p. 5).

The above imply that, although real statistics of unsafe abortions are not documented regularly, unsafe abortions constitute an issue of concern in Rwanda. Rwanda amended articles criminalising abortion in 2018 and 2019, however, abortion remained a criminal offence ((Republic of Rwanda, 2018; Republic of Rwanda, 2019). It is only permitted in cases when the pregnant person is a child, or the pregnancy is a result of

rape, forced marriage, or incest and when it puts the life of the woman in danger (Republic of Rwanda, 2018, p. 122). Outside of these exceptions, both helping a woman to have an abortion and having a self-induced abortion are recognised as offences and punished not only with a prison sentence but also paying a large fine (Republic of Rwanda, 1977; Republic of Rwanda, 2012; Republic of Rwanda, 2018).

The 2012 amendment of the abortion law, permitting safe abortion to women other than in the case where the pregnancy puts the woman's life in danger gave an impression that the Government of Rwanda understood the need for a safe abortion service (Umuhoza *et al.*, 2013). However, research further revealed that it was not easy for girls and women to access legal abortion mainly because of the condition of presenting a court order to a healthcare provider in order to access this service, and from the fear of disclosing rape and the rape-induced stigma. For example,

Many survivors of rape would prefer to remain silent rather than seeking immediate help and sometimes those who are eligible for legal abortion may still resort to unsafe abortion to avoid going to court and becoming public. Furthermore, disclosure of rape would cause them to face severe consequences such as being marginalized, shamed, and losing prospects of marriage (Hodoglugil *et al.*, 2017, p. 88).

Marriage is an important institution in Rwanda, as it is in many other countries. The above study showed that the main reason for secrecy around anything related to sex before marriage, especially for girls is to protect their reputation because it is stigmatising to remain unmarried (Hodoglugil *et al.*, 2017). In 2018, when the penal code was amended for the last time, the article on the exemption from criminal liability expanded access to abortion precisely for minors (Republic of Rwanda, 2018). The ministerial order that followed emphasised "the right of a child" to request abortion services and removed all structural challenges that girls and women used to face, including the previously necessary court order (Republic of Rwanda, 2019).

Furthermore, the ministerial order highlights that "the person requesting for abortion is not required to produce evidence of the grounds she invokes" (Republic of Rwanda, 2019, p. 6). This means that those seeking abortion services have a less onerous task in requesting an abortion, and have a higher chance of maintaining confidentiality. The only condition the ministerial order maintained is that abortion services had to be delivered by a recognised medical doctor, and that the pregnancy must be less than 22 weeks (Republic of Rwanda, 2019, p.6). While the legal reform has been hailed by

activists as advancing the protection of minors and advancing ASRHR, there remains a great deal of controversy about minors' access to abortion.

Controversy around the legal reform of abortion for minors

The legal reform in Rwanda was recognised as protecting the rights of minors whose rights were violated because of early pregnancies and early motherhood (Uwizeye *et al.*, 2020). However, it increased controversy in the society where some people found it inappropriate to allow minors to have abortions because they considered moral values more important than sexual reproductive rights (Rugema *et al.*, 2023, p. 10).

Research has pointed out some challenges that the legal reform allowing abortion faces, namely parents' unwillingness to support abortion requests for their children because of negative social attitudes towards abortion, sexuality, and sex before marriage (Cressey *et al.*, 2020; Påfs *et al.*, 2020). Further, Cressey *et al.* (2020) argued that: "Parents' disapproval of sexual behaviour before marriage may increase adolescents' reluctance to seek help from healthcare centres that require parental consent" (Cressey *et al.*, 2020, p. 4).

The uncertainty about the approval of minors' abortions by parents suppose a barrier the law legalising abortion for minors had to face, which could discourage minors and others in the legal framework from seeking safe abortions and resorting to unsafe abortions. While 40% of public hospitals are owned by churches, mainly the Catholic Church, and those health facilities do not provide abortion services, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) supporting access to abortion called Health Development Initiative (HDI) showed concern about the implementation of the legal provision of abortion for girls and women living in areas where there are only hospitals affiliated to churches (HDI, 2020, p. 4).

A study on the perceptions of the legal reform allowing abortion for minors and other circumstances has shown that some women leaders did not agree with the law providing access to abortion (Rugema, *et al.* 2023). The negative perceptions of abortion emanated from the belief that abortion has 'a bad connotation' and is always understood as unsafe abortion; and further, these women leaders were also concerned about the abuse of the law and risks of the law to encourage immorality among minors which could violate cultural values (Rugema *et al.*, 2023, p. 9). This study identified some gaps in knowledge among women leaders who did not know

about the existence of a legal provision of abortion for minors (Rugema *et al.*, 2023, p. 9). This gap in knowledge was also identified among healthcare providers who sometimes do not help girls and women seeking abortion and other SRHR services (Påfs *et al.*, 2020). The study by Påfs *et al.* (2020) showed that some healthcare providers in Kigali sometimes rely on previous laws, which requested a court order from the girls and women seeking an abortion, ignoring that the law was amended. Therefore, the lack of awareness was considered a challenge, which can sometimes prevent women and girls from seeking or accessing abortion services (Påfs *et al.*, 2020, p. 5). However, this study shows that there are also some healthcare providers who do not accept letting girls on legal grounds access safe abortion services because of cultural and social norms (Påfs *et al.*, 2020).

It is in this context of stigma and restrictions related to safe abortion access that media, especially radio stations can play a vital role in educating women and girls about access to SRHR in general and safe legal abortion in particular.

Media as a source of information and influence

The media is regarded as possibly the most credible and effective source of information on SRHR and abortion in particular and plays a key role in influencing the formation of public opinion about abortion (Fraile and Hernández, 2024). The way media and radio stations in particular construct and represent abortion depends largely on the countries' context in terms of religious beliefs, social and cultural values, and country legislations (Nyathi and Ndhlovu, 2021). It also depends on current scientific justifications, and international human rights conventions (Eboie *et al.*, 2022; Fraile and Hernández, 2024; Hadley, 2023; Kempton, 2024; McDonnell and Murphy, 2019; Nyathi and Ndhlovu, 2021).

Media in its varied forms has the ability to reach a wide audience and offer the space to discuss issues affecting societies (McQuail and Deuze, 2020) as a once-dreamed public sphere (Habermas, 1989). The importance media attaches to sensitive subjects makes them receive important public attention, however, this increased attention is not always positive. The increased coverage of abortion issues in recent years, and the negative representations of abortion in the media can result in the media amplifying moral panics in societies (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018). This creates or reinforces negative representations and stereotypes among

members of the audience. Consequently, this can promote misconceptions and abortion stigma among the public (Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018; Purcell *et al.*, 2014). Conversely, the increased coverage of abortion that advocates for women's rights to abortion as a human right can change social-cultural attitudes and countries' legislation (Kempton, 2024; McDonnell and Murphy, 2019).

Factors impacting on the coverage of abortion

Several factors influence how abortion is covered in the media, and how much it is covered. These include the newsworthiness of the topic, the context and media freedom, and media ownership (Feltham-King and Macleod, 2015; Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018). Journalists in media houses, especially radio journalists know what is of interest to their audience, therefore, when they consider issues important and interesting to the public, they can increase the coverage and debates on the issues, especially through live talk shows on radio stations (Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018; Nduhura and Prieler, 2017). The way issues are communicated sometimes aims to satisfy the audience's appetite and boost sales, but they are also influenced by the "rule of newsworthiness" (Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018, p. 67). This implies that,

Editors and journalists select, produce, and present news according to a range of professional criteria that are used as benchmarks to determine a story's newsworthiness [...] if a story does not contain at least some of the characteristics deemed newsworthy, it will not appear on the news agenda. News values, then, are the value judgments journalists and editors make about the public appeal of a story as well as whether it is in the public interest (Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018, p. 67).

This suggests that even before radio journalists make decisions to cover issues related to abortion, they follow some criteria indicating relevant news to cover. This implies that an issue that deserves coverage must be new or interesting to the public (Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018). Decisions around covering the topic of abortion may be influenced by this concept of newsworthiness but may also depend on a country's context and media freedom of expression.

In light of the above, the South African context provides a strong example of how the media context impacts coverage of abortion, with a marked difference between newsprint media representation of abortion by commentators in South Africa before 1990 when there were restrictive laws and media freedom was limited; and after 1990,

during democracy and a period of liberalisation of abortion laws, with an increase of gender activist movements and an environment of greater media freedom (Feltham-King and Macleod, 2015). In addition, the media contributed to raising awareness of the bill on abortion in South Africa by increasingly debating on positive values of liberalisation of abortion (Skjerdal, 2000). Media ownership status (whether a newspaper or other media house is government-controlled or privately owned) also dictates the way media houses represent abortion issues (Nyathi and Ndhlovu, 2021).

Abortion coverage, stigma, and negative stereotypes

Media coverage of abortion can be in the form of advocacy for human rights (Skjerdal, 2000). However, media coverage also encourages debates on controversial topics related to what women's bodies are expected to be and how they are intended to work (Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018; Lagos and Antezana, 2018; Purcell *et al.*, 2014).

Purcell *et al.* (2014) conducted a study on the way media add to the stigmatisation of abortion in Great Britain. They analysed 12 newspapers in England and Scotland to determine the narrative around abortion and how representations contribute to its stigmatisation. The study found that a few newspapers represented abortion positively, advocated for the right of women to abortion, and challenged the stigmatising and negative discourse surrounding abortion and women who decide to terminate their pregnancies (Purcell *et al.*, 2014). However, a larger number of the newspapers they analysed presented abortion as a criminal act, which identifies women as guilty of committing murder (Purcell *et al.*, 2014). The study also showed that newspapers tend to associate abortion with post-abortion complications and health risks, in order to discourage women from seeking abortion services. The study showed that many of the analysed newspapers portray women who terminate their pregnancies as 'incompetent' or 'unnatural' women who are unable to deal with motherhood. This deviation from the 'norm' of womanhood and motherhood can be exaggerated in the media and result in social hostility and the stigmatisation of women seeking or having abortions. The fear of stigma can prevent women from seeking abortions (Purcell *et al.*, 2014).

In the context of Zimbabwe, Nyathi and Ndhlovu (2021) found that government-owned newspapers tend to criminalise abortion and promote restrictive laws on abortion. Most of their stories portray abortion as 'killing', constructing women who seek abortion

services as criminals and killers. The study found that the government-owned newspapers sought to attract the readers' attention to the dire consequences of abortion for women, without clarifying the difference between safe and unsafe abortion. As a result, such constructs of abortion spread fear of the possible consequences of abortion, which can discourage women from seeking abortion services (Nyathi and Ndhlovu, 2021).

However, the above study revealed that private independent newspapers chose to engage in more independent debates around abortion whereby three privately owned newspapers from the study sample advocated for the decriminalisation of abortion. Private media coverage is mostly dominated by articles showing the consequences of unsafe abortion on women's health, advocating for women's rights to abortion, criticising the restrictive abortion law in Zimbabwe, and calling the government to review the laws to provide access to legal and safe abortion to prevent the consequences of unsafe abortions. According to Nyathi and Ndhlovu (2021), the fact that government-owned newspapers in Zimbabwe criminalise abortion spreads fear about the risks of having an abortion and discourages women from seeking medical assistance to terminate unwanted pregnancies safely. It also discourages abortion supporters' movements and increases stigma for women who have abortions because these dominant voices have a significant impact on how social norms about abortion are formed, felt, and even sustained.

In South America, the framing of abortion in the media is similarly found to either condemn or stigmatise women who have or seek abortions (Lagos and Antezana, 2018). Lagos and Antezana (2018, p. 136) criticise the online media public sphere "as a male domain" whereby men's voices are seen to encourage gender-based violence with their violent discourses. Lagos and Antezana (2018) aver that even if the media are a space for the public to express their opinions freely, what is said in that sphere and how it is said can contain elements that lead to moral panic. Their study suggests that in the context of countries in South America, online public opinion often propagates a distorted picture of abortion, holding accountable the survivors of rape and sexual assaults, which result in pregnancies, condemning them as responsible for their own violation (Lagos and Antezana, 2018). The increased negative portrayals and representations of abortion and girls and women who seek abortions reinforce stigmatisation, discourage some from seeking abortion services and stand as a barrier

to the activists who are engaged in advocating for women's rights to abortion (Lagos and Antezana, 2018).

Stigmatisation here refers to the negative "attribute that is deeply discrediting" an individual because of some aspects that the community considers unnatural or disapproved by society (Goffman, 1963, p. 12). Therefore, the media and radio stations in particular have the ability to increase abortion stigma with the way they boost negative portrayals of women having abortions or those seeking abortion services (Lagos and Antezana, 2018; Nyathi and Ndhlovu, 2021).

The media as a public sphere for men's voices has also been highlighted by Kempton (2024) while assessing the coverage of the change in abortion laws in the United States of America. This study found that media tends to increasingly make men's voices heard because men are the ones holding political power and actively participate in the decision-making processes. Further, the study showed that media boosts men's voices, opposing the right of women to seek abortions and that women's voices claiming their reproductive health rights are not boosted in the same way as men's. This, and other studies, suggest that the media coverage of the legalisation of abortion tends to be more political than any other health issues (Fraile and Hernández, 2024; Kempton, 2024).

Unwitting media bias in abortion coverage

Media can also unwillingly convey a negative image of abortion to its audience even if they had an intention of advocating for the right to abortion when the media content does not match the reality of abortion (Freeman, 2022). In broadcasting, televised entertainment can be one of the ways where issues related to abortion can be discussed. An analysis of four American and British television dramas from four different television stations found that even though these fictional dramas positively portray abortion and highlight women's rights to seek abortion, they fail to portray abortion in a realistic way (Freeman, 2022). This unrealistic picture emerges when the drama portrays the medical abortion procedure as surgical only and people seeking abortion as White, rich, and young. Freeman (2022) argued that television producers exclude information that viewers should know, including the alternatives to surgical interventions for abortion, such as medical abortion (taking oral medication), that all

women can seek an abortion, no matter where they live, their age or colour of skin (Freeman, 2022). Freeman noted that:

Misinformation can exaggerate the risks of seeking abortion services: Inaccurate tropes reinforce the assumption that abortion is violent and dangerous, and the underrepresentation of particular groups could fuel stigma within these groups (Freeman, 2022, p. 600).

Freeman's (2022) study on televised drama suggested that even in entertainment on television when images do not cover the whole truth about abortion, it can risk reinforcing the existing concerns associated with post-abortion complications and can increase women's fears about seeking abortion services. For example,

More accurate representations of abortions (in terms of how an abortion is accessed, what will happen during the procedure, what will happen after, and who accesses abortions) may help to provide safer information to those who only access information about abortion through popular culture (Freeman, 2022, p. 600).

The above means that media in its various forms play an important role in constructing meanings and representations around trending issues no matter the intention either entertainment or abiding by the rule of newsworthiness because representations come from constructs of meanings expressed through language and signs (Hall, 2020). Media coverage focusing on the newsworthiness of issues regarding abortion, can also inadvertently provide biased information. This suggests that when the voices opposing legal abortion are considered newsworthy, they are the most heard in the media and gain prominence among the members of the audience (Rohlinger, 2014; Sambaiga *et al.*, 2019).

In countries such as Tanzania and Uganda, and other countries with restrictive laws on abortion, and where the most of the population holds strong religious beliefs, research suggests that media focuses on anti-abortion movements' discourses because the audience is mainly made of people opposing abortion (Larsson *et al.*, 2015; Sambaiga *et al.*, 2019). These studies suggest that when the voices of activists supporting safe abortion and advocating for legal changes are few and are found not interesting to the public, they do not attract media attention, and therefore, lose visibility in media. When the media gives voice to the opinions opposing women's rights to abortion, these rights are ignored among the population (Kempton, 2024).

Abortion coverage as advocacy

While the media can amplify dominant voices of power, which negatively portray abortion, it can also advocate for abortion rights. The media can promote debates and give a voice to activists in order to influence public opinion and change conservative attitudes and restrictive laws (Feltham-King and Macleod, 2015). It has the capacity to influence social attitudes around abortion. There are instances where the media has contributed to countries revisiting their restrictive laws and protecting women's rights to abortion (McDonnell and Murphy, 2019).

The increased coverage of incidents justifying the right of women to access abortion services brought about a change in the abortion law in the United States of America (Rohlinger, 2015). According to Rohlinger (2015, p. 43), although the US law allowed abortion in cases of "rape, incest, and fetal deformity" ; during the 1940s and 1950s; abortion legalisation was only based on medical decisions, not on the women's request. Rohlinger (2015, p. 43) outlines how this changed in the 1960s after increased coverage of the request for abortion of a woman who realised that "she had ingested a drug known to cause fetal deformity" and decided to seek an abortion. This was also associated with the rise of second-wave feminism, a women's rights movement that focused on reproductive rights and abortion rights as a pillar of equality in America (Kline, 2010, p. 2). The story of the woman who sought abortion was covered by media, particularly televisions that covered the whole process from when she was refused a medical abortion in the US and decided to travel to Sweden where the abortion was granted because medical tests showed that the foetus was not able to survive in the womb due to the deformity and the "rubella measles epidemic" she contracted (Rohlinger, 2015, p. 43). Television coverage prompted many pregnant women with rubella measles to seek abortions immediately (Rohlinger, 2015). Rohlinger (2015, p. 44) suggested that,

These controversies provided a new framework for understanding the abortion issue – a woman's right to choose whether she had an abortion – and spurred the growth of the pro-choice movement, which explicitly argued that women have a constitutionally protected right to an abortion. [...] The stage for the contemporary battle over abortion was set with two Supreme Court decisions decided on January 22, 1973. In *Roe v. Wade* the Court ruled that a woman has a constitutionally protected right to an abortion and that the state could not prohibit abortion during the first trimester or before viability.

This implies that the media has the capacity to influence and bring about changes in the laws and help women access legal and safe abortions without any health risks.

In Ireland, McDonnell and Murphy (2019) argued that media coverage of the death of Savita Halappanavar, after being refused an abortion because the law did not permit medical doctors to perform an abortion while the heart of the baby was still beating, brought about a change in Irish law. McDonnell and Murphy (2019) investigated how six Irish newspapers framed the issue of abortion, where the death of Savita Halappanavar provided an opportunity for newspapers to highlight the gap in the existing legislation, which did not give medical doctors a clear framework in which they could perform abortions. The law was criticised for prioritising the rights of the unborn over the mother's rights (McDonnell and Murphy, 2019, p. 18). The international media attention and debates reflected negatively on Ireland's image and resulted in a change in the constitution, to offer a more liberal abortion law after a referendum, where the population voted for the liberalisation of safe abortion despite the fact that a large proportion of the population held Catholic beliefs, which oppose all forms of abortion (McDonnell and Murphy, 2019, p. 5).

Abortion coverage for informed decision-making

The media also has immense power to provide factual information to assist women in making informed decisions about abortion services. Studies on factors associated with the ability to decide on terminating a pregnancy among women of reproductive age have found that media exposure enables women and young girls to make decisions around abortion (Ahinkorah *et al.*, 2020; Aalmneh *et al.*, 2022; Dickson *et al.*, 2018). This is so because they are able to acquire information on the existing laws guiding abortion in their countries and gain knowledge on their rights to decisions about their own bodies (Aalmneh *et al.*, 2022; Ahinkorah *et al.*, 2020).

A comparative study in Ghana and Mozambique identified socio-demographic factors influencing the termination of pregnancy among women in the two countries. The findings indicated that exposure to one form of media (either newspaper, radio, television or social media) at least once per week, was a factor for women to decide to terminate a pregnancy (Dickson *et al.*, 2018). The study found:

The importance of media in providing information about how and where to terminate a pregnancy could account for the association between media

exposure and the prevalence of pregnancy termination. Women who have access to social media may also be aware of the abortion laws in their country and are less likely to be stigmatised by society in their quest to have a pregnancy terminated (Dickson *et al.*, 2018, p. 8).

Similarly, a study conducted in Ghana to determine the relationship between media exposure and self-efficacy in abortion decision-making among adolescent girls and young women revealed that girls and women consuming media messages are more likely to develop a sense of independence in deciding on their own abortion than those who are not exposed to this information (Ahinkorah *et al.*, 2020). The study suggests that women's exposure to media provides them with a variety of ideas and knowledge on the importance of safe abortion and helps them to make independent decisions. Ahinkorah *et al.* (2020, p. 9) recommended that,

To promote safe abortions, these factors should be taken into consideration to provide culturally and age-appropriate support systems and education via the various media platforms to help adolescent girls and young women who might desire to have an abortion. Government should also ensure regular, periodic media campaigns to target adolescent girls and young women and provide education/knowledge on family planning and safe abortion practices.

The media's role in enhancing capacity building in decision-making regarding access to abortion was also confirmed by a study in Kenya assessing three popular media outlets (Kafu *et al.*, 2021). The study found that when media aims at providing adolescents with accurate information on sexual reproductive health and abortion, they can change cultural mindsets and encourage adolescents to make decisions on their reproductive health (Kafu *et al.*, 2021). While much of the available research on media coverage of abortion focuses on the coverage of abortion in newspapers, television, and online media, there is little research conducted on radio and abortion. Given the influence of radio on its audience, and its effectiveness in reaching all social groups (Chiumbu and Motsaathebe, 2021; Munoriyarwa, 2021a), attention is needed to explore the way radio covers and represents abortion. In addition, there is no available research on how Rwandan media, especially radio stations, communicate and cover SRHR issues and the topic of abortion. This is the gap that the current study aims to fill.

Radio as a powerful medium for communication in Rwanda

Radio is considered the most effective medium of communication in Africa and can help to reach large geographical areas and is effective in engaging people for change (Myers, 2008, p. 5). Apparently, radio has proven itself as a developmental tool, particularly with the rise of community and local radio stations, which have facilitated a far more participatory and horizontal type of communication than was possible with the older, centralised broadcasting model of the 1960s and 1970s (Myers, 2008, p. 5). Community radios are radio stations, which are based in rural communities whose aim is to enhance access to information and community members' participation in the news making process (Leketanyane *et al.*, 2021a).

Munoriyarwa (2021) argues that radio is the most popular medium in South Africa, which offers a space for public debates and free expression about issues affecting society. Similarly, in Rwanda, radio is the most common medium and historically has been recognised as the most influential medium (Thompson, 2007, p. 42). Currently, Rwanda has a media law which guarantees the freedom of media and expression (Republic of Rwanda, 2013; Republic of Rwanda, 2015). The increase in the number of radio stations facilitates access to information with a diversity of radio programming because currently, more than 81% of Rwandans listen to the radio either from their radio sets or mobile phones (NISR, 2022, p. 29).

In Rwanda, Nduhura and Prieler's (2017) study argues that radio stations mediate the public sphere through citizen journalism. This study indicates that radio stations play a role in advocating for the communities, and achieving the public sphere through radio talk shows and other radio programmes; allowing mass audiences to participate in the process of news production, where people freely criticise the public authority and express their views on issues affecting their society. The study shows that radio stations facilitate discussions between the audience and the local government in Rwanda, to the point that the audience can freely expose injustice from local leaders with the result that sometimes those responsible are dismissed from their duties.

The established role of the radio in Rwanda suggests that when radio stations cover a controversial topic, such as the decriminalisation of abortion for minors, this coverage may have a powerful effect (a deeper discussion on the role of radio is

provided in Chapter 3). This study seeks to understand the nature of this coverage, to consider what this effect might be.

Conclusion

The above literature reflected on the context of abortion worldwide, in sub-Saharan Africa, East and Southern Africa and Rwanda in particular. The literature review has also discussed the context of the legal provision in Rwanda. The research shows that socio-cultural values and religious beliefs are the main reasons for the hostility to the realisation of SRHR in Rwanda, especially with regard to access to abortion among the youth (Ndayishimiye *et al.*, 2020b; Tuyisenge *et al.*, 2018). This results in stigma associated with early pregnancies and abortion, which sometimes makes some resort to unsafe abortions (Rugema *et al.*, 2023).

The literature shows that media content which promotes independent decision-making and women's sexual and reproductive rights has the power to influence the audience's attitudes and social norms around abortion and can influence governments to change abortion restrictive abortion laws. Well-informed and responsible media coverage of issues related to abortion can result in a more informed public, reduced stigma, a more nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding sexual and reproductive rights, and better health outcomes and expanded options for women.

The above literature suggests that the media can be perceived as a double-edged sword when it comes to media coverage of abortion debates (Rohlinger, 2014). The media can serve as a model of the ideal public sphere, whereby the population has various opportunities to participate in public life by expressing their views on matters affecting them. However, where the dominant voices in this public sphere are the voices of power, including men and others who are against abortion rights, this can drown out other arguments for women's right to abortion, and prevent accurate media coverage of abortion issues.

Media coverage of abortion reveals that abortion is a controversial subject worldwide, and even in countries where abortion is legalised, negative constructs of the issue in the media are obvious and can result in moral panics (McDonnell and Murphy, 2019; Nyathi and Ndhlovu, 2021). Evidence shows that where media content amplifies negative attitudes towards abortion, this increases abortion stigma, discourages

women from seeking safe abortions, and prevents activists from advocating for abortion. This can perpetuate the problem of women continuing with unwanted pregnancies, or seeking unsafe abortions, which is a factor leading to high maternal mortality rates.

The next chapter discusses the public sphere and moral panic theories and considers the ability of media to offer a space for public opinions, sometimes resulting in arguments increasing panics around issues considered as threats to society such as the issue of access to abortion for minors.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The Theoretical Framework chapter supplements the current study's literature review (Chapter Two). The role of a theory within a study is to “provide explanations of what conditions or factors seem to bring about some sort of consequence” (DeFleur and DeFleur, 2022, p. 21). A theory helps to “describe, define and explain” conditions and situations and help to foresee the possible outcomes in case things happen in the way the theory described them (Barker, 2007, p.199-200).

The theoretical framework of the current study comprises the Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989), and Moral Panics Theory (Cohen,1972). The two theories guide the qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2014) to understand how radio stations covered the controversy around the amendment of the law allowing access to abortion for minors in Rwanda. This chapter provides a detailed discussion of each theory and its theoretical concepts, its origin, how it has developed over the years, and critiques of the theory. The relationship between the two theories is also established.

As pointed out in the introduction (Chapter One), this study sought to understand non-state radio stations' coverage of issues related to the decriminalisation of abortion for minors in Rwanda. Therefore, while the theory of the public sphere showed how the public engages in debates on the amendment of the law allowing abortion for minors on selected non-state radio stations; the theory of moral panics explained the way radio coverage and debates represent the decriminalisation of abortion for minors as a social concern and how it can make sense of a moral panic and social crisis in the Rwandan society.

Public Sphere Theory

Definition and origins of Public Sphere Theory

The public sphere can be understood as “that realm of social life where the exchange of information and views on questions of common concern can take place so that public opinion can be formed” (Dahlgren, 1995, p. 7).

The theory of the public sphere originates from the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989) who explored how, during the 18th and 19th centuries, private people from the social class of the bourgeoisie, motivated by social injustices, and economic problems of the time caused by the public authority (Habermas, 1989, p. 24), came together to discuss political and economic issues affecting their society and created the “bourgeois public sphere” (Habermas, 1989, p. 27). The bourgeois public sphere came to replace the “sphere of public authority”, which comprised public authorities and rich landlords (Habermas, 1989, p. 18).

The bourgeois public sphere is defined by Habermas (1989, p. 27) as:

The sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour.

The public sphere supposes an open space for all the citizens willing to engage in reasonable debates to find the best arguments that they consider the best solutions to issues of common interest (Habermas, 1989, p. 27). The discussions used to take place in public places where people could express themselves freely, for example in salons, clubs, coffee shops and other public spaces (Habermas, 1989, p. 31-33), where participants enjoyed their discussions as equal members of society (Habermas, 1989, p. 34-35). Habermas (1989, p. 27) notes that debates were characterised by “reasoning arguments” and respect among participants, which means that they were expected to generate criticisms without aggressiveness or causing harm to each other. In those interpersonal discussions, the press played an important role, providing information on which participants in debates constructed their arguments (Habermas, 1989, p. 20-22). The public sphere taking place in coffee shops and other public spaces later shifted in media as it will be discussed later in this chapter.

Building on the concept of the public sphere, Habermas (1989) further developed it into a comprehensive theory of communicative action and deliberative democracy theories. The theory of communicative action emphasises the importance of rational discourse and communication in the functioning of a democratic society (Elster, 1998). Deliberative democracy is based on the ideas that,

Citizens' participation in the democratic process have a rational character—that voting, for example, should not simply aggregate given preferences but rather follow on a process of ‘thoughtful interaction and opinion formation’ in which citizens become informed of the better arguments and more general interests (Habermas, 1996, p. ix).

The public sphere in this context supposes that in a well-functioning democratic society, rational discourse and deliberation should be central to decision-making processes (Habermas, 1996). This idea has influenced contemporary discussions on democratic theory and practice and numerous scholars have subsequently built on or reflected on the work of Habermas on the public sphere (Elster, 1998; Fraser, 2010; Gutmann and Thompson, 1996). Habermas' theory of the public sphere emphasises the importance of inclusivity, equality, rational discourse in decision-making processes, and the role of citizens in contemporary societies (Habermas, 1989, p. 36-37). The public sphere was perceived as “a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e., opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes)” (Habermas, 1996, p. 360). However, Habermas’ (1989) public sphere has been subject to criticisms because debates in the public excluded social categories of people such as women, slaves, the uneducated, and poor people. Instead, it prioritised minorities comprising men who were rich, urban, and educated (Gripsrud *et al.*, 2010, p. 280).

Fraser (2010, p.136) criticises the lack of openness and accessibility of the Habermasian public sphere to all, which she asserts encourages gender and social inequalities, observing that:

It is not possible to insulate special discursive arenas from the effects of societal inequality and that where societal inequality persists, deliberative processes in public spheres will tend to operate to the advantage of dominant groups and to the disadvantage of subordinates.

This suggests that the public sphere should be accessible or at least include representatives of all social categories whose problems are discussed in the public sphere including children (Jovchelovitch *et al.*, 2013; Kulynych, 2001), women and marginalised groups (Fraser, 2010). Habermas’ (1989) public sphere is also criticised for encouraging ‘weak publics’, who only discuss issues affecting society without the ability to take any further decision, as opposed to “strong publics; whose discourse encompasses both opinion formation and decision making” (Fraser, 2010, p. 143). The

proposed public sphere is also considered as lacking “normative legitimacy” and “political efficacy” (Fraser, 2014, p. 9). For example,

It is difficult to associate the notion of legitimate public opinion with communicative arenas in which the interlocutors are not fellow members of a political community, with equal rights to participate in political life. And it is hard to associate the notion of efficacious communicative power with discursive spaces that do not correlate with sovereign states (Fraser, 2014, p. 9).

The above suggest that, since it is a matter of common interest, all citizens should participate in the public discussion for it to be legitimate, and for it to be effective, it should be linked to structural political power.

When considering the possibility of all citizens coming together as equals and discussing issues of common interest, Verstraeten (2000, p. 74) argued that this kind of public sphere is quite impossible to realise. This is because each society is naturally characterised by inequalities among its members, which facilitates dictatorship and manipulation from both government and the media on how issues of common interests are discussed. However, in the way Habermas (1989) presented his theory, the public sphere had no authority over decision-making. It was only a space for discussions to highlight problems affecting society, in order to bring them to the attention of the public authority, who are decision-makers so that those issues could inform changes in the way the country was governed (Habermas, 1996b, p. 159).

Despite the criticisms towards the Habermasian public sphere, researchers recognise the importance of the theory as a foundation to build an ideal democratic society based on the right to expression and inclusion (Fraser, 2014; Gripsrud *et al.*, 2010; Johnson, 2006; Ma, 2020). While some researchers raise questions about access to the public sphere, where the public sphere of Habermas supposed discussions which used to take place in public spaces such as coffee shops and salons (Habermas, 1996, p. 361), Adut (2012, p. 242-243) holds that even if the public sphere cannot be accessed by everyone physically, some people can access it by representation, and others through the media.

Media as a space for the public sphere

The theory of the public sphere has received attention from scholars in mass communication, with researchers demonstrating the importance of the media in facilitating the public's participation in political affairs through print and broadcast media (Butsch, 2011; Dahlgren, 1995; Dahlgren and Sparks, 1991). The public sphere is perceived as having shifted from public gatherings to the media as a space for the masses to gather and discuss important issues (Dahlgren, 1995). Initially, the public sphere was facilitated by print media (Habermas, 1989). However, as the years went by, the public sphere institutions shifted from clubs and coffee shops and expanded to the broadcast especially radio and television's scattered audiences whereby the information instantly reached them at their places (Butsch, 2011, p. 157).

While the media has traditionally been uni-directional, with print and broadcast media sharing messages which were consumed by a mass audience with limited opportunities to respond (Verstraeten, 2000, p. 76); this has changed in the past two decades. New information and communication technologies have revolutionised participation in the public sphere in media and free access to information (Butsch, 2011; Papacharissi, 2002). The association of the new media with the old media created a real public sphere as imagined by Habermas, whereby the audience can access information and participate in discussions via mobile phones, social media, and comment sections on websites (Butsch, 2011; Papacharissi, 2002). The Internet facilitates greater interaction between media and their audiences, especially radio stations' audiences who can participate in any programmes using the Internet. This interaction has resulted in media transforming their content to allow for more engaging and interesting debates, and the public participates via the Internet (Verstraeten, 2000, p. 77; Papacharissi, 2002).

Courtesy of new media, the public sphere is appreciated to offer the audience various ways of participating in debates and overcoming constraints based on time, space, and identities (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 13-15). The combination of all tools offered by the new media such as social media and mobile phones with the traditional media ensures the success of the public sphere because inclusion is assured. As it was at the advent of the radio in the US when the audience and newspaper readers used to gather in groups for discussions (Butsch, 2011, p. 155 -157), the public uses new

media to organise themselves in small groups on social media such as ‘ad hoc publics’ on Twitter (now X) (Bruns and Burgess, 2011, p. 2) and ‘tiny public’ (Charron, 2023, p. 46) whereby social media users come together and discuss their issues of concern. This contributes to enlarging the media public sphere because social media communities contribute to the discussions held on live radio talk shows.

Research shows that well-functioning media institutions are promising for the ideal public sphere for societies because they are the platforms where citizens expose the various challenges they face daily and find solutions to their concerns (McQuail and Deuze, 2020). However, some researchers argue that the media public sphere has its weaknesses as did the Habermasian public sphere, which used to take place in public spaces. The literature review of this study (Chapter Two) also explored the exclusivity of women in the mediated public sphere, which is criticised as being dominantly conquered by men when it comes to discussing and imposing their decisions on issues that concern only women such as abortion and women’s reproductive health (Lagos and Antezana, 2018). The public sphere facilitated by the new media allows access to the few people utilising the Internet and those having internet literacy; it encourages public authority expression and has not been able to overcome the language barrier (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 13-15). Therefore, no medium promises a total public sphere because each medium has a part of the population who do not have access to it (Verstraeten, 2000, p. 76).

The public sphere and abortion

As discussed in the literature review of this study (Chapter Two), the debate over abortion in the media public sphere is influenced by various reasons, however, despite being a health issue, abortion is mostly discussed as a social and political issue (Fraile and Hernández, 2024; Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018). Therefore, given the controversy that abortion raises between society and politics, it has become particularly an issue of interest for media coverage (Nyathi and Ndhlovu, 2021; Kempton, 2024), which is discussed as an issue of concern affecting society. As a result, depending on the focus of media to conduct debates on abortion, the discussions can bring change in the way abortion is perceived in society (Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018; Purcell *et al.*, 2014).

The public sphere in broadcasting

In broadcasting, radio and television have particularly been recognised as incarnating the Habermasian public sphere (Butsch, 2011; Chiumbu and Motsaathebe, 2021; Dahlgren, 1995) by breaking time and space limitations and reaching the audiences from their location and at any time. Television has a role in enhancing public participation in events. For example, Dahlgren (1995, p. 46) observed: “We cannot all be present at all events and developments, but fortunately, television can represent them for us”. This suggests that the omnipresence of television in different events makes the audience feel as if they were also present. The public sphere on radio was very influential in the 20th century (Butsch, 2011). The influence of radio was due to the fact that it does not require any level of education as newspapers do, or substantial financial means like television (Verstraeten, 2000, p. 76).

Further, technological advancement also revolutionised the radio’s accessibility, for with the advent of mobile phones, people can listen to radio programmes even from their mobile phones (Butsch, 2011). Radio’s accessibility and affordability sometimes resulted in governments using it to spread propaganda to a large audience of citizens (Butsch, 2011; Chiumbu and Motsaathebe, 2021; Munoriyarwa, 2021; Leketanyane *et al.*, 2021). As a public sphere tool, radio was appreciated in the United States because it offered the opportunity to the audience sometimes gathered in ‘forums’ to participate in live discussions as they listened to radio programmes (Butsch, 2011, p. 158). In Africa, radio has also transformed into a real public sphere, especially with the association of social media and mobile phones where audiences participate directly in radio programmes and share their views (Sibiya and Mhlambi, 2021). In South Africa, Chiumbu and Motsaathebe (2021) argue that radio stations play an important role in giving a voice to the citizens so that they can express their opinions about issues affecting them. For example, with the introduction of community radio stations that operate within communities and communicate directly in residents’ respective local languages, radio stations and their audience create ‘reflexive development’, that is,

Where we see the community radio station creating a space for citizen engagement who, in turn, can transform the station into a platform, beyond facilitating dialogue and engagements that create a sense of identity and belonging for the communities it serves (Leketanyane *et al.*, 2021: n.p).

The dialogue on radio stations, which creates an image of Habermasian public sphere is also obvious through radio live talk shows and live debates, whereby when combined with radio call-ins and social media texting they encourage the citizens to freely express their opinions: “The talk show attempts largely to create a public sphere that is inclusive and participatory” (Munoriyarwa, 2021: nd).

Similarly, in Rwanda, radio audiences form a public sphere in radio stations where they participate in the process of news production by volunteering as “radio ambassadors” or radios’ “eye pupils” (Nduhura and Prieler, 2017, p. 182, Radio Izuba, 2022). In that capacity, they update journalists on issues happening in their areas, which need radio coverage.

It is in line with the importance of radio as a platform for the public sphere, especially in Rwanda, that this study uses the theory of the public sphere to guide the analysis of how non-state radio stations give space to citizens and journalists to express their opinions and concerns about the legal reform allowing abortion for minors under some circumstances. Through the theory of public sphere, this study sheds the light on the way radio stations play a role in building a democratic society based on the realisation of the right of expression of citizens. Understanding citizens’ engagement in discussions and debates through selected non-state radio stations’ coverage of the legal reform will also help to understand the way that discussion adds to or reduces moral panics within Rwandan society.

Moral Panics Theory

Definition and origin of moral panics

Moral panic refers to an “over-heated period of intense concern” within a society, about an issue they consider a ‘threat’ to social values (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 150); whereby it is recognised that “the social reaction is predominantly media-fuelled” (Jewkes, 2004, p. 64). The theory of moral panics originated from the British sociologist Stanley Cohen(1972), in his book entitled *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. This book was based on his research between 1967 and 1969 into the “Mods and Rockers phenomenon” in the United Kingdom (Cohen, 2002, p. 2). The phenomenon involved two groups of young people representing two different youth sub-cultures in Britain, who had a series of violent clashes culminating in a weekend of riots in coastal

towns in May 1964. These clashes caused fear and resulted in police intervention and arrests. According to Cohen (2002), these events received a lot of sensationalised media attention, and the coverage framed them with exaggerated attributes. This resulted in exaggerated negative representations and stereotyping images, which attracted fear, concern, and panic among the public. Since then, the term “folk devils” has been mostly used to represent people who do not want to live according to collective social norms, thus deviants (Cohen, 2002, p. 3).

Deviance can be regarded as behaviour or “a vagrant form of human activity, moving outside the more orderly currents of social life” (Erikson, 2018, p. 307). Therefore, a deviant can be understood as a person whose behaviour is “in violation of normative expectations” (Terry and Steffensmeier, 1988, p. 56). Thus, deviant people are those who behave in a way opposing moral rules established in a society. As a result, the moral panics theory considers that when people are identified as being deviant from the rest of society, they are discriminated against, marginalised, and victimised (Jewkes, 2004).

Cohen’s (1972) work is considered to be the origin of the theory of moral panics, and the concept of moral panic attracted not only scholars in sociology but also those in criminology and media studies, to study media coverage of crimes and deviance and the public reactions to it (Cohen, 2002; Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Jewkes, 2004).

For Cohen (2002, p.1), a moral panic can be understood as:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.

The above imply the role of media in constructing the moral panic and the figure of the folk devil, and the social institutions representing them as deviant (Cohen, 2002). From this definition, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994, p. 157-158) propose that moral panic is characterised among others by ‘concern’, ‘hostility’, ‘consensus’, ‘disproportionality’, and ‘volatility.’

The first characteristic of concern is defined as a state where the population or a portion of the population is worried about a “behaviour and its supposed consequences that that behaviour presumably causes for the rest of the society” (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 157-158). The second characteristic is about hostility. Hostility is defined as the state where, since most members of society are worried about the behaviour, there is opposition to the people who are constructed as deviants. For example,

Members are collectively designated as the enemy of respectable, law-abiding society; their behaviour is seen as harmful or threatening to the values, interests, way of life, and possibly the very existence, of the society, or a sizeable segment of that society. These deviants are seen as responsible for the threat. A dichotomisation between "them" and 'us' takes place, and this includes stereotyping-generating 'folk devils' or villains on the one hand, and folk heroes on the other, in this morality play of evil versus good (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 158).

Research shows that the construction of a group of people as deviant results in stigmatisation and discrimination (Goffman, 1963; Jewkes, 2004). Therefore, the hostility that characterises a moral panic creates the construction of deviance. The third characteristic of moral panic is that there is consensus, whereby most members of the society have a common agreement that the objects of moral panic are dangerous to the wellbeing of society (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 158).

The fourth characteristic is about disproportionality of the increased fear of the harm and consequences that the behaviour may cause, and the reality when there is a closer observation, they find that there is an exaggeration of the occurrence of the event and alteration of the truth (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 158). The fifth characteristic is about the volatility of a moral panic in time. This means that even if moral panics break out, the panic does not last long. It vanishes sometimes because people are used to the object, which was the origin of the panic, and disappears at a given time and is forgotten or leaves memories behind (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 158).

Issues leading to moral panics are sometimes unusual to the population or “lying dormant perhaps, but hard to recognise” and sometimes exist in society for longer periods as “camouflaged versions of traditional and well-known evils” (Cohen, 2002, p. vii-viii), but result in moral panics because they have been amplified or revived by a

new event and the intervention of various institutions, especially media coverage (Jewkes, 2004).

The scholarly interest in the work of Cohen (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Jewkes, 2004; McRobbie and Thornton, 1995; Miller, 1998) points out some criticisms of the weaknesses of the moral panic model. The common aspect, which is criticised is the way Cohen's work is not clear on how a moral panic ends (McRobbie and Thornton, 1995; Miller, 1998). Regarding the media coverage of moral panics, McRobbie and Thornton (1995) regard Cohen's model of moral panic as old-fashioned as it only emphasises press coverage, especially tabloids' coverage of panics while nowadays the media industry has widely developed to include broadcast and digital media. According to Jewkes (2004), Cohen's (1972) moral panic theory considers the audience as passive consumers of media messages, which in turn influence them in a powerful way, overlooking the ability of the audience to selectively choose the information to consume and the limited effect of media messages. For example,

The overriding problem with traditional characterisations of the moral panic model is that they presuppose that in finding consensus on certain issues, audiences are gullible and that they privilege mediated knowledge over direct experience; an assumption that is clearly not viable. In fact, more than any other factor, recent cultural and media theorists have resisted the moral panic thesis's implicit supposition that the public are naively trusting of media reports and cannot tell when they are being manipulated by politicians (Jewkes, 2004, p. 82).

Despite the criticism by various scholars, Cohen's (1972) work arguably offers a clearer way to explain new social problems emerging within societies and the role of media in spreading a sense of panic to the public (Cricher, 2008; Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Jewkes, 2004; Thompson, 1998).

Media as moral panic amplifiers

The media play a significant role in spreading distorted and exaggerated information about events leading to moral panics (Cohen, 2002). The media's role in constructing moral panics resides in the fact that the coverage of issues focuses on what is mainly newsworthy. Hence, journalists like to cover issues that are new, unusual, and and reflect on conflicts breaking out in society (Cohen, 2002, p. 9). However, the way these issues are constructed contributes to amplifying moral panics. Below is a poignant analysis,

The media have long operated as agents of moral indignation in their own right: even if they are not self-consciously engaged in crusading or muck-raking, their very reporting of certain 'facts' can be sufficient to generate concern, anxiety, indignation or panic (Cohen, 2002, p. 9).

The above analysis suggests that the media are not the origin of events leading to moral panics, however, even when the coverage of particular events abides by the rule of newsworthiness, how those newsworthy events are covered can result in moral panics (Cohen, 2002; Jewkes, 2004). The newsworthiness of issues and events means their potential to attract the audience's attention (DeFleur and DeFleur, 2022, p. 195). This justifies the reason that some issues are considered good news story ideas over others. Therefore, for an issue to be considered as newsworthy, there are criteria called 'news values' (DeFleur and DeFleur, 2022, p. 195), which help media professionals to judge what is news. According to Brighton and Foy (2007), news values serve to guide journalists in planning their coverage of important issues.

Some common news values are 'timeliness', which means that the audience likes to learn about events when they are still new; 'proximity' means that an issue is newsworthy because it takes place near the audience; 'conflict' the audience prefers consuming news about controversy; 'impact' means that an issue is news because it affects a large number of people; and 'prominence' a story is newsworthy because it includes people who are well known among the public (DeFleur and DeFleur, 2022, p. 207).

Therefore, sometimes media coverage relies on these news values when covering sensitive events leading to moral panics (Cohen, 2002, p. 10). The increased coverage and attention paid to one particular event, the language used to describe and represent it, with exaggerations and distortion of the reality of events, using emotive words and phrases to attract the audience's attention, thereby increasing and generalising fear and concern about those events (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994; Jewkes, 2004; Thompson, 1998). The consequence of this exaggerated coverage on members of one society is that those who are "morally good decent, respectable and moral" discriminate and victimise those who are "deviant, undesirable outsiders" (Jewkes, 2004, p. 70).

Therefore, Goode and Ben-Yehuda (2009, p. 91) consider media as sharing the responsibility for causing moral panics,

The media are an expression of panics as well as their spark or cause. They set agendas, focus attention on issues, and turn up the heat of concern in all sectors of the society – the public at large, politicians and legislators, social movement activists, and law enforcement. Agenda-setting during the moral panic is, in fact, is the most important role the media play. They focus attention on an issue and frame it in such a way that the public is made aware of that issue's emotional significance. In a sense, as a result of this framing and agenda setting, the public knows its part in the moral panic drama. The beating heart of most moral panics can be found in the media.

The media also plays an important role in ending the panics, for when their interest shifts to other important issues, the panic reduces, and then it is forgotten (Jewkes, 2004, p. 70). In the context of this study, through the lens of moral panics theory, the data shows how radio stations contributed to amplifying fear and the how some citizens expressed their reluctance to support the reform allowing abortion for minors in Rwanda.

Moral panics in broadcasting

As it was the case for the theory of the public sphere, researchers' interest in moral panics theory has been less oriented on broadcast than on print media. This is because it was easy to analyse the sensational headlines, front-page leading stories, the use of words and metaphors in text, and the choice of pictures in print media (Cohen, 2002; Purcell *et al.*, 2014; Thompson, 1998). However, it has also been realised that both radio and television play important roles in reaching large audiences instantly, and can therefore amplify moral panics in societies (Rek-Woźniak and Woźniak, 2020). Television images and pictures can amplify moral panics with the way they convey important representations in news stories due to their ability to show body cues, even other angles of issues, which are not expressed in spoken or written language (Coleman, 2010; Gitlin, 1980; Messaris and Abraham, 2001; Rek-Woźniak and Woźniak, 2020).

Radio stations are also currently interactive media and easily accessible to a wider audience (Pan and Kosicki, 2001, p. 35). The accessibility and affordability of radio make it effective when it comes to communicating sensational messages about

deviance, and radio stations attract their listeners' attention which makes them powerful tools for moral panic (Howell, 2012). The analysis of moral panics in radio stations often focuses on the important coverage of issues leading to moral panic over other important issues of public importance, which makes them important for the public (Sedláková, 2017). Further, it also focuses on the choice of language and vocabulary either by the journalists or audience used to represent events or to portray the deviants (Pan and Kosicki, 2001, p. 45). The nature of radio stations and their programmes especially talk shows, debates and news reports can promote constructs that affect their audiences' attitudes (Pan and Kosicki, 2001).

Moral panics and abortion

In societies where abortion is considered deviant, intensified discussions on its legality and illegality as a morally wrong act can lead to moral panics (Cossin, 2015), particularly when the discussions are oriented on cultural and religious moral values, which are seen to be violated by those who have or seek abortion, do infanticide, and illicit sex among others (Cossins, 2015; Jewkes, 2004).

As noted in the literature review of this study (Chapter Two), media coverage constructing abortion as deviant is capable of making sense of moral panics (Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018; Lagos and Antezana, 2018; Purcell *et al.*, 2014). Given the importance of radio stations as credible sources of information in Rwanda, especially non-state radio stations, this study uses the moral panic theory to evaluate the language and constructs used either by journalists or the audience expressing themselves. They do this through news reports and talk shows and radio magazines around the legal reform expanding abortion for minors in the context of Rwandan culture, and provide some insight as to the likely impact of this coverage.

Conclusion

In this chapter, it emerged that media, and specifically radio stations create a powerful space for the public sphere by allowing their listeners to participate in programming by expressing their views on issues affecting them and proposing solutions (Chiumbu and Motsathebe, 2021). The public sphere theory helps to understand how information circulates in the public domain, including through radio. Within this sphere, media coverage of societal events or issues considered deviant, and the way they are

discussed does not only influence their prominence and attention from the public but also results in audiences attributing these events the same characteristics that the media gives them (Cohen, 2002; Jewkes, 2004; Thompson, 1998). The chapter also outlines how the moral panic theory serves to understand the role of the media in voicing and making perceived social problems sensational through their increased coverage, and the way the information about the events leading to moral panics is constructed, resulting in a generalised fear and concern among the public. This study uses these two theories to explore how issues of the legal provision of access to abortion under specific circumstances in Rwanda were covered by selected radio stations. They also help to reflect on the way selected radio stations have portrayed abortion issues, how they reflect the main characteristics attributed to abortion in the context of Rwandan culture, and how audiences have participated in the public sphere, by getting involved in the discussions about SRHR and abortion using the platforms offered by non-state radio stations. Both theories stand together to guide the analysis of this study, and to understand how radio coverage may have shaped public opinion on the topic of abortion for minors. The research methodology for both data collection and data analysis is discussed in the next chapter on research methodology (Chapter Four).

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The research methodology chapter outlines the methods for data collection and data analysis of this study. It complements the theoretical framework (Chapter Three), which aimed at explaining how media coverage allows the public to engage in debates in the public sphere (Habermas, 1989) and the way issues are represented creates panics among members of society towards sensitive issues under coverage (Cohen, 1972). This chapter positions this study as qualitative research with a case study as an approach to inquiry to analyse the way selected non-state radio stations covered and represented the decriminalisation of abortion for minors and the way the radio stations broadcast constructs and mediate the cultural meanings and values attributed to this issue in Rwanda. The methodology was designed to answer the following research questions: 1) How did the selected radio stations cover the legal amendments to abortion access for minors in Rwanda?; 2) How are Rwandan citizen voices reflected in non-state radio's coverage of this issue?; 3) How do selected radio stations represent issues related to legal abortion for minors in Rwanda?; 4) How do the radio stations' policies, guidelines, practices, and other news-making factors impact the coverage of abortion for minors in Rwanda?

The methodology chapter outlines social constructivism as a research paradigm, then gives details on data collection methods and discusses the inclusion and exclusion criteria for each sample. Limitations and strengths for each method of data collection are also provided. The second part of the chapter gives details on how I conducted a qualitative content analysis of the data collected from both in-depth interviews and radio content.

Research paradigm

A paradigm is understood as the 'worldview', which guides researchers from the beginning to the accomplishment of their research (Bloomberg, 2022, p. 77). This study is grounded in the social constructivism paradigm, which proposes that both "knowledge and reality are socially constructed" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 13).

In the context of social constructivism, culture is at the heart of providing and shaping the knowledge of people within a society (Kim, 2001). Researchers that hold social constructivist worldviews recognise the subjectivity of the interpretations of phenomena, which are influenced by the researcher's knowledge, experience, and background (Bloomberg, 2022, p. 78).

This study recognised that meanings of abortion are socially constructed, whereby it is assumed that the knowledge and the attitudes of the members of the Rwandan society are also shaped by social-cultural norms and values, religious beliefs, and individual experiences. The social constructivism paradigm helped to understand the meanings of the constructs as expressed through radio stations on the decriminalisation of abortion for minors in Rwanda.

Social constructivism further suggests that language is central to the construction of social reality (Hall, 2020, p. 5), and thus understanding the language and constructs of abortion presented in the content of the selected radio stations helps to identify the dominant cultural values and meanings attributed to abortion in the Rwandan socio-cultural context. Social constructivism also highlights the role of power in shaping social realities (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 84). Therefore, understanding whose voices are foregrounded in the radio coverage of abortion in Rwanda helps to understand how non-state radio stations covered the decriminalisation of abortion for minors.

Research design

A research design is the “plan for conducting the study” (Creswell and Poth, 2016, p. 49). It provides details of methods of data collection and data analysis adopted to find answers to research questions (Wimmer and Dominick, 2013, p. 251). This study is a multiple case study, which involves examining a group of cases to explore a phenomenon (Wimmer and Dominick, 2013, p. 141). Case study research is recognised as “the study of a case (or cases) within a real-life, contemporary context or setting” (Creswell and Poth, 2016, p. 96). For this study the multiple cases are the radio stations, and the explored phenomenon is the coverage of the legal reform on abortion. It includes comparing and contrasting across different ‘cases’ (stations) in order to understand a broader issue to identify patterns, similarities, or differences

across the cases. Collective case studies are useful for studying a phenomenon across multiple settings or contexts (Cresswell and Poth, 2016). I chose a qualitative approach to critically analyse the decriminalisation of abortion for minors in Rwanda in order to understand how non-state radio stations produce their content, and how abortion is broadcast through various formats. This approach helps to analyse and understand constructs, and representations through the opinions of members of the Rwandan society over the decriminalisation of abortion for minors as expressed in radio content and understanding the experiences of participants concerning the coverage of the legal reform allowing abortion for minors in Rwanda.

Data collection methods

I collected primary data from in-depth interviews with key informants who are radio employees from the selected eight non-state radio stations; and secondary data, which comprised archived radio content from selected non-state radio stations, which covered the legal reform allowing abortion for minors in Rwanda. The common inclusion criterion for both radio stations and radio content is that they had to have covered the legal reform allowing abortion for minors in Rwanda in the period between 2018 and 2022. I decided on this timeframe because the last amendment took place in 2018 and 2019, while 2022 corresponds to the initiation of the study. Each radio broadcast and each interview were considered separate units of data.

The sample selection of non-state radio stations

This study used purposive sampling to select radio stations that met the research purpose. Purposive sampling is important because it helps researcher “in selecting information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (Bloomberg, 2022, p. 265).

While the total number of radio stations in Rwanda was 38 at the time of sample selection (RURA, 2022), I collected data specifically from non-state radio stations, thereby excluding the eight government-owned radio stations. I made this decision because I wanted to avoid the likelihood of government influence over the radio content from public radio stations. From the 30 remaining non-state radio stations, I specifically excluded eight faith-based radio stations to avoid bias based on religious beliefs, as I was more concerned with the secular discussion on abortion. It is from the

22 remaining non-state radio stations that I purposively selected the eight radio stations. The final number of non-state radio stations that participated in this study was determined through an initial scan of the eight non-state radio stations from all provinces of the country to determine available content on the coverage of the legal reform on access to abortion by minors.

The sampled non-state radio stations included five community radio stations located in provinces mainly in rural areas namely Radio Ishingiro (Northern Province), Radio Huguka, Radio Salus (Southern Province), Radio Izuba (Eastern Province), and Radio Isangano (Western Province). Being a community radio station was a criterion for stations operating in the rural provinces. I chose them because they were the only private community radio stations operating in Rwanda's five rural provinces and because of their targeted audience which comprised rural adults and the youth. Other private radio stations, which are not community radios operating in provinces were excluded (see Table 4.1 inclusion and exclusion criteria on page 70).

A community radio station is defined as a "non-profit service that is owned and managed by a particular community, usually through a trust, foundation, or association. Its aim is to serve and benefit that community" (Fraser and Estrada, 2001, p.4). Most of the time community radio stations are based in rural communities (Fraser and Estrada, 2001; Fox, 2019). I purposively chose the four community radio stations owned by private associations (Radio Izuba, Radio Isangano, Radio Ishingiro, and Radio Huguka) because they share a common objective of promoting rural development, and their main target audience comprised farmers in their respective rural areas of broadcast (Huguka, 2016). Given that development touches on all areas of life, the community radio stations promote public education through their coverage (Huguka, 2016; Niyonzima and Bhujju, 2021). The four community radio stations also work in synergy to achieve their common objective of promoting rural development and share news stories among themselves (Huguka, 2016). Rural development assumes ensuring economic growth and people's wellbeing (Diago, 2020). Rural community radio stations help farmers to achieve economic stability and social wellbeing through information (Huguka, 2016). Therefore, the coverage of these radio stations was likely to provide insight into adult people's perspectives especially parents, as the legal change might affect their children, as well as the perspectives of

the youth in rural areas concerning the legal provision of abortion for minors in Rwanda.

I also included Radio Salus, which is the University of Rwanda's radio station (Graham, 2009). Despite the radio belonging to a government university, its main objective is to build media capacity, enhance democracy, encourage community debate, and serve as a laboratory for students in the School of Journalism and Communication of the University of Rwanda by providing a hands-on learning experience to produce professional journalists in Rwanda (Radio Salus, 2024). Therefore, Radio Salus was chosen to provide the views of the youth, most likely university students, and the views from the population around the University of Rwanda, Huye campus, and Huye District where the station broadcasts.

The sample also included three commercial radio stations from Kigali city. Commercial radio stations are private radio stations that are oriented in business (Rothenbuhler, 1996). The radio stations from Kigali are Kigali Today (KT) Radio, Radio 10, and Flash FM. These are among the private radio stations, which are known for their common character of being independent and promoting open and authentic debates and advocacy and have the notoriety of being among radio stations that advocate for the rights of listeners, especially for the live debates that encourage citizens to participate in radio programmes (Nduhura and Prieler, 2017). This resulted in a total of eight radio stations that participated in the research by availing their archived radio content and accepted to provide an interview with one of their employees (Appendix C).

The non-state radio stations were selected across the country in an attempt to ensure the representativity of the views on the legal reform allowing abortion for minors from different provinces in Rwanda. This is because people's attitudes may vary depending on where they live (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), whether in rural or in urban areas. This suggests that despite that Rwandans share the same culture and the same vernacular language (Kinyarwanda), even the way people apprehend abortion can vary depending on where they live.

Eight radio stations for a case study is appropriate because qualitative research aims to "develop a deep understanding of a specific phenomenon" (Bloomberg, 2022, p. 269), and does not require bigger sample sizes as it is done in quantitative studies (Bloomberg, 2022). Given that the eight radio stations have different editorial lines and

different target audiences, their variety helped to provide perspectives from different social classes and all ages. This also ensured the representativity of public opinion across the country concerning abortion and the legal reform allowing abortion for minors in Rwanda.

Table 4.1: *Inclusion and exclusion criteria of radio stations*

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Radio stations must be non-state	State-owned stations affiliated with Radio Rwanda station, in Kigali and in Provinces were excluded
They must have covered the decriminalisation of abortion for minors in Rwanda during the period from 2018 to 2022	Non-state faith-based radio stations are excluded
From provinces: They must be community radio stations	Other commercial stations in provinces were excluded
From Kigali: They must be private and secular stations with notoriety for advocating for the public and hosting honest debates	Non-state faith-based radio stations were excluded
They must be willing to participate in the research	Radio stations not willing to participate in this research were excluded
They must have the needed content available for analysis	Radio stations not having the needed content on the subject under study were excluded

Source: The author

The landscape of radio stations in Rwanda

Currently, as discussed in the Introduction (Chapter One), Rwanda has 39 local stations and three international (RURA, 2024). Among them, there are eight public radio stations regulated under Rwanda Broadcasting Agency (RBA), and the other 31 are private and commercial radio stations because they were established by “private investors, religious groups, academic institutions” (Rwanda Government Board (RGB, 2016, p. 29).

Community radio stations

The definition of community radio stations, suggests that these radio stations serve the interests of their communities (Fraser and Estrada, 2001, p. 4). In its annual report, RGB's Rwanda Media Barometer (RMB) report classified community radio stations into different categories (RGB, 2013, p. 54). However, this study was concerned with community radios, which are based in rural areas to promote access to information and spearhead rural development in the communities in which they are based, and the academic radio station Radio Salus started by UNESCO in 2005 (RGB, 2013: 54). The section below provides a profile of each of the eight radio stations which participated in this study. The geographical maps showing radio coverage are attached in this thesis (Appendix B).

Radio Ishingiro 107.5 FM: Northern Province

Radio Ishingiro is a community radio established in 2010. It and broadcasts on 107.5 FM from high up in the hills in Rwanda's Northern Province. Although its main listener base is the Northern and Eastern Provinces, its broadcast reach extends to every province in Rwanda and Kigali city. Radio Ishingiro's vision is to be a leading community radio station in Rwanda championing social transformation through information empowerment and establishing social enterprises to harness development and improve the livelihood of the community (Radio Ishingiro, 2022).

Radio Huguka 105.9 FM: Southern Province

Radio Huguka is a private community radio station, located in Muhanga District, Southern Province. Radio Huguka is a rural radio for agricultural sensitisation and expansion, and rural development. Given the large number of rural Rwandans who practise agriculture, Radio Huguka aims to help the population acquire new knowledge and exchange experiences in the agricultural domain, as well as in rural development in general (Radio Huguka, 2016). Radio Huguka's editorial line is to promote access to information, formation, and debate in the rural world. Radio Huguka aims to be a non-political community radio of reference, financially independent, which promotes positive change at all the levels of society and plays a role in promoting freedom of expression, unity, and reconciliation, the agriculture and rural development supported by transparent and structured management (Radio Huguka, 2016).

Radio Salus 97.0 MHz FM : Southern Province

Radio Salus was established in 2005 at the formerly National University of Rwanda (NUR) currently the University of Rwanda (UR), Huye campus, as a result of a project implemented by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in order to create a new independent academic media outlet.

The primary objectives of the station are to build media capacity, enhance democracy, encourage community debate, and improve the university's journalism school by providing a hands-on learning experience for students. Since its inception, not only has the station achieved one of its primary goals of media capacity building, but it has also enhanced and diversified radio programming (Radio Salus, 2022). Moreover, its national coverage is about 85% of the whole country and its impact is felt in neighbouring countries as it can be listened to by those living in some parts of Burundi, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Further, the station is accessible around the world through online broadcasting (Radio Salus, 2022).

Radio Izuba 100 FM: Eastern Province

Radio Izuba was established in July 2004. It is the first community FM radio station in Rwanda and broadcasts on 100 MHz from Ngoma district, Eastern Province. It also features on social media platforms. It focuses on community development and good governance. To promote the reporting of grassroots issues, in addition to its 34 regular personnel, Radio Izuba cooperates with community citizen reporters called 'Imboni' (translated as eye's pupils) who report to the radio about what happens in their areas. Radio Izuba has an estimated audience of approximately 4 800 000 and its area of coverage is the whole Eastern Province, some parts of Southern Province and Kigali. Radio Izuba also has a television station, Izuba TV, which covers the whole country (Radio Izuba, 2022).

Radio Isangano Radio 104.9 FM: Western Province

Radio Isangano is a community radio station broadcasting from Karongi District, Western Province. It was founded on 30 April 2011 by a non-governmental organisation known as Radio Isangano. Radio Isangano was established to solve the problem of inaccessibility of radio FM waves due to the region's topography of high mountains. This was a barrier to the population's access to information. Radio

Isangano covers the whole Western Province, a part of Southern Province, and a small part of Northern Province. Though the geographical area of coverage is small, the station can be accessed via the Internet (Radio Isangano, 2022).

Radio Flash FM 89.2 FM: Kigali

Radio Flash FM is an independent Radio station broadcasting from Kigali and covers the whole country. It started operating in 2004. Flash FM's editorial line is about promoting advocacy. It's main aim is to provide news on current affairs, and informative journalism on local, national, and international issues, sports, and the best mix of music. In 2015, Flash FM expanded and established its TV station called Flash TV (Radio Flash FM, 2022).

Radio 10 87.6 FM: Kigali

Founded in June 2004, Radio10, 87.6 FM is the first Rwandan private radio station. The station reaches all the provinces in Rwanda. Its aim is to be a Pan-African radio station and the voice of Rwanda. Since July 2013, Radio 10 has a sister broadcaster namely TV 10 station. TV 10 also covers the whole country. Both Radio 10 and TV 10 are owned by Tele 10 Group. Radio 10's editorial line is about to inform, educate, and entertain. It aims at bringing change. Radio 10's main objective is to participate in the development of the country by providing a credible inclusive and educational platform (Radio 10, 2022).

KT Radio 96.7-107.9MHz FM

KT Radio is an independent radio station belonging to Kigali Today Ltd. It started operating in July 2012, with a mandate to provide information through the website. In March 2014, it started broadcasting on FM waves. KT Radio's main objective is to provide information dissemination, education, and entertainment to the audience. In addition, the radio aims to provide information on the real image of Rwandans' daily lives to those living in Rwanda as well as to outsiders. The radio station covers the whole country and has journalists representing it across the country. KT Radio has a mandate to provide accurate and balanced information to the audience. It is one of the other media owned by Kigali Today, which includes KT Press an online newspaper in English, and the Kinyarwanda online paper operating on the website (www.ktradio.rw) (KT Radio, 2024).

Table 4.2. An overview of the radio stations constituting the study sample

Radio station	Type of radio station	Editorial policy	Language of broadcasting	Geographic reach	Target audience characteristics
Flash FM Kigali city	Commercial radio	Promoting advocacy	Kinyarwanda	The whole country	-All people -All ages
Radio Huguka Southern Province	Community radio	Promoting access to information, formation, and debate in the rural world.	Kinyarwanda	The whole Southern, Western, Northern Provinces, Kigali City, and one part of the Eastern Province	-Farmers -Rural areas -Low and -All ages
Radio Isangano Western Province	Community radio	Promoting rural development, social cohesion and social welfare; and access to information	Kinyarwanda	The whole Western Province and one part of Northern Province	-Farmers -All ages -Rural areas
Radio Ishingiro Northern Province	Community radio	Promoting transformation through information empowerment, harnessing development and improving the livelihood of the community	Kinyarwanda	The whole Northern Province and one part of the Eastern Province	-Farmers -All ages -Rural area

Radio Izuba Eastern Province	Community radio	Promoting community development and governance through communicati on	Kinyarwanda	All Eastern Province, one part of Kigali city, the Northern and Southern Province	-Farmers -Rural areas -All ages
KT Radio Kigali city	Commercial radio	Providing information, education and entertainmen t showing the real image of Rwandans' daily lives to those living inside the country and to outsiders	Kinyarwanda	The whole country	-All people -All ages
Radio 10 Kigali city	Commercial radio	Informing for change	Kinyarwanda	The whole country	-All people -All ages
Radio Salus Southern Province	Academic radio	Being a laboratory for students within the Department of Journalism and Communicati on of the University of Rwanda.	Kinyarwanda	85% of the whole country (Radio Salus, 2024)	-University students -Youth Local population Southern Province

Source: The author

Archived radio content

To understand the type of coverage of the legal reform of the penal code of 30/08/2018 expanding abortion for minors, and the ministerial order on conditions for medical doctors to perform abortion; this study collected 36 archived broadcasts that covered the issue regarding the legal reform allowing abortion for minors. These were the archived data stored on the eight radio stations' servers and online platforms (Berger, 2012; Bloomberg, 2022).

Data was collected between the 5th of October 2023 and 27th of February 2024. In October 2023, I collected data from four radio stations: Radio Isangano (Western Province), Radio Salus (Southern Province), Radio Ishingiro (Northern Province), and Radio Izuba (Eastern Province). In February 2024, I managed to collect data from the remaining four radio stations namely Radio Huguka (Southern Province) and the three other stations located in Kigali city. These were Flash FM, KT Radio, and Radio 10.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for radio content

The following table illustrates the inclusion and exclusion criteria for radio content.

Table 4.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for radio content

Inclusion	Exclusion
Radio broadcasts had to reflect on the legal reform specifically the Penal Code of 2018, and the Ministerial Order of 2019.	Radio broadcasts covering abortion in the previous law revision of 2012 was excluded
Radio broadcasts had to reflect on the legal reform allowing abortion specifically for minors.	Data which covered the discussion on the legal reform allowing abortion but for other categories provided by the law were excluded.
Data had to reflect on the discussion regarding the legal reform allowing abortion for minors	Broadcasts which covered issues other than abortion were excluded
Data had to be broadcast between 2018 and 2022 which is the time frame of the study.	Data which were broadcast before 2018 and after 2022 were excluded

Source: The author

Content selection

This study retained 36 items that met the inclusion criteria from a total of 76 broadcasts collected across the eight radio stations. The four community radio stations provided 18 broadcasts, 17 news reports and one live talk show from Radio Huguka. All the 17 news reports were broadcast in synergy to all four stations during news hours. However, from the 18 broadcasts, only nine were retained for this study because they met the inclusion criteria. The excluded items mostly focused only on teenage pregnancies in Rwanda, others talked about the abortion law reform but focused on the grounds for adult women and not for minors. The eight retained items are news reports and one talk show.

Radio Salus provided a total of 32 broadcasts, only four of them were retained as meeting the inclusion criteria for this study because others focused mostly on teenage pregnancies. Among the four items retained were one news report and three pre-recorded magazine programmes. Kigali Today (KT Radio) provided 14 broadcasts and 12 were maintained for this study as they covered the amendment of the law allowing abortion for minors. They included 11 news reports and one talk show. Of the two broadcasts that were excluded, one was about the previous amendment of 2012, and another covered abortion, but it focused on adult women. Radio 10 provided seven items, six of which met the inclusion criteria. They included four news reports and two talk shows. The excluded talk show covered a debate on contraceptives for minors. Flash FM provided five items comprising three news reports and two radio programmes that all met the inclusion criteria for the current study.

An overview of radio content by format

Content to include in the analysis was drawn from hard news stories, feature stories, and live talk shows and debates from all the eight selected stations. The variety of formats was due to the shortage of broadcasts. At the time of sample selection, I did a tour of selected radio stations to identify the available content for this study. At that time, I realised that there was not much coverage of the 2018 reform of the law. Some radio stations declared having lost a part of their content on servers either by accident or by cleaning up servers to have enough storage space. As a result, it was not possible to focus on collecting one specific format and have enough content to analyse

for this study. For this reason, radio stations provided available content that covered the legal reform allowing abortion for minors in all formats. The final content collected was predominantly news reports, live talk shows and pre-recorded radio magazine programmes.

News reports

This study collected a total of 27 news reports from all eight radio stations made of a mixture of interviews from various sources and reporters' narrations. The average length ranged between two and four minutes. Apart from the news reports from the four community radio stations, which were shared among the four community radio stations and were aired during news hours, other radio stations broadcast their own news reports during news hours on their respective radio stations. Among 27 news reports, 13 were hard stories covering events such as a campaign of awareness of the amended law allowing abortion for minors and press conferences on the legal reform allowing abortion for minors.

The hard news reports were from six radio stations. One was from Flash FM, another one from Radio Huguka, three were broadcasts on Radio Isangano, one from Radio Izuba, six from KT Radio, and one from Radio10. Two of them covered press conferences, whereby public authorities and government partners held press conferences to explain the legal reform allowing minors safe abortion. The 11 remaining hard stories covered awareness campaigns. News reports also included 14 feature stories from seven radio stations: two from Flash FM, one from Radio Huguka, one from Radio Isangano, one from Radio Ishingiro, five from KT Radio, three from Radio 10, and one from Radio Salus. The feature news reports were characterised by journalists choosing angles or story orientations and going to the field with the specific intention of collecting people's views on the legal reform allowing abortion for minors.

Radio pre-recorded magazine programmes

In this study, I collected three magazine programmes from Radio Salus. They were pre-recorded and orientated towards specific topics whereby two were from a health programme and one from a justice and laws programme. The magazine programmes have their specific day and time in a week to be broadcast. The health programme (*Sigasira Amagara*) is broadcast every Wednesday at 16h00, while the justice and

laws programme (*Ubucamanza n'amategeko*) is broadcast twice a week: Saturday morning from 08h00 to 08h30 and Tuesday from 16h00 to 16h00.

Table 4.4. Data collected from each radio station

Name of radio station		Total meeting inclusion criteria	News reports	Live talk shows	Pre-recorded magazine programmes
1	Flash FM	5	3	2	-
2	Radio Huguka	3	2	1	-
3	Radio Isangano	4	4	-	-
4	Radio Ishingiro	1	1	-	-
5	Radio Izuba	1	1	-	-
6	KT Radio	12	11	1	-
7	Radio 10	6	4	2	-
8	Radio Salus	4	1	-	3
Total		36	27	6	3

Source: The author

Live talk shows

I analysed six live talk shows where journalists interacted with the public. One talk show was from Radio Huguka, two were from Flash FM, one from KT Radio, and two were from Radio 10. The live talk shows collected for this study included some with one or two journalists in the studio interacting with the audience via phone calls and reading messages on social media platforms namely Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Examples of these talk shows are *Rirarashe* (Radio 10), *Ikaze Munyarwanda* (Flash FM), and *Ubyumva ute* (What is your opinion) (KT Radio) where guests were in the studios interacting both with journalists and the public. For Gospel Time on Radio Huguka, some guests were in the studio conversing with the journalist, while others were received via phone calls. The journalists also received phone calls and read comments from SMS and from their social media. Radio 10 provided a live debate during news hour, where experts were invited to comment on the amendment of the law allowing abortion for minors and other circumstances. The audience's intervention was mostly facilitated through social media and phone calls. As for the above radio

magazine programmes, live talks are known by names and have specific days and times to be broadcast.

Data management of radio content

I collected radio content on the same day that I had interviews with the radio station staff. This was helpful because radio stations are located in different provinces, far from my hometown. Some radio station staff loaded content directly onto my external drive, via WeTransfer software, others shared via links to YouTube that I accessed, and all data were saved and managed in my computers, Google Drive, and on the external drive. In order to ensure safety, I also shared data with my supervisors and secured it with passwords.

It is important to note that even if much content drawn from servers did not show dates of broadcast, it was possible for the staff to do a search of content broadcast within a specific period from servers and get them because data on servers are saved following the date of broadcast. The radio station staff only provided the data which was broadcast within the time frame I requested. However, when they were gathered in one folder and transferred to my external drive, or via WeTransfer, no date of broadcast appeared. However, while listening to the content to find out the ones that met inclusion criteria, and for translation and analysis, I was able to recognise the year that content was broadcast for some illustrating some contexts such as COVID-19, or years which have passed since the reform was made, among others.

I collected all data on my external disk from Radio Isangano, Radio Salus, and Radio Izuba. Radio Huguka provided two news reports on my external drive and sent the two remaining news reports and the Gospel show via a link to WeTransfer via email, KT Radio sent all 14 items via a link to WeTransfer via email, I collected six items on my external drive from Radio 10, the one remaining was provided as links to YouTube. Flash FM provided four items of content on the external drive and one talk show via links to YouTube.

I collected online data from the YouTube channel after having secured the gatekeeper authorisation letters from radio managers who authorised them to be used in this study and the radio station staff shared with me links to YouTube. In addition, they are in the public domain, which means that they do not need the site's permission to access

them (Bloomberg, 2022, p. 164). However, I listened to the content from YouTube player because according to the YouTube terms “Although users are allowed to play videos to audiences for non-commercial purposes, it must be done through the YouTube player” (Berger, 2012, p.10).

After data collection, I proceeded with listening for the selection of items meeting the inclusion criteria to be translated from Kinyarwanda (local language) to English and transcribed (Ross, 2010). Transcription is important in qualitative research because it “brings immediacy and transparency to the phenomena under study by allowing the audience access to inspect the data on which the analysis is based” (Nikander, 2008, p. 225). Translation of data from different languages can be done either by first transcribing the original language. The document is then translated to the desired language for research; or by translating and transcribing directly from the original language to the second language for research analysis (Hennink *et al.*, 2020). For this study, I translated and transcribed at the same time. I first listened to the audio content in Kinyarwanda (local language) and then translated it directly to English. I chose to translate directly because Kinyarwanda is my mother tongue, and I understand it sufficiently to confidently interpret the nuances of the discussion in English. In addition, this process allowed me to transcribe a large amount of content within a limited timeframe. While translating I kept in mind that I had to keep the original meanings of some cultural contexts hidden in the words of the original language (Kinyarwanda) (Hennink *et al.*, 2020). The original meaning is important, as Cresswell and Poth recommend:

In the entire qualitative research process, the researchers keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or writers from the literature (Cresswell and Poth, 2018, p. 39).

Therefore, while translating, I listened to the audio several times and then translated to English and transcribed at the same time. Even before starting the data analysis, I listened again and again to make sure I understood what the participant said because it was important to keep the original meaning of the data which later helped while building coding frames and attributing sub-categories and for data analysis.

The relevance of radio content as data

Collecting radio content was important for this study because it provided insight into how the legal reform allowing access to abortion for minors was mediated and what the Rwandan population said about it. Given that radio broadcasts contain the original voices of people and journalists, it was easy to understand how they represented abortion and shared their opinions on minors seeking abortion. Radio content provided rich views from many categories of people, providing insight into more voices than I could collect using other methods of data collection.

Limitations to using broadcast content

I encountered some challenges with data collection, including access to content and missing dates of broadcasts. Given that the legal amendments on access to abortion took place in 2018 and 2019, and data collection was done in 2023 and 2024, radio stations claimed having cleaned up their servers or having lost the content due to server damage. Even during data collection, some radio stations had lost the few content recordings that they previously claimed they had. As a result, some radio stations could provide only one news report, even if the interviews with the radio station staff mentioned having covered the reform of the abortion articles in various formats.

Despite the challenges described above, I collected sufficient data to answer all my research questions. Although some radio stations provided few items, others provided more than expected, which filled the gaps in content. The fact that the four community radio stations work in synergy, sharing news reports filled the gaps for those community radio stations, which had few content items because the eight news reports were broadcast to all four community radio stations.

In-depth interviews (IDIs)

Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the selection of participants to IDIs

To be included in the study as a key informant, the participant had to be an employee of the selected radio station. Participants had specific responsibilities and knowledge of editorial decisions, policies, and the production of radio programmes, relating to the coverage of the legal reform that legalised abortion for minors. The roles and responsibilities regarding the inclusion and exclusion of participants have been obscured, to ensure their anonymity.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews

In this study, I employed semi-structured in-depth interviews as an additional tool for data collection. The interviews were conducted with eight radio station staff. An in-depth interview is a primary tool for data collection, which facilitates the researcher's interaction with the participant (Bloomberg, 2022, p. 281). The interaction between the researcher and the participant is important because the researcher can even understand the participant's emotions and body language by keeping eye contact, and of course through observation (Coughlan, 2009).

I chose to conduct in-depth interviews with key informants from selected radio stations because it helped to understand the reasons the selected radio stations covered the legal reform on abortion access. The number of participants (eight) was a good one, especially when compared to the size of the entire sample size. This is important because some researchers propose that saturation for interviews can even start from six interviews and above (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 3; Hennink *et al.*, 2017, n.p.). Further, in qualitative research, the researcher only "needs a small sample to study in greater and deeper detail" (Bloomberg, 2022, p. 269). Interviews were conducted with one staff member from each of the eight target radio stations, to collect first-hand data.

Purposive sampling was used to select appropriate participants to be enrolled in the study because of their knowledge of the subject under study (Bloomberg, 2022, p. 265). The radio managers who gave me gatekeeper permission letters helped me identify information-rich participants. All the eight participants were proposed by radio managers as suitable participants for this study, because of their knowledge of the coverage of the legal reform promoting abortion for minors. All of them were radio station employees and they belonged to the station management. Further, they were conversant with the stations' policies, which affected the coverage of the amendment of abortion law. As per the radio content discussed earlier (archived radio content), all the interviews were conducted between the 5th of October 2023 and the 27th of February 2024, at the same time as the radio content.

In-depth semi-structured interview guides

I used an in-depth semi-structured interview guide (Appendix D) as an instrument to collect detailed information from radio station staff on why their radio stations covered the legal reform allowing access to abortion for minors in Rwanda. The semi-structured

guide helped me to interact with the participants and avoid the rigidity of written questions (Hennink *et al.*, 2020; Kallio *et al.*, 2016).

In terms of structure, the interview guide comprised open-ended questions, which allowed the participant to express themselves. For this study, the semi-structured interview guide was a list of 13 questions, which is a good number of questions for an in-depth interview to facilitate interaction between the researcher and the participant (Kallio *et al.*, 2016). The questions were informed by the research question seeking to know the factors, which motivated the selected radio stations to cover the legal reform legalising abortion for minors in Rwanda.

The interview guide followed the structure that Hennink *et al.* (2020, n.p.) proposed “Opening questions, key questions, and closing questions”. The three first introductory questions focused on gathering information about the participant, their experience, and their position at the radio station. They were followed by nine key questions that specifically sought to illuminate the factors enhancing the coverage of SRHR and the legal reform promoting abortion for minors. The last closing question allowed the participants to give their opinion about the coverage of the amendment of the law.

Ethical considerations for IDIs

During the data collection process, I was guided by University of KwaZulu-Natal’s ethics guidelines. I started data collection after obtaining ethical clearance from the University’s Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC/00005648/2023) on the 22nd of June 2023 (Appendix E). I arranged data collection dates and times with the radio station staff via phone. I found them at their respective radio stations as they had requested.

Each participant completed and signed an informed consent form (Appendix F) which highlighted the voluntary nature of their participation in the research and assured them that their contributions would be confidential and that they would not be identified in the research. I ensured confidentiality by referring to them anonymously (as Participant 1, Participant 2,...to Participant 8) and I differentiated their radio stations from their locations (Kigali and Provinces) during the data analysis in the discussion presented in Chapter Five and Six of this thesis. The informed consent also stated that the data from both the radio content and interviews will be kept for five years after

which they will be destroyed. On the day of the interview, I explained to the participants about their rights to withdraw from the study. Given that all the participants had bachelor's degrees, the informed consent form and interview guide were kept in English because they understood English. However, they had the right to answer questions in their preferred language. All of them were comfortable answering in Kinyarwanda, their local language.

The interviews took between 25 to 55 minutes. The length of the interview depended on the way the participant took the time to respond to questions and how they provided details until we felt we had covered all the areas of interest or that they had no more information to share (Guest *et al.*, 2006, p. 64). With the participants' permission, the interviews were recorded with an audio recorder to facilitate the processes of transcription and translation. The audio recordings were translated and transcribed directly from Kinyarwanda to English for analysis, and the transcriptions and translations were completed in March 2024.

Relevance of in-depth interviews

The in-depth interviews with the radio station staff were useful for this study because they explained how they covered this law and the reasons which made their radio stations cover the legal reform expanding abortion for minors and other circumstances in Rwanda. This aspect was not obvious in the archived radio content. Therefore, the two methods of data collection complemented each other.

Limitations linked to data collection using in-depth interviews

The collection of data using in-depth interviews had some limitations, including confusion amongst some of the participants around the key issue, bias in responses, and logistical challenges. It appeared that some participants were constrained by prevalent social and religious norms and would not express themselves freely and respond to the questions about their coverage of the legal provision of abortion, as they perceived this as a sensitive topic. In the review of data, it was obvious that some provided biased and contradicting information, for example, some started by saying that they covered the law because they wanted to educate and sensitise people about the new law, but in the course of the interview, they ended up saying that they were not interested at all in covering the legal reforms around abortion because it is a sensitive issue for their audience.

During the data collection period from October 2023 to February 2024, some radio station staff were not available at the appointed time, obliging me to reschedule their appointments more than twice, with no possibility of replacing them with another key informant from the same radio station. This was particularly difficult when I had to interview two participants who were in two different provinces on the same day. This required patience and endurance because I knew that the radio station staff work under pressure, and I therefore had to accommodate their schedules. Despite these challenges, a total sample of eight interviews was collected, and I collected sufficient data to answer all my research questions. For clarity and honesty of participants' responses, during face-to-face interviews, it was easy to observe and notice any misunderstanding or confusion, then this helped me to guide the interviewee with probing questions.

Researcher positionality

This section describes the researcher's positionality which is about my reflexivity and positionality to the research topic and research participants as well as the analysis and how these might affect the research process, interpretation, and findings (Bloomberg, 2022). As a former journalist with skills in radio coverage, coupled with the experience I got while conducting my master's research where I analysed the image of gender equality through radio stations in Rwanda, this affected the choice and selection of radio stations that participated in this research. My knowledge of the field of journalism and my connectedness to some journalists helped me to secure gatekeeper authorisation letters and gaining access to radio content from some radio stations.

Further, my background as a Christian and Rwandan woman places me directly in Rwandan society and helps me to understand the religious and cultural response to the legal provision of abortion for minors. I was aware that my religious affiliation could affect the data analysis and findings, however, I was mindful to manage my biases. The knowledge of my biases and my intention to manage them helped me to concentrate on what participants said during data analysis and to avoid imposing my biases on findings because I wanted to ensure the rigour or trustworthiness of my findings.

I was aware of the fact that I am a PhD student, and a lecturer at the University could exercise power over participants who were radio stations' employees. To mitigate these power dynamics, I maintained a friendly relationship with them as a former colleague, which resulted in acceptability and equal relations. I was not in a position of authority, I did not exercise any coercion or undue influence (Bloomberg, 2022, p. 127). I was further aware that participants' tendency could be that of saying what they assumed that I wanted to hear because of their interpretation of me, a woman doing research on women's issues (Bloomberg, 2022). In order to avoid any influence, I explained to interviewees about their freedom to express themselves about the subject regardless of who I am. I also asked questions on the list, read the probe on the question paper and let them express themselves freely. This helped them say what they knew without feeling the burden of being coerced to tell me what I wanted to hear. The participant recruitment process was initiated at the time I was securing gatekeeper authorisation letters, thus, one year prior to the time of interviews. This permitted the interviewees to take time and consider their participation, avoiding possible feelings of coercion for the interviewees (Bloomberg, 2022, p. 127).

Data analysis methods

This study used qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2014) as a method of analysis for both the content from radio stations and interview data generated with radio station staff. The qualitative content analysis helped to critically examine the way that expanding legal access to abortion for minors was covered on the selected non-state radio stations and the way Rwandans expressed themselves over the issue.

Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis is defined as “a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material. It is done by classifying material as instances of the categories of a coding frame” (Schreier, 2014, p. 7). It is used when researchers want to interpret the meaning in content whether this is in texts, video or audio transcripts (Forman and Damschroder, 2007; Schreier, 2012).

The analysis process followed the eight steps of qualitative content analysis proposed by Schreier (2014, p. 8):

1. Deciding on a research question

2. Selecting material
3. Building a coding frame
4. Segmentation
5. Trial coding
6. Evaluating and modifying the coding frame
7. Main analysis
8. Presenting and interpreting the findings

Step 1: Deciding on a research question

The first step of deciding on research questions for this study was based on the problem identified, a review of the literature around radio coverage of abortion, and an understanding of the two theories namely of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989) and moral panics (Cohen, 1972). The analysis served to find answers to the following research questions which guided this study: 1) How did the selected radio stations cover the legal amendments to abortion access for minors in Rwanda?; 2) How are Rwandan citizen voices reflected in non-state radio's coverage of this issue?; 3) How do selected radio stations represent issues related to legal abortion for minors in Rwanda?; 4) How do the radio stations' policies, guidelines, practices, and other news-making factors impact the coverage of the topic?

The question about coverage (Question 1) sought to understand the way the legal reform was covered, and the type of broadcast (news, magazines, live talk) produced in regard to this issue. By seeking to know how audience voices were 'reflected' in the broadcasts (Question 2), I wanted to understand the way audiences' voices were 'included' and 'moderated' in the broadcasts. Representation of legal abortion (Question 3) aimed at "describing or depicting it, to call it up in the mind by description or portrayal or imagination; to place a likeness of it before us in our mind or in the senses" (Hall, 2020, p. 2). Therefore, this study looked at the way abortion was portrayed in radio content broadcast on selected radio stations. The way the issue was represented is important because the representation of issues is also socially constructed:

Just as people who belong to the same culture must share a broadly similar conceptual map, so they must also share the same way of interpreting the signs

of a language, for only in this way can meanings be effectively exchanged between people (Hall, 2020, p. 5).

Regarding newsmaking factors (Question 4), I wanted to understand important factors either based on the radios' editorial policies, factors such as newsworthiness, advertisers or government-oriented policies, which could have exercised influence on the radio stations to cover the legal reform expanding abortion for minors.

Step 2: Selecting material

As outlined earlier in this chapter, selected material for analysis includes the 36 radio broadcasts and eight interviews with radio station staff. The radio content and interview transcripts had a huge amount of data relevant to this study.

Step 3: Building coding frames

In qualitative content analysis, building a coding frame is a process of “assigning units of meaning to the categories” of that data (Schreier, 2014, p 7). A coding frame is made of “at least one main category and at least two subcategories” (Schreier, 2014, p. 8). The main category is about “aspects of the material about which the researcher would like more information” while sub-categories “specify what is said in the material with respect to these main categories” (Schreier (2014, p. 8). Therefore, one main category may have many sub-categories and during the analysis, the sub-categories can also generate other sub-categories.

To build coding frames for this study, I developed the main categories of analysis for both the radio content and interview data through inductive coding based on the research questions; and I developed sub-categories deductively from the radio content and interview responses (Bloomberg, 2022). Coding frames for the in-depth interviews were built separately from coding frames from radio content, given the separate research questions.

Building coding frames for the in-depth interviews

The transcripts generated from the in-depth interviews were used to build frames. The main categories were inductively developed to answer the research question about the factors that motivated selected radio stations to cover the legal reform on access to abortion for minors in Rwanda. The in-depth interviews aimed at responding to

research Question 1, which was: How did the selected radio stations cover the legal amendments to abortion access for minors in Rwanda? and Question 4) How do the radio stations' policies, guidelines, practices, and other news-making factors impact the coverage of the topic?

The analysis of the data used two main categories which are:

- Coverage
- Reasons

The sub-categories were developed deductively from the responses of radio station staff to the interview questions. The two theories of the public sphere and moral panics guided the development of sub-categories under these two main categories.

Coverage

The main category of 'coverage' showed how participants described the formats in which they covered the issue on their respective radio stations. This category generated two sub-categories namely formats and feedback.

The 'format' sub-categories included news reports, live talk shows/ debates, and magazines/ pre-recorded programmes. The 'feedback' subcategories included the association of new media (mobile phone and social media).

Reasons

The main category of 'reasons' for coverage showed how participants described factors that motivated them to cover the issue regarding the legal reform allowing abortion for minors. The category generated sub-categories which were based on an understanding of the key characteristics of the two theories that constituted the theoretical framework for the study, namely the public sphere (Habermas, 1989) and moral panics (Cohen, 1972).

The development of sub-categories for the analysis was influenced by an understanding of the public sphere theory (Habermas, 1996, p. 368-376). These sub-categories outline how radio stations played a role in providing a common space for citizens to express their opinions.

The 'reasons' sub-categories based on the public sphere theory were identified as:

- Providing factual and balanced information
- Providing information on the law
- Providing public education
- Discussion on issues of concern
- Encouraging free expression of opinions
- Sharing reasoned arguments
- Ensuring inclusivity of opinions

The theory of moral panics informed the development of the following ‘reasons’ sub-categories.

- Newsworthiness
- Deviance
- Hostility
- Morality
- Victimisation
- Stigmatisation

Building coding frames from radio content

The same process used to build coding frames for the interviews was undertaken for the radio content, whereby materials were selected from the transcripts of all the 36 broadcasts. The main categories for the analysis were generated inductively based on the research questions, and the sub-categories were generated deductively based on key elements of both the public sphere and moral panics theories.

The radio content was analysed to answer the questions:

1) How did the selected radio stations cover the legal amendments to abortion access for minors in Rwanda?; 2) How are Rwandan citizen voices reflected in non-state radio’s coverage of this issue?; and 3) How do selected radio stations represent issues related to legal abortion for minors in Rwanda?

Content from radio stations generated two main categories which are: ‘Information’ and ‘opinion’ (this category of ‘opinion’ includes ‘opinions for’ and ‘opinions against’ the legal reform). Each category generated subcategories informed by either the public sphere or moral panics theory, with some sub-categories having sub-sub-categories.

While the categories for the interviews showed the reasons and factors that influenced the coverage of the legal reform allowing abortion; the sub-categories for radio content showed how the audience engaged in discussion over the legal reform allowing abortion for minors.

Categories generated by the public sphere theory

The theory of the public sphere is concerned with how citizens come together to discuss common issues of concern to seek sustainable solutions (Habermas, 1989). The public sphere generated the following subcategories for my analysis of the radio content:

- Awareness
- Providing information on the law
- Discussion on issues of concern
- Encouraging free expression of opinions
- Encouraging expression of opinion
- Providing factual and balanced information
- Reasoned and critical discussion arguments
- Promoting an inclusive public sphere
- Allowing for debates

Categories generated by the moral panics theory

The moral panics theory guided the analysis of materials showing how the radio stations represented issues related to legal abortion for minors in Rwanda. The decision on the allocation of sub-categories to the radio content was based on Cohen's (2002, p. 1) definition of moral panics, and on the five main characteristics of moral panics suggested by Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994, p. 157-158) as discussed in the theoretical chapter of this study.

The main sub-categories generated from the theory of moral panics included:

- Concern Deviance
- Hostility Morality
- Victimization Stigmatisation

- Religious authorities' hostility

Table 4.5: Main categories and sub-categories for interviews and radio content

Main categories and sub-categories from interviews with radio station staff	Main categories and sub-categories from radio content: Information and Opinions
COVERAGE AND REASONS	OPINION FOR AND INFORMATION
Sub-categories	Sub-categories
Format	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>News reports</i> - <i>Live talk shows</i> - <i>Pre-recorded magazine programmes</i> - <i>Public feedback and interaction</i> 	Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing factual and balanced information - Providing information on the law - Awareness - Reasoned arguments
REASONS	Expression of opinion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Providing factual and balanced information -Providing public education -Influencing public attitudes -Providing sexual education to the youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expression of opinion - Discussion of issues of concern - Advocacy - Suggesting alternative solutions to abortion
Discussion on issues of concern <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraging free expression of opinions - Covering controversial issues amongst diverse audiences - Advocacy for wider accessibility of abortion services - Encouraging discussions on issues of concern - Highlighting teenagers' hardship and injustice 	Inclusive public sphere and debates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public authorities' voices - Religious authorities' voices - Teenagers and mothers' testimonies - Experts' voices - Parents' voices
Moral panics sub-categories from interviews	Moral panics sub-categories from radio content
Deviance	Deviance; Portraying deviant
Hostility	Concern <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concern about death - Concern about infertility - Concern about psychological trauma - Concern about immorality - Concern about child abusers
Morality	Morality
Victimisation	Threat to societal values Hostility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hostility to abortion - Hostility to immorality and deviance - Hostility to the law Religious authorities' hostility
Stigmatisation	Victimisation; Exaggeration
Newsworthiness	Stigmatisation; Sensational language and tone
Source: The author	

Step 4: The segmentation

When conducting qualitative content analysis, segmenting material means “dividing it into units such that each segment/ unit fits into one category of the coding frame” (Schreier, 2012, p. 127). During this step, I split the selected data into different segments in order to align with the identified subcategories. I manually did this segmentation on the text from the entire data set of transcripts, where segments, as aligned with the individual sub-categories, were separated from larger paragraphs of text, and each segment in each transcript was numbered to facilitate referencing.

Radio stations were numbered from one to eight, and their items were numbered from one to 36 (see Table 4. 4 for details on broadcasts). The participants’ interview transcripts were given numbers from one to eight to ensure their anonymity. After segmentation, I coded each segment (Schreier, 2012, p. 146). The following is an example of a segmented and coded transcript.

Figure 10. An example of a segmented and coded transcript

4. 13. Radio Ishingiro Vox pop =14 segments Codes: 624-635

1/ You can get a pregnancy without means of taking care of that child. It’s ok you can terminate it.

624/ Economic challenges, support abortion

2/ I support abortion instead of having a child that you will not be able to raise or

624/ Economic hardship justification for abortion

3/a child that you will make suffer

Code 625/ Child protection

If she was unfortunate to be violated by a member of her family like her brother, her father, or her uncle,... and got pregnant, that pregnancy should not be terminated.

626/ Incest, rejection justification of abortion

5/ Because when they terminate it, they kill an innocent child.

627/ rejection of incest myth as justification for abortion

This is to prove that those who used to terminate their pregnancies illegally are right.

Code 628/ Moral values

631/ health reasons, support for abortion

There is no reason to terminate a pregnancy when you have the blessing to have one.

632/ Religious beliefs, value of pregnancy, against abortion

I support our religious leaders who do not agree with it.

633/ Religious beliefs, against abortion

When you agree to have sex with anybody you also have to assume the consequences.

634/ moral values, responsibility, against abortion

14/ Abortion is not good at all.

635/ General rejection of abortion

Source: The author

Step 5: Trial coding

Trial coding includes what Schreier (2014, p.16) describes as a “pilot phase”, which consists of applying “categories to part of your material, proceeding exactly as you are planning to do during the main analysis phase”. The previous steps of building the coding frames, selecting materials, and segmentation helped me to familiarise with the data. For this trial coding, I grouped the codes in the thematic sub-categories according to my theoretical framework. The following table is an example of how trial coding from a selection of text from one broadcast item.

Table 4.6. A trial coding of the above segmented transcript of a news report

Statements	Codes	Sub-category	Theory
4.14/ 624	Economic challenges	Expression of opinion	Public sphere
4.14/625	Economic hardship	Expression of opinion	Public sphere
4.14/626	Rejection of incest as a reason for abortion	Deviance	Public sphere
4.14/627	Moral values, murder, right of the unborn, opposition to abortion	Deviance	Moral panics
4.14/631	Religious beliefs, value of pregnancy against abortion	Hostility	Moral panics
4.14/632	Religious beliefs, against abortion	Consensus	Moral panics
4.14/633	Moral values, responsibility, against abortion	Victimisation	Moral panics
4.14/634	General rejection of abortion	Hostility	Moral panics

Source: The author

After trying the codes out as shown in table above, I went through the coding to check the ‘consistency’ (Schreier, 2012, p. 146). Checking the coding helped me to identify where segments were broad and needed to be separated to have one meaning and one code because each code had to belong to one sub-category and one theory. The codes were arranged in the coding sheets from code 1-1554 for 36 radio content and the other code sheet for eight interviews had codes from 1-575.

In the coding sheet, I entered at least codes from each of the 36 broadcasts from the eight radio stations and codes from each interview to ensure ‘variability’ and ‘representativity’ of all data (Schreier, 2012, p. 149).

Step 6: Evaluating and modifying the coding frame

The sixth step proposed by Schreier (2012) is about evaluating and modifying coding frames. I went through the codes assigned during the pilot phase to see whether they were well generated and if they made sense in the sub-categories where I had allocated them, and modified them when necessary.

Step 7: Main analysis

After having all the materials coded and ready for analysis, I proceeded with the analysis of the entire data set. At this stage, I had to interpret my data to give meaning to the entire data set. I analysed each segment separated off during the segmentation stage, in all transcripts. I analysed each segment manually, by putting the analysis in the comment's column of each segment. The analysis was guided by both the public sphere and moral panics theories, which helped me to meaningfully interpret both interview data and radio content.

Step 8: Presenting and interpreting the findings

After confirming that all data were coded and that the codes belonged to their sub-categories, I made the final step of presenting and discussing the findings. The interpretation of interviews and radio content and the discussions of sub-categories are presented as analytical comments, with quotations taken from the selected materials. At this stage, the theories continued guiding the analysis, whereby the moral panics theory helped to understand arguments showing that the legal reform allowing access to abortion for minors is perceived as being a threat to society or not, and the public sphere theory allowed for an understanding of how radio stations were a space for public discussions and expression or not.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the methodology used to collect and analyse data for this study. Falling within the socio-constructivist research paradigm, I chose a case study design and adopted a qualitative research approach. The data was collected following a purposive sampling of eight non-state radio stations whereby the eight radio stations provided a total of 36 broadcasts, which were transcribed and translated from Kinyarwanda to English to facilitate the analysis. I also conducted interviews with a

total of eight key informants who were radio stations' employees, thus one from each radio station. The interviews were also transcribed in English and analysed. In this chapter, I discussed the approach to qualitative data analysis that I used, and explained how I proceeded in building coding frames with main categories and sub-categories, and then segmented and coded the data. After trying out and evaluating codes, I finally interpreted each segment. The results of the analysis are provided in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 5

THE RADIO AS A FACILITATOR OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Introduction

This chapter analyses and discusses the findings from the interviews and radio content that was used to build coding frames with main categories and sub-categories under the guidance of the public sphere theory (Habermas, 1989). The chapter considers how radio stations became an example of the public sphere, where the radio stations gave the public a voice to express their opinions about the legal reform allowing access to abortion for minors. Through various formats, the radio stations helped the audience to access the public sphere. Particular attention was paid to the way journalists gathered and disseminated information on the topic and broadcast it to explain it to the population and raise awareness about the new law. The chapter comprises two parts. The first part includes the analysis of main categories and sub-categories emerging from in-depth interviews with radio station staff, exploring the variety of formats used to cover the legal reform, and the reasons which motivated the radio stations to cover this important development. The second part includes the analysis of radio content, where a wide range of voices on the topic were represented in the public sphere. The chapter provides responses to the research questions:

- 1) How did the selected radio stations cover the legal amendments to abortion access for minors in Rwanda?;
- 2) How are Rwandan citizen voices reflected in non-state radio's coverage of this issue?;
- 3) How do selected radio stations represent issues related to legal abortion for minors in Rwanda?;
- 4) How do the radio stations' policies, guidelines, practices, and other news-making factors impact the coverage of abortion for minors in Rwanda?

Table 5.1: Categories and sub-categories of analysis in relation to the public sphere

Main categories and sub-categories from interviews with radio station staff	Main categories and sub-categories from radio content: Information and Opinions
COVERAGE AND REASONS Sub-categories	OPINION FOR AND INFORMATION
Format	Sub-categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>News reports</i> - <i>Live talk shows</i> - <i>Pre-recorded magazine programmes</i> - <i>Public feedback and interaction</i> 	Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing factual and balanced information - Providing information on the law - Awareness - Reasoned arguments
REASONS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing factual and balanced information - Providing public education - Influencing public attitudes - Providing sexual education to the youth 	Expression of opinion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expression of opinion - Discussion of issues of concern - Advocacy - Suggesting alternative solutions to abortion
Discussion on issues of concern <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraging free expression of opinions - Covering controversial issues amongst diverse audiences - Advocacy for wider accessibility of abortion services - Encouraging discussions on issues of concern - Highlighting teenagers' hardship and injustice 	Inclusive public sphere and debates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public authorities' voices - Religious authorities' voices - Teenagers and mothers' testimonies - Experts' voices - Parents' voices

Source: The author

Part one: Analysis of interviews with radio station staff

In this section, I discuss the motivations for radio stations to cover the legal reform allowing access to abortion for minors. Quotations from the interviews and radio content are analysed and discussed, informed by an understanding of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989) and investigating how the radio stations facilitated or

prevented operating as a platform for the public sphere in their coverage of the legal reform. Responses from the interviews, participants gave a part of the response to the research questions: “How did the selected radio stations cover the legal amendments to abortion access for minors in Rwanda?” and “ How do the radio stations’ policies, guidelines, practices, and other news-making factors impact the coverage of abortion for minors in Rwanda? ”. The main category of ‘coverage’ is discussed through an analysis of the formats that each station used to cover the legal reform. The category of ‘reasons’ to analyse the factors which motivated the radio stations to cover the legal reform expanding abortion for minors. Therefore, in this first part, I analysed the interviews with participants following the sub-categories for ‘coverage’ and ‘reasons’.

Radio coverage of the legal amendment

Chosen formats

The eight participants interviewed said that they covered the legal reform allowing abortion for minors under various genres, which included news reports, live talk shows, and pre-recorded magazine programmes.

All the eight radio stations covered the legal reform allowing abortion for minors under the format of news reports. Regarding the pre-recorded magazine programmes, only Radio Salus covered this format in addition to the news report. For live talk shows and debates, Flash FM produced two live talk shows, Radio Huguka produced one live talk show, KT Radio produced one live talk show, while Radio 10 produced two live talk shows. The total of the content comprised 36 broadcasts as provided in the following table (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2. Details on broadcasts

Name of the radio station	Format of Broadcast	Length	Broadcast date
1. Flash FM	News reports 1. Intense controversies and arguments over the issue of abortion provision: activists want abortion to be performed by nurses and midwives	3min 00sec	10/12/2020
Flash FM	2. Controversy over legalising abortion for children below 18 years	3min 49sec	03/10/2018
Flash FM		2min 20sec	24/07/2020

	3. People do not agree with health institutions on the issue of legalising abortion.		
Flash FM	Live talk shows 4. Live talk: How can we link the law allowing abortion and the culture	47min 17sec	05/ 12/ 2021
Flash FM	5. Ikaze Munyarwanda: The law on abortion generates controversies in Rwanda	47min 09sec	22 /05/2019
2. Radio Huguka	News reports 6. Ruhango, controversy on abortion	2 min 31sec	---
Radio Huguka	7. Muhanga, Parents do not agree with the law	3min 07 sec	---
Radio Huguka	Live talk shows 8. Gospel show: the abortion law	1hour 30 min	2021
3. Radio Isangano	News reports 9. Awareness of abortion law	2min43 sec	---
Radio Isangano	10. Karongi, Teen mothers happy to learn legal abortion	2min 44sec	---
Radio Isangano	11. Karongi, Religious View on abortion	2min 54sec	---
Radio Isangano	12. Nyamasheke awareness of abortion law	3min 03sec	---
4. Radio Ishingiro	News report 13. Radio Ishingiro Vox Pop	1min 24sec	---
5. Radio Izuba	News report 14. Ngoma, East opposition to the abortion law	2min 58sec	--
6. KT Radio	News reports 15. Rutsiro, they are happy to learn about the new abortion	4min 58 sec	---
KT Radio	16. The law is against illegal abortion even for those in the legal framework	3min 54sec	---
KT Radio	17. The abortion law encourages fornication	3min 26sec	---
KT Radio	18. Arguments on abortion law	3min 35sec	---
KT Radio	19. Unsafe abortion effects on girls' health	3min 48sec	---
KT Radio	20. Musanze teen mothers were trained about the new law legalising abortion	3min 09sec	---
KT radio	21. Kigali abortion is not a solution	3min 36sec	---
KT Radio	22. Abortion law in Gakenke District	3min 09sec	---
KT Radio	23. Legal abortion	2 min 36sec	--
KT Radio	24. There is no law legalising abortion in Rwanda	3min 00sec	---
KT Radio	25. Abortion law (MoH press conference)	3min 27sec	---
KT Radio	Live talk shows	58min 02sec	---

	26. Talk show: <i>Ubyumva ute?</i> (What is your opinion?)		
7. Radio 10	News reports 27. Opposition to abortion and contraceptives for teenagers	3 min 51sec	---
Radio 10	28. Controversy in Nyabihu / West	3min 49sec	----
Radio 10	29. Controversy in Southern Province	2min 10sec	13/08/2022
Radio 10	30. Musanze North abortion is strangling a baby	2min 24 sec	13/08/2022
Radio 10	Live talk shows 31. Live in News: The abortion law	50min 25sec	13/08/2022
Radio 10	32. Zinduka talk show: Abortion: What have those babies done to deserve death?	1hour 10min	11/10/2021
8. Radio Salus	News Report 33. Nyamagabe, they support abortion law	2min 15 sec	---
Radio Salus	Pre-recorded Radio magazine Programmes 34. Health programme: Reproductive health: safe abortion	45min 53sec	2021
Radio Salus	35. Health programme: Illegal abortion and what the law says about safe abortion	36min 04 sec	2021
Radio Salus	36. Laws programme, the law allowing legal abortion	29min 40sec	2022

Source: The author

During the interviews, the participants explained that they covered the legal reform in different formats because they wanted to create some space for public expression. They recognised that it was a topic of interest to different groups, as was expressed in the following comment:

When it (the updated law) was still a draft, people started talking about it. We started to produce radio programmes like talk shows and debates between all concerned sides like parents, government institutions, civil society, etc.

(Participant 5, Kigali).

The participant in the above indicated that their radio station engaged in inclusive debates whereby the radio station engaged government institutions, activists, experts, and ordinary citizens to participate in debates to discuss the legal provisions of

abortion for minors as an issue of concern for Rwandan society. The following statement added to this claim:

We produced news, programmes and talk shows. We wanted to know the views of all Rwandans, the government, and civil society, we wanted to hear from all of them (Participant 6, Kigali).

The above arguments are a testimony that the radio stations aimed to broadcast balanced discussions, which is central to the functioning of a democratic public sphere. They considered that a diversity of formats would have ensured a diversity of opinions on the topic.

After it was published, there were news reports; feature stories, whereby journalists used to go to the field and collect people's views on the law and make news reports to be broadcast. There were also hard stories when there were events that journalists went to cover and produced news stories to be broadcast (Participant 5, Kigali).

The participant's point of view indicated that by focusing on the topic as an issue of human interest, journalists found the audience in their own contexts, to interview them about their views regarding the legal reform. To some extent, this provides evidence that the radio station aimed to create an inclusive public sphere.

The coverage of events for hard stories showed that radio stations participated in raising awareness of the legal reform when they reported the government's decisions and explanations from the event's organisers on the legal reform. The broadcasting of government position indicates that sometimes radio stations eventually serve as a mouthpiece of the government or other event organisers.

While feature stories show a deliberate editorial decision on the search for more inclusive information by journalists, the participant in the above argument indicated that the radio station mixed the opinions of their audience, with the public authorities and experts to provide facts and explanations and to balance information. Participants provided explanations using a variety of formats to be able to provide comprehensive information and public education.

We covered the legalisation of abortion in various formats: Magazines, news reports, debates, interviews, and other radio programmes. We invited doctors

from the nearest district hospital Kabgayi, and we asked them questions about SRH and abortion, is it possible to have an abortion and not risk any post-abortion complications? What about some other speculations that when one gets an abortion, there are risks to never have other children? What is the impact of abortion on a child? And they explain (Participant 7, Provinces).

This argument shows the variety of formats aimed at explaining to the audience about issues concerning SRHR and the safety of abortion performed at the hospital. Participants explained that they used this variety of formats to ensure that they could include expert voices who would answer questions that were issues of concern to the public:

Because people speculated about the post-abortion consequences that may affect a child, then we also wanted to see the long-term impacts it may have on the girl (Participant 5, Kigali).

One participant explained that their radio station covered the law in different formats, to promote a more nuanced understanding of the topic and what it meant for women's rights:

We produced a series of news reports and radio programmes. We believe that it is important for people to understand that women have the right to their bodies and that abortion is also included in those human rights. Hence, we produced more than five stories on this same topic (Participant 1, Provinces).

Another participant commented on how the coverage in a variety of formats allowed their radio station to respond to an issue of significant interest to listeners.

You know, when it was published it received a lot of opinions from all the categories of Rwandans. It was talked about almost everywhere; it was trending on social media, and everyone was giving opinions. As a media house, we had absolutely to cover it, we could not even escape it because it was the reality at the time (Participant 5, Kigali).

The participant indicated that coverage in various formats prompted both factual reporting (news) and opinion-based discussion (talk shows).

We also come back on it in our live talk shows in commentaries mainly when it has been broadcast in the news. We analyse it mostly in the morning shows in order to hear what the community says (Participant 3, Provinces).

The participant indicated that talk shows often served as forums for debate and deeper exploration of the social and moral dimensions of the topics covered in the news. In this study, news on the legal reform to extend access to abortion to minors in Rwanda served as a case in point.

Public feedback and interaction in the public sphere

All the participants indicated that they gathered information and opinions using interactive media, especially through mobile phones, short message services (SMS), Facebook, call-in shows, and WhatsApp messages:

Apart from these debates and news stories, we also have live talks in the news hour. This is done, for example, when the news presenter sees such an interesting story, and at a given moment takes some minutes to discuss it with the audience. They may start by reading SMS, viewing comments on Facebook and other social media platforms and then interact with the audience (Participant 5, Kigali).

The participant explained that they engaged in discussions with their audiences via social media and electronic devices such as mobile phones, which allowed the public to express their views on the legal reform. They affirmed that using these channels of communication helped them provide an opportunity for their audiences to participate in public debates through the live talk show formats and online platforms, and share their views on the legal provision of abortion for minors.

We open lines for calls and post topics on our social media platforms for the audience to comment and give their views. We discuss with the audience, and they propose conclusions and solutions. Yes, we give them the line and let them call us, they give feedback using our Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms (Participant 3, Provinces).

The participant recognised that the discussion in live talk shows helped the audience to express their opinions and resulted in the audience proposing solutions. This is as

it was envisioned in Habermas' (1989) public sphere; whereby citizens debated issues of public interest and proposed solutions. Other participants added that they received feedback through interpersonal communication in addition to the convergence of new media and traditional radio.

We can even meet on the road while walking and they tell you what they think because they know us. Sometimes they comment on what is broadcast in the news. One may say, "I agree with what you said or I do not agree" (Participant 1, Provinces).

Given that the radio station operates within communities where the audience knows journalists, they could interact at the personal level and make some comments on radio programmes. Radio stations get the public's feedback from the field as well: *"We go to the field and find them where they are, that is how we know what they think. But some come here to tell us what they think."* (Participant 8, Kigali).

The above comments indicate that radio stations offered their audiences various opportunities to give their feedback and to participate in sharing their views in the radio coverage of the topic. The journalists' fieldwork where they conducted interviews to broadcast on radio stations, played an important role in helping the radio stations to make known the public's opinion about the legal reform. In addition, the convergence of traditional radio with the Internet helped in facilitating the interaction with the audience who directly participated in radio programmes via social media, smartphones, and the use of mobile phones in texting short messages. Therefore, radio stations promoted an inclusive public sphere by availing a variety of means to share their views regarding the legalisation of abortion for minors.

Reasons for the coverage of abortion legislation

During the in-depth interviews, participants showed that they covered the legal reform allowing abortion for minors for various reasons, including providing information and education, covering controversy, influencing opinion, and playing a role in advocacy for access to SRHR.

Providing information and education on abortion law for minors in Rwanda

All participants who were interviewed recognised having covered the legal reform on abortion for minors in Rwanda because they wanted to provide factual and balanced information to their audiences about the new law. One participant explained,

In fact, the government started an issue and we also had to cover it. And people used to talk about it everywhere, on Twitter, and other social media platforms. So when you see something like that, you must invite credible sources who can provide credible information. This helped to clarify the information so that it could not continue to be considered a rumour. We served as a channel and gave the issue the right way to be understood (Participant 5, Kigali).

The participant above indicated that the publication of the law allowing abortion for minors enflamed public opinion, and people started to interpret it in their own ways, which necessitated the radio stations to intervene and broadcast explanations from an expert perspective to clarify the legal reform. The argument implies the role of the radio station to provide the audience with accurate and factual information and explanations to promote the understanding of the law appropriately.

Another participant explained that their radio station provided the audience with information regarding minors' rights to accessing safe abortion services, with the hope that the knowledge could be beneficial to the community where the radio station operates:

For example, if someone hears about the possibility for a teenager to access abortion services at the hospital on our radio station, it may happen that one day it happens that a given schoolgirl who was about to abandon school due to early pregnancy goes to the hospital and gets the abortion service. She will continue with her studies, and on our side, our goal would have been achieved. Because after completing her studies, she will work and develop herself and contribute to the country's development in general (Participant 7, Province).

The participant above was referring to the fact that their radio station's main goal is to promote the community's development. The participant recognised the role of the radio station to inform the public and to provide education at the same time. He therefore believed that the radio content on legalising abortion for minors would

contribute to drawing the public's attention to the consequences of early pregnancies on young girls, and allow them to access this service if required, to further their own development and the development of Rwanda in general.

Raising awareness was a key reason given by participant for the coverage of the legal reform:

NGOs, civil society, and government institutions started to do media tours countrywide to sensitise the citizenry on this legal reform, especially aiming at raising awareness on the right of minors to access safe abortion services. This was another motivation because we participated in these media tours and covered stories (Participant 7, Provinces).

The participant indicated that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government institutions served as the main source of information regarding the legal reform. The radio stations aligned with various actors to raise awareness of the law because they wanted to educate the public about the legal reform.

One radio station in Kigali affirmed having received information regarding the legal reform from advertisers who used to buy space on radio stations, and the radio stations hosted their radio programs.

We have clients such as Safe Generation Organization (SGO), which mostly works on issues related to sexual reproductive health; we also work with Health Development Initiative (HDI) when they have any information that they want to communicate to the audience they come, we plan a radio programme then we produce and broadcast for them (Participant 5, Kigali).

The inclusion of advertisers and stakeholders indicated that radio stations provided one-way information through different radio programmes, which on the one hand helped the radio stations to provide current and credible information from appropriate sources. However, on the other hand, this information may have been manipulated by the advertisers and stakeholders. As a result, this may reduce the objectivity of the information broadcast.

Influencing public attitudes

Participants explained that they covered the legal reform because they were convinced that it was possible to influence social attitudes with radio messages:

I think that people change their attitudes because there are discussions and explanations about this law (Participant 2, Provinces).

The above participant assumed that the fact that radio stations provided information by enabling discussions and providing explanations from credible sources, could have an impact on people's attitudes regarding the legal reform. The participant expanded on the need for audiences to realise that the legal reform was an example of social change necessary to protect girls. This is exemplified below:

We try to explain and tell society that culture grows and changes, and the society's beliefs and attitudes can change with time. So, even this law permitting young adolescent girls to access medical abortion should be put into practice to protect the interests of those young girls (Participant 2, Provinces).

The above comment highlights the role of the media in facilitating the public's understanding of cultural evolution, particularly regarding sensitive topics such as abortion. This aligns with the media's role in promoting public awareness and acceptance of legal reforms. The participants recognised that attitudinal change was likely, although measuring this change was not easy.

Even if there are no testimonies of parents who changed their attitudes toward abortion and could go with their children to the hospital for abortion. I think that there are many whose attitudes changed and currently know where they can get that service whenever they need it (Participant 2, Provinces).

The participant indicated that parents' attitudes may remain personal for those who support the legal provision of abortion for minors and who cannot share their views publicly, for fear of stigma. However, they highlighted the role of radio stations to equip the public with the much needed information, which might reduce stigma and allow young people to access the services they need.

The participant particularly reflected on the fact that they found it important to encourage understanding of the law by including explanations from experts.

In those various radio programmes and news, we help citizens to understand the good reasons for this law, by inviting experts: lawyers, and members of parliament so that they can explain it well in order to change those attitudes, which are also based on social and cultural norms and religious beliefs (Participant 2, Provinces).

The belief that the inclusion of experts's views in the coverage of the legal reform would affect communities' attitudes and encourage acceptance of the new law, is an indication of the power of radio to influence communities.

In this study, the participants are considering a positive change that can be brought about through these broadcasts. When a radio station tries to manipulate or control public attitudes, this may interfere with the public sphere by undermining democratic discussion. A truly functioning democratic public sphere depends on the media being a neutral forum for discussion, and not a tool for propaganda or influence.

Providing sexual education to the youth

All the participants reported that they covered the amendment of the law in the context of advancing access to SRHR and provided information specifically targeting young people. For example,

Nowadays, even at eight years old, children have access to smartphones and can watch whatever they want, even pornographic movies. So we consider that they also need to receive some content from the radio aiming at providing sexual reproductive health education so that even if they use those technological tools of communication, and that they have access to a variety of content from the Internet, they might acquire reliable information regarding sexual reproductive health (Participant 7, Provinces).

The participant above assumed that radio stations were capable of providing credible information to balance with misinformation or sensationalised content from the Internet, and considered the role of radio in providing a more balanced perspective on sexuality.

Some participants indicated that the need for sexual and reproductive health information among the youth was a motivating factor. One participant expressed

concern about the way that teenagers do not access this information from families, because of the cultural values, which do not permit open discussion on sexuality.

Anything about sex is considered taboo in society. People are ashamed and avoid talking about it. This makes sexual issues unusual and pushes us to cover them more often to break those taboos and allow the youth to discover the truth. So, the youth are curious to know about sexual reproductive issues and we provide them with accurate information (Participant 8, Kigali).

The participants affirmed that their radio stations aimed to satisfy the curiosity of young people by providing reliable information. For example:

We realised that those children are curious to know about sexual and reproductive issues. Hence, they pay attention when someone talks to them. They go to seek information anywhere because in their own families, such subjects are considered taboo! So, by seeking information outside the family, they retain false information (Participant 2, Provinces).

The participant above indicated the culture of silence around sexuality and the reluctance to discuss sexual issues in families leads the youth to get false sexual information because they seek information from non-credible sources.

The pervasiveness of the myths around sex motivated the radio stations to orient their coverage aiming at providing credible information. One participant explained,

For example, one can tell you that “a girl can get pregnant because when having sex, the boy lies on her. But if you change positions and that you (girl) lay over him you will not get pregnant!”. Then a girl may try that position and get pregnant! So, this interesting misinformation in this area of sexual reproductive health compelled us to orient our coverage to SRHR (Participant 2, Provinces).

Another participant argued:

When they meet other brilliant children, who have interacted with the Internet and have some knowledge of sexuality, those children with no information receive false information about their own sexual and reproductive health. They may start having sex without knowledge of how to have protected sex or to

prevent pregnancy. The consequences are those early pregnancies we can see today (Participant 7, Provinces).

In the above arguments, the participant made a general analysis according to which sexual information from the Internet is not trustworthy for the youth. Therefore, they thought that with radio messages, they could provide credible sexual information on SRHR. Even though early pregnancies affect girls, the following statement shows that they also affect boys who impregnate them.

After falling pregnant, a child drops out of school, maybe the one who made her pregnant is another child, maybe a classmate or a schoolmate, on his side he also does not study appropriately (Participant 7, Provinces).

All the participants were concerned about the consequences of early pregnancies for girls, particularly dropping out of school and the hardships that follow childbirth. However, participants believed in the capacity of radio messages to provide sexual education, affect social norms, and change attitudes. They had confidence in the role of radio in contributing to reducing early pregnancies and their consequences.

The following comment shows that the participant was convinced of the power of radio messages to change both the youth and their parents' attitudes:

So, the effect is that if children had access to information, they could even influence their parents who do not support these issues of abortion and contraceptives (Participant 6, Kigali).

For the participants, the radio stations included the youth and the content targeted the youth to realise an inclusive public sphere whereby the information shared would be relevant to all audiences.

Covering controversial issues amongst diverse audiences

The participants who participated in the interviews argued that there is a generational conflict, which contributes to the controversy over the issues regarding ASRHR, especially access to abortion.

When you talk to the audience in general: girls, boys, parents, men and women, people in all categories do not have the same understanding of this law, especially abortion (Participant 8, Kigali).

The participants above recognised the contradicting attitudes among people, in the way they think about legal access to abortion. They further observed that,

When you talk to the youth, you find that there are two categories of opinions. One part is against it, and another is for abortion. Those who support abortion say that, "it is not possible to abstain, but we are also worried about getting pregnant. So, if I ever get pregnant, I will rather use all means and get it out!" (Participant 8, Kigali).

The participant also highlighted that people respond to the issue differently, depending on their age.

Parents who know that in the Rwandan culture, girls who got pregnant were killed, cannot understand how it has changed to the extent of allowing a child to get a legal abortion at the hospital as a right (Participant 8, Kigali).

Further, the participant recognised that cultural attitudes towards teenage pregnancy have changed with time, from the acceptance of the practice of killing pregnant girls for what was perceived as immorality and deviance, to providing legal and safe abortion. He observed that in case one person had lived in both of these two periods, they could hardly accept the new law.

The participant further noted that the controversy around abortion was among the motivating factors which encouraged their radio station to cover it.

You understand that everyone has a different opinion on the same subject makes it interesting. Therefore, we must cover it (Participant 8, Kigali).

While controversy does not always lead to rational discussion; in Habermas' (1989) ideal public sphere, diverse viewpoints are essential for robust societal debate. Covering controversial topics enables the station to showcase this plurality, reflecting its role as a facilitator of dialogue. Controversy also captures public attention and spurs engagement, and this makes the topic significantly newsworthy and interesting enough to cover, which might lead to greater listenership too.

Advocacy for wider accessibility of abortion services

Seven of the eight radio station staff, from both rural areas in the four provinces and the urban area (Kigali city) explained that they not only covered the legal reform, but also spent time analysing it and criticising it for its inaccessibility to all girls and women in the legal framework. The following quote criticises the limitations of accessing abortion:

We also show that access is not that easy because the service is delivered only by the medical doctors who are based only at the district hospitals. Health Development Initiative (HDI) says that sexual reproductive health and rights must be open to all, and must be easily accessible (Participant 6, Kigali).

Further, the participant argued that even if the law allows abortion under certain circumstances, it should be made more accessible. He argued that there are fewer hospitals than health centres and fewer medical doctors than nurses, which restricted access to abortion.

They should even allow health centres and health posts, which are at the cells and sectors' levels to deliver abortion services (Participant 6, Kigali).

These reflections imply that this radio station's coverage aimed at advocating for expanded access to abortion for more girls and women, which highlights the role of the radio in reflecting on important issues affecting society to advocate to the public authorities who have the ability to bring changes. Another participant thought that access to abortion should be more liberalised:

The law on abortion was revised and legalised abortion only for some categories of people. Why is it only applicable to these categories, and not to the remaining ones? Why isn't it open for all women? (Participant 8, Kigali).

participants also highlighted that some aspects of the law were unclear and that some women who are not within the legal framework can misinterpret the parameters for access and seek an abortion while they are not in the relevant categories.

For example, the law says that when a pregnancy is a result of rape, the pregnant person can have a safe abortion. And for this category, there is no age specification; she may be an adult, adolescent, or any age. And when she

goes to the hospital, there is nothing she is required to present as proof of rape. Only her testimony is reliable. This may suppose that any woman can say that she is pregnant from rape and get a legal and safe abortion, even if the law did not say it in that way! (Participant 8, Kigali).

The participant further observed that the law, and the ministerial order of 2019 were confusing, and considered that the topic was, therefore, important to cover in the media. Giving the topic adequate media coverage was an important step towards enlightening society. For example,

What I think that they need to know is that sometimes we cover issues that are in the interest of our public and they give their opinions. When you analyse the law, you find that the law is unclear about those people who are not mentioned by the law but who will find themselves committing abortion as a crime because the law is not clear enough (Participant 8, Kigali).

The participant above expressed a need for awareness in order to avoid misinterpretation of the law, for the benefit of the girls and women who may need abortion services. Further, they highlighted the advocacy role played by journalists in these cases.

Because of the confusion in the law, even some victims of rape are refused abortion! For example, we have a story here that I covered; it is about a woman who was raped by three men and got pregnant..... According to what she says, she went to the health centre (because there are some health centres where the ministry deployed doctors who can provide abortion services) when she realised that she was pregnant at three months. However, she was refused access to the abortion service. We just did advocacy, pro-abortion activists promised to help, and maybe we will need to go back for a follow-up story (Participant 8, Kigali).

The quotation above highlights the role of radio stations in covering issues affecting the population and doing advocacy to help individuals to access certain services, and to encourage public institutions and civil society to do what is in their jurisdiction.

All eight radio station staff explained that the limitations of the new law were a motivating factor for radio stations to cover the legal reform. Given their wide coverage,

they also took the opportunity to advocate for expanded access to abortion. This provides evidence that radio stations can play an important role in advocating and boosting the voices of the voiceless and the voices of people who are marginalised and denied their rights to services in the public, in order to ensure that a more democratic public sphere prevails.

Encouraging discussions on issues of concern

The eight participants explained that their radio stations covered the law allowing abortion for minors because they wanted to offer a space for discussing contemporary issues affecting society.

We were mostly interested to know the reactions of our audiences, and we also focused on the consequences of abortion on a child's health. For example, in a radio programme named Ubyumva ute (what is your opinion), there was a debate on this law decriminalising abortion for minors and for other categories (Participant 5, Kigali).

In the imagined Habermasian public sphere, issues were discussed in public. Similarly, the participant above showed that the radio stations took the new information and discussed it in a live talk show where the public generated their opinions, and expressed their concerns regarding the possible effects of abortion for minors in Rwanda.

All the participants in the study showed that they covered the legal amendment because they were attracted by its topicality:

"Mostly because the issue of abortion is controversial, so it interests our journalists" (Participant 1, Provinces).

Controversy was recognised as an element of newsworthiness, and journalists covered it because they knew that it also sparked interest in their audience, and was likely to boost listenership. For example,

We wanted to know the views of all Rwandans, the government, and civil society; we wanted to hear from all of them. However, the problem is that, of all those categories as I have just mentioned them, they do not understand this

law in the same way. Some support this important reform while others oppose it completely (Participant 6, Kigali).

The participant above indicated that the radio station became a space for public debates where public institutions, civil society, and ordinary citizens came together in the debate. This indicates that the radio stations wanted to have an inclusive public sphere, which is the ideal Habermasian public sphere where all voices are represented.

Highlighting teenagers' hardship and injustice

All the participants affirmed that radio stations covered the legal reform because they were concerned about the increased number of teenage pregnancies in the country.

The statistics on early pregnancies that are published annually are also a motivating factor. There are reports that are published regularly showing how the number of early pregnancies among adolescent girls is increasing at the district level. Importantly, the whole government is concerned by this issue (Participant 3, Provinces).

The above highlights the important role of radio stations in providing timely and relevant information. Both radio stations from rural areas and their counterparts in urban areas recognised that the issue of teenage pregnancy was a topical one, and it deserved a wide radio coverage.

We cannot miss a story on this issue, because maybe there is a child who is not going to school, a child who has also given birth to another child, or when a child goes to beg on the road with another child on her back, that means that it is a big problem! (Participant 6, Kigali).

Another participant commented on the hardships faced by young mothers with illustrative comments on the likely outcomes for these girls:

We often encounter some cases of young girls taking care of their babies, especially in rural areas. As you go to cover other stories on the field as usual, you find a small girl carrying a baby on her back, and when you ask her, she tells you that it's her baby and that she is no longer going to school after giving birth. You can imagine a girl of fourteen, fifteen or sixteen years, with a small

baby on her back, with a hoe in her hands cultivating in other people's farms to get something to eat with her baby! (Participant 7, Province).

These descriptions show situations that the participant felt deserved journalists' attention and coverage because they affected their audience, and that the role of radio stations is to encourage discussions based on issues affecting the public.

Participants mentioned that some teenage mothers faced stigma and risked abandonment by both their own families and the fathers of their babies, and even by wider society in general.

Another thing that made us cover this legal reform is that we realised that teenagers who give birth are traumatised even by their own families (Participant 3, Provinces).

Another participant argued:

Some parents say, "Go away, you are not part of this family, you will no longer sleep in the main house, go to the smallest house like a kitchen or a house for domestic animals!" She spends nights there alone with her child without food (Participant 2, Provinces).

The quotations above show that the radio stations were compelled to cover what they considered as injustice in order to denounce the stigmatising treatment that teenage mothers endure. The participant recognised that there are consequences of the stigma associated with early pregnancies:

That stigma is also a cause of unsafe abortions. Because once minors learn that they are pregnant, they do not want anyone to know about it. Then, they decide to go to those traditional healers to get the foetus out in secret. Sadly, many have testimonies from their friends who aborted unsafely for fear of harassment in their families (Participant 2, Provinces).

The above comments indicate the participant's recognition of the role of radio stations in discussing issues affecting society, challenging stigmatising attitudes and encouraging civil society and the government to address the problems associated with teenage pregnancies.

Another participant observed that their radio station highlighted the unequal power relations in society and the injustices that affect teenagers:

We are mainly facing a problem whereby for example; an adolescent girl is made pregnant by an adult man, and in order to escape from justice, they try to give bribes/ corruption to the child's parents. The consequence is that the pregnant girl will not have access to justice, even the child she bears will suffer injustice because such a baby will not have the right to his father (Participant 4, Provinces).

The above comment indicates the choice of radio stations in voicing the hardships that teenage mothers and their children go through, highlighting that these issues of concern need special attention and sustainable solutions. All the participants indicated that they have witnessed the hardships of pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers even after the legal reform was enacted. Some of them explained that their choice to cover the teenagers' hardships was to support the implementation of the law allowing abortion for minors so that pregnant girls can access safe abortions.

Then those cases pushed us to think about the law that was published. We started to think that it would be useful if this reform was implemented. We also wondered if the concerned categories of women and society in general know it! (Participant 7, Provinces).

The comment indicated that non-state radio coverage aimed to make the legal reform known among teenagers and other concerned women in order to empower them with the knowledge of their rights to access safe abortion legally. Other participants explained that the suffering of these young girls made some of them seek help and ask for advocacy from radio stations.

Journalists used to cover it because sometimes children between 14-15 years used to find us on the radio to ask for advocacy because they are impregnated mostly by married. Children testify about how they got pregnant, and explain about the hardship they are facing, and then parents can choose to protect their children (Participant 6, Kigali).

This comment shows the trust that the public has in the radio station as a voice of the voiceless, and its ability to denounce injustice and challenge unequal power dynamics

in society related to both gender and age. The participant's comments indicate that the radio stations included the voices of children when they denounced unhealthy practices of older married men having relationships with teenagers. This inclusion of marginalised voices makes for an inclusive public sphere, which addresses some of the criticism of the Habermasian concept (Fraser, 2010), and makes for a more ideal and democratic public sphere. Further, the participants noted that their coverage aimed to remind parents of their role in supporting and protecting their children, and the role of the government in finding solutions to issues affecting the citizens.

We advocate so that the government can do what is in its capacity to solve the problem and if they think they cannot do anything they search among their partners or promise it for next time or next year (Participant 6, Kigali).

The above indicates that the public sphere in radio stations did not only discuss issues affecting society but also sought solutions from the central government. Although sometimes the public sphere encourages the public who cannot make any further decisions after participating in the debates (Fraser, 2010), the inclusion of the concerned people, mainly teenagers speaking of their own problems, and the public authority indicated that radio stations saw themselves as playing a role in seeking solutions by advocating for the teenage mothers.

Part Two: Analysis of radio content

In this part, I analysed the two main categories of data generated from the radio content 'information' and 'opinions' with their sub-categories as illustrated in the table below:

Table 5.3. Radio content sub-categories related to the public sphere

<i>Opinion and Information</i>	
Sub-categories	Included voices
Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing factual and balanced information - Providing information on the law - Awareness - Reasoned arguments 	Public authorities' voices Activists' voices Experts' voices

<p>Expression of opinion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion of issues of concern - Advocacy - Suggesting alternative solutions to abortion - Inclusive public sphere and debates 	<p>Parents' voices</p> <p>Teenagers' and mothers' testimonies</p> <p>Religious authorities' voices</p>
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Source: The author

Public authorities voices

The content of seven radio stations showed that the radio stations included and broadcast the information provided by the public authorities as the main sources of information on the legal reform to allow minors access to abortion services. In a news report from Flash FM Radio covering the Ministry of Justice's press conference, when the law n°68/2018 of 30/08/2018 determining offences and penalties in general was just enacted in 2018 (Republic of Rwanda, 2018), the journalist adopted a neutral and objective tone when he introduced the news report by reminding listeners about the background to abortion legislation in Rwanda, and the development that culminated in abortion being authorised in the previous law of 2012:

The Rwandan law does not authorise abortion except when the person is a victim of rape, or the pregnancy is a result of incest, or forced marriage or in case the pregnancy puts the life of the pregnant woman at risk. Recently, this law was amended, and a new criterion has been added. Even a child below 18 years of age, is allowed to request and receive an abortion service (Flash FM, news report 2; 3/10/ 2018).

The journalist reminds the audience that the law does not offer universal access to abortion, and informs listeners about the new reform and the unusual criterion of expanding abortion for minors, which was the object of the press conference organised by the Ministry of Justice. This news report was produced in the context of the news value of timeliness, whereby journalists and media houses cover new occurrences of issues that are of interest to the audience.

At this press conference, the Minister of Justice explained the new articles of the law expanding legal abortion for minors and other circumstances to journalists in the following way:

Now the law accepts that even a child, a child, we call a child, anyone under 18 years can access abortion services. For a child, being pregnant is a legitimate cause, which can make her approach a medical doctor and explain her case then the medical doctor performs the abortion. Of course, it must be a professional medical doctor. He must work according to the oath he made to be a medical doctor serving human beings (Flash FM, news report; 2; 3/10/ 2018).

The journalist used this extract where the minister explained the category of minors, but did not include the minister explaining the other existing categories. This highlights the need to attract the listeners' attention to the changes made in the law, which since then expanded legal abortion services to minors. The inclusion of the voice of the Minister of Justice explaining the legal reform allowing abortion for minors indicates that the journalist was providing credible information from a credible source. The inclusion of the public authority in the news broadcast is evidence of radio stations encouraging discussions on government decisions in the public sphere.

On KT Radio, they also provided information using the public authority's voice. When the Ministry of Health published the ministerial order in 2019, the ministry organised a press conference to explain the conditions for access to abortion services.

The journalist paraphrased the words of a public authority as follows:

A Rwanda Bio Medical Centre (RBC) personnel in charge of the Maternal Health Department says that in general, abortion is a crime, but what has been done is to facilitate women in some categories to have a safe abortion (KT Radio, news report 25).

The journalist showed that the public authority highlighted the fact that abortion is still a crime, apart from the fact that in limited circumstances it is legalised, and the foregrounding of this suggests that the journalist wanted listeners not to be confused, and to avoid misinterpretation of the law. The journalist also chose to focus on the fact that abortion services under specific circumstances were easier to access than before. They said:

The only thing that the medical doctor requires from the patient is a letter, you just write a letter to the hospital requesting an abortion. It is the only document the medical doctor keeps (KT Radio, news report 25).

The above highlights the role of radio stations in informing the public about the changes in the law and raising awareness about the accessibility of abortion services by minors. On different occasions, journalists also quoted the Minister of MIGEPROF who provided explanations about the circumstances determining access to abortion.

It should be noted first that abortion is not legalised for everyone. We say, “under some circumstances” (in English). For when the life of the mother is in danger, medical doctors are obliged to perform an abortion to save the woman’s life or for children who have been sexually abused ...

We know that nowadays we have cases of 8 and 9-year-old girls who are sexually abused. But if it comes that this child gets pregnant, obviously that pregnancy will put her life in danger! (Radio Huguka, live talk show 8; 2021).

The choice of the radio station to include this quote reflects a focus on the issues of saving either the life of a woman or a child, and highlights the concerns about sexual abuse of young people. This quote indicates that abortion would solve other issues of concern affecting society, such as early pregnancies and their related effects on minors' lives. The minister's quotes call listeners to a sense of humanity and considers abortion in terms of saving minors' lives. This reflects the role of radio stations in the public sphere where they encourage debates on important issues that affect the public.

In another controversial news report from KT Radio, the journalist included the same Minister of MIGEPROF in the discussion where some interviewed people were concerned about the consequences of the law on girls' behaviours such as encouraging immorality (quotes are analysed in the next chapter on moral panics). The Minister considered the capacity of minors to take parental responsibility and the hardships they face after childbirth.

How can an 11 or 12-year-old girl be a parent? And you know that after giving birth, they face a lot of challenges like dropping out of school, discrimination and abandonment by families, among many others (KT Radio, news report 17).

The inclusion of the Minister's response informed the audience about the need to think about abortion for minors beyond ideas of morality, and as a solution to protect the rights of children.

The broadcast also included a quote from the Minister highlighting that it is not appropriate to force girls and women to give birth from unwanted pregnancy and noted: *"But why can you carry a pregnancy against your will?"* (KT Radio, news report 17). The inclusion of this quote aligns with current debates around sexual and reproductive rights and decision-making, although the right to abortion is only guaranteed in limited circumstances in Rwanda. The Minister's argument justifies the government's choice to respect women's choice to control their own reproductive health, which is in line with international human rights conventions. To the listeners, this quote brought into the public sphere an important issue and it triggered debate on the issue of unwanted pregnancies as an issue of concern affecting society and its needs for a solution.

The broadcast also highlighted that the new law was in response to a need, and included the Minister stating:

Those who are underage are allowed to have abortions legally, in case they need it (KT Radio, news report 17).

Including the Minister's arguments on the need to protect minors' SRHR as solutions to a societal problem highlights the government's decision to protect minors' rights to abortion. This indicates the role of radio stations in democratising the public sphere by including public authorities in justifying government decisions.

Radio Huguka, as a community radio, also included the words of a local leader, the Vice Mayor of Muhanga District, addressing the local population and explaining the law, with a focus on the provision of abortion as a solution to the problem of sexual assault.

The law is there, it advises a person who got pregnant from sexual assault, that there is a way to solve at least one problem. But it does not mean that you are obliged to terminate pregnancies! No, it is not written in the law that anyone who is underage, and gets pregnant must seek for abortion, if not she will be punished by the law! (Radio Huguka, news report 7)

Giving airtime to the local leader's words may encourage listeners to consider the issue of abortion as being more complex than some might imagine. However, this can be considered as government's manipulation of the public sphere when radio stations seem to be the voices of government.

The quotes analysed in the above section provide evidence that radio stations have ensured that the public sphere involves public authorities, who are decision-makers, to explain the government's decision to reform the law.

The voices of authority included in news reports and live talk shows provided factual information and clarified misunderstandings, but also reflected some of the complex issues that led to the revision of the law. These included the understanding that early pregnancies can have a devastating impact on the lives of children, and recognising that pregnancy as a result of rape can cause far more consequences for the rape survivors than just the pregnancy. When authoritative voices reflect this complexity of the issue on radio, this brings us closer to Habermas' (2002) ideal of the public sphere, as this may support more reflective discussion. Going beyond the provision of information in this way may actively engage listeners in reasoned deliberation, contributing to a more informed and participatory public.

Activists' voices

The radio stations also broadcast a range of voices from civil society, whereby some activists were supporting the legal reform allowing abortion for minors, celebrating the step the government took; while others were opposing this and forwarding arguments based on what they see as a different morality.

Activists supporting the legal provision of abortion continuously helped the government to raise awareness of the law through increased campaigns of awareness across the country and used radio stations as channels for this communication. This helped them to be heard in news reports, and radio magazines where they provided information about the law, and in live talk shows; participating in live debates on the issue with the audiences. On the side of opposing the new law, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and religious leaders used the same media and radio stations to express their opposition to the legal reform through various news reports and live talk shows.

The local NGO known as HDI was the most heard through all radio stations, both in the country's rural provinces and in Kigali city, explaining the legal reform allowing abortion for minors and other circumstances. HDI aims at promoting equal access to quality healthcare services (HDI, 2021); it carried out campaigns of awareness throughout the country, sensitising the population and raising awareness of the law to promote its implementation. Another local NGO, Empower Rwanda, which acts to empower women in some districts of the Eastern Province was also heard on Flash FM, supporting the law expanding abortion to minors.

The activist's voices included in the radio broadcasts often showed concern about unsafe and illegal abortions and their health consequences, and the risks of maternal mortality, which were a motivation for liberalising access to safe abortion. For example,

There has not been much research, but the few available research showed that many girls who seek post-abortion treatment are those who have tried to have unsafe abortions. Research conducted from 2010 to 2012 showed that in Rwanda, there are more than 60 000 abortions each year, and two of five who had abortions had post-abortion complications (KT Radio, news report 20).

Further, the activist's factual argument provides evidence of the incidence of unsafe abortions that he raised in the debate as an issue of concern affecting society. The argument indicates that the activist participated in the public sphere with reasoned and logical arguments to convince the audience of the significance of unsafe abortions. The activist indicated the need to expand legal access to abortion as a solution to unsafe abortions among minors and survivors of rape.

So, this is to help those who could resort to illegal and unsafe abortion. Another thing is that unsafe abortion causes a big loss for the country. Again, there are some who are sexually abused and still, they resort to unsafe abortion (KT Radio, news report 20).

Including the voice of this activist and his call for humane reasoning indicates the contribution of civil society to advocacy on the issues of unsafe abortion and its major effects on girls and women so that the public could consider legalising abortion as a way of satisfying an existing need and protecting girls' health. The argument also

represents unsafe abortion as an issue affecting the public, in order for the government and the public to pay particular attention.

The following argument was featured in a live talk show on Flash FM Radio, where an HDI activist indicated that expanding legal access to abortion was intended to eradicate morbidity and maternal mortality caused by unsafe abortions.

The main problem was the increased number of deaths due to unsafe abortions. Logically, the more a country has strict abortion laws, the more girls and women resort to unsafe abortions. And when they do it with unskilled practitioners, they risk their lives, which means that many die, and others have long-term disabilities. This is why it is good to have a law legalising abortion so that those who need those services may have them from the hospital (Flash FM, Live talk show 5, 22 May 2019).

The activist's reasoned argument in the debate on the legal provision of abortion called the audience's attention to the risks associated with the increased illegal and unsafe abortions and the need to ease access to abortion services to save lives. This indicates that the radio stations held a public sphere closer to the ideal one, where participants in the debates can advance good reasoning arguments in the debates.

Despite the fact that legal and safe abortion is only provided under limited circumstances in Rwanda, the activist's arguments offered a general reasoning based on the human rights to sexual and reproductive health. Another activist that featured on Radio Salus raised the same concern about maternal mortality linked to unsafe abortion as a justification for the legal reform. They said:

It was also in order to reduce the number of women who die when giving birth. In Rwanda, we have decided to reduce maternal mortality to 273/1000 women per year. Because as people who give life, they should not die in the process. No matter who she is. We cannot say that some give birth legally or illegally, but we just want to prevent maternal mortality, no matter how you got that pregnancy. Whether you have a pregnancy because you are married or not, there should be no one who dies from giving birth. You can see that these are tangible reasons for this law to be adopted. If you see that people are dying for this reason and think that if you do something they will not die, you can do it. The government, which watches over the rights of every citizen, cannot miss to

offer that opportunity. We also add that it is the right of women. Let me add this. In Rwanda, women have been promoted so that they can enjoy their rights (Radio Salus, magazine programme 36; 10/06/2022).

The inclusion of this activist's argument highlights that access to abortion can be discussed outside the context of perceived immorality and rather in the context of maternal health, mental health and social wellbeing. This typifies the role of radio stations as that of giving a voice to activists advocating for the rights of the marginalised and fighting against gender-based discrimination in the public sphere. The activist continued and said:

The number of rape is increasing in Rwanda. And many victims get pregnant. Then many of them also decide to have an abortion but resort to illegal abortion which also affects their health (Radio Salus, magazine programme 36; 10/06/2022).

The activist justified the legal reform to expand abortion for minors and other categories to listeners. The activist's reasoned argument provides evidence of the ideal public sphere where all issues of concern are brought to the attention of the public in debate.

Further, the activist discussed the methodologies used by traditional healers when performing unsafe abortions. They explained:

So, the person who goes to the traditional healer for an abortion is afraid of breaking the law that she can go to prison, with the person helping her. In that case, any error can lead to death. She dies from heavy bleeding. Even the way it is done there, it is like killing a person. Even when she doesn't die from the haemorrhage, the way her genital organs are injured causes infection (Radio Salus, magazine programme 35; 2021).

By highlighting the realities and health risks faced by individuals, the inclusion of these voices broadens the scope of the public sphere to include urgent issues of health and safety that might have otherwise been overlooked in the public debate around the issue.

The activists also showed that they were concerned that the country spends a large amount of money on treating post-abortion complications, further justifying the need for access to legal abortion. One of them said:

Unsafe abortions cost Rwanda over US\$1,7 million to treat unsafe complications (Radio Salus, magazine programme 35; 2021).

The activists also explained that the country needed to reduce the number of girls and women imprisoned for illegal abortions:

I think you have seen that last time the President of the Republic pardoned around 370 girls and women who were in prison for illegal abortion. This shows that we have many girls and women in jail because of illegal and unsafe abortions (Flash FM, Live talk show 5; 22 May 2019).

The inclusion of HDI activists in the radio stations' news reports and live talk shows provided factual information and expanded the debate on abortion to reasoning about the health risks of unsafe abortions. Inadvertently, this expanded the public sphere on the issue to include consideration of health, human rights and justice.

The radio stations also allowed activists opposing the legal reform to express their opinions. In two live talk shows: one on Flash FM, and another on Radio 10, a representative from the Rwandan Collective of Leagues and Associations for the Defence of Human Rights (CLADHO); an umbrella body of human rights organisations, openly opposed the legal reform. During the two live talk shows, activists from CLADHO and HDI participated in the same talk shows, where each party defended its arguments, where CLADHO's arguments were mostly opposing the legal reform expanding abortion for minors, while HDI strongly supported the law. Inviting the two opposed activists indicated that the radio stations promoted debates and different views regarding the legal provision of abortion for minors.

Given that CLADHO also works in advocating for child rights, the activist from this NGO advanced two main arguments, considering that the law is incomplete and violates the rights of children. CLADHO found the law incomplete because it did not provide a way to follow up and ensure justice for children who are sexually abused. The representative said:

I am looking at the law expanding abortion. It does not make a provision for the child to provide information concerning the person who made her pregnant before having that abortion. How will this person be punished? (Flash FM, Live talk show 5; 22 May 2019)

The activist brought into the debate the idea of justice for abused children where he considered that the pregnancy should serve as proof of rape, which could help to punish the offenders.

What is bad about this ministerial order is that the medical doctor has no right to say anything to anyone. This is why there must be an exception regarding the information which is provided here. It may be used by the police or other concerned institutions to facilitate the follow-up and punishment of the criminal (Flash FM, Live talk show 5; 22 May 2019).

The CLADHO was concerned about the right to confidentiality of the person seeking an abortion, assured by the law, which he considered a way of hiding the information from justice. The activist also communicated that the law is not for the good of minors but for the benefit of men who rape minors, as expressed in the following argument:

If we let things like this happen, people are going to continue to make those children pregnant because they know they are allowed to have abortions, and that there will be no justice, none will arrest them. This time they are not worried about justice since the pregnancy will be quickly terminated (Flash FM, Live talk show 5; 22 May 2019).

The activist's argument called the attention of the public to the gap identified in the law, which is the need for justice for pregnant children rather than the need for terminating their pregnancies. The inclusion of this opinion indicates the variety of the arguments provided in the public sphere, where radio stations encouraged arguments both opposing and supporting the legal reform.

While the activist from HDI showed that the law expanding access to abortion for minors serves to protect the rights of the pregnant child, the CLADHO activist argued that the law jeopardises the rights of the child:

We do not support that law, we disagree with this Ministerial order, because it does not protect the life and the rights of a child at all. (Flash FM, live talk show 5; 22 May 2019).

Further, the activist argued that being a minor should not be a valid legal ground for abortion:

We do not support having an abortion only because she is a child...

We only support abortion on medical grounds, only when medical doctors realise that the continued pregnancy puts her life in danger (Flash FM, live talk show 5; 22 May 2019).

With this argument, CLADHO communicated to listeners that abortion on medical grounds is the only way to protect the rights of the child. In a live talk show on Radio 10, the same activist noted:

When we consider human rights, we do not agree that abortion is a right because it is killing. And the first human right is the right to life (Radio 10, Live talk show 31; 13 Aug. 2022).

By raising the idea of abortion as violating the right to life of the unborn, this activist added another element to the public sphere, which provides evidence that CLADHO held a position of pro-life and religious beliefs foregrounding the debate on the fact that the foetus is a human being in the same way as the mother. The activist proposed an alternative solution to abortion, which is about protecting minors from early pregnancies:

We support the idea that a child should be protected from having early pregnancy. In case she gets pregnant there is no other solution but to let them give birth (Flash FM, live talk show 5; 22 May 2019).

CLADHO's arguments aiming at protecting both the rights of the unborn and those of the mother and protecting minors from early pregnancies show that the public sphere is where participants propose solutions to the problems affecting the public.

When the journalists asked the HDI activist for his opinion on CLADHO's argument proposing the prevention of early pregnancies, the HDI activist highlighted the need to

have a variety of strategies in protecting the right of the child against early pregnancies. For example:

I do not think that we are against the rights of the child, we instead protect the rights of the child by ensuring that a child has a safe service which will not harm her life in case one or other measures of prevention fail (Flash FM, live talk show 5; 22 May 2019).

The inclusion of guests with these opposing views showed that the radio stations held an inclusive and rational public sphere where they engaged in controversial but constructive debates.

With the above-analysed content, it is clear that the legal access to abortion for minors has necessitated radio coverage, and radio stations played an important role of being a space for the public sphere, by providing the much needed factual and balanced information, raising awareness of the law, and providing a space for free and reasoned debate.

While analysing the opposing voices of these activists from different NGOs, it is interesting to note that both were males debating on the right to abortion which is an issue that largely concern women. This adds to the critics of the Habermasian public sphere, which excluded women from public discussions (Fraser 2010) and the criticism of the media public sphere, which is also dominated by men (Lagos and Antezana, 2018). In all analysed content, the activist from Empower Rwanda, who participated in a live talk show on Flash FM, was the only female activist who contributed to the debates. The activist took the opportunity to call the attention of her listeners to the need for females to be aware of their rights. For example:

I think that it is very important to put efforts into increasing awareness of this law, especially among women. Because they are the ones who bear the consequences of being pregnant, and it is all about their bodies (Flash FM, Live talk show 4; 5 Dec 2021).

The activists in the above argument highlighted the gap of knowledge concerning women's awareness of their rights as a way of preventing the negative effects of unwanted pregnancies. The activist based her reasoned argument on the fact that society condemns mothers even for the pregnancies of their daughters. As a result,

some mothers help their daughters to seek unsafe abortions, which can affect the whole family.

When a child is sexually abused and gets pregnant, the whole family blames the mother. So, the mother knowing the cultural attitudes, once she learns that the girl is pregnant, wants to try to keep it secret and help the child to have an abortion secretly. Unfortunately, they do not think about the sexual abuse. What is important for her at the moment, is to get that pregnancy out, to avoid the stigma to the child and the whole family. Because the community considers a child who is pregnant as a prostitute (debauchee), a bad girl and many other bad labels that the community attributes to her. So the mother will make sure that the girl has an abortion, but in a traditional way from traditional healers (Flash FM, Live talk show 4; 5 Dec 2021).

The activist brought into the debate arguments related to rights and highlighted how pregnant minors are victimised, stigmatised and discriminated against. Importantly, the activist brought a new aspect to expand the public sphere on the issue concerning the social stigma associated with early pregnancies as an issue of concern, in need of public attention.

Further, the activist highlighted the risk of prison to both mother and daughter if they opt for an illegal abortion and the possibility, for the consequences to extend to the whole family.

The consequences are unpleasant in that the mother and the child may go to prison. Now, problems will increase in the family because maybe the mother goes to prison, leaving behind other small children at home. You understand how serious the issue is? Maybe those who stay at home will also be victims of sexual violence (Flash FM, Live talk show 4; 5 Dec 2021).

The activist also showed that a lack of awareness of the rights to legal and safe abortion remained an issue of concern, and highlighted the need to increase people's awareness through campaigns.

I think we must tell parents that it is good to help a child get a safe abortion in a legal way so that she can continue to lead a normal life free of the negative

consequences of an unsafe and illegal abortion (Flash FM, Live talk show; 5 Dec 2021).

The above highlights that failure to terminate unintended pregnancies affects girls' plans for the future, and added another component to the public debate, where the activist called the attention of the listeners to the future of pregnant minors and the right to planning in terms of when they are ready to give birth.

Further, the female activist highlighted that statistics on teenage pregnancies and school drop-out rates are high in the Eastern Province, where her NGO is based and operates, and highlighted a need for action in order to encourage gender equality in education. She said:

There is a large number of teenage pregnancies, especially in Nyagatare and Gatsibo Districts (Eastern Province). In fact, for the last five years, Nyagatare has been the first to have the highest number of teenage pregnancies. We ask them to think, if these kids are giving birth at this level, what will be the future of this country? We will find ourselves challenged to see that there is no gender equality that we always teach in education. We risk having only boys in schools without a good number of girls. Then there will be no balance in education. (Flash FM, Live talk show 4; 5 Dec 2021).

She also highlighted the inequality in the impact of early pregnancies between girls and boys:

We have conducted research in Nyagatare and Gatsibo Districts and realised that 70% of girls are impregnated by their boy counterparts who are also young like themselves. Then, when a girl falls pregnant and drops out of school, but the boy continues studying (Flash FM, Live talk show 4; 5 Dec 2021).

While many of the other broadcast debates on early pregnancies tend to focus on rape, child abuse and the power dynamics between old men raping minors, this activist showed facts that most early pregnancies are from under 18-year boys. The activist explained that the resulting gender inequality is unfair and supports the legal reform based on this argument.

So, girls must have the same rights to education as boys. If boys continue school, there is no reason for girls to drop out. Why don't boys' parents get

stressed at the same level as the girls'? Girls' parents should understand that girls have the same right as boys. On the side of the boy, life continues normally, but in the girl's family, there is mistreatment, and harassment because she is pregnant while they are both children (Flash FM, Live talk show 4; 5 Dec 2021).

In the above quote, the activist explained that children's rights should be protected by promoting fair treatment between male and female children, which challenges the precepts of the patriarchal Rwandan society. This makes sense of the role of the public sphere to advocate for the rights of all, including the oppressed and marginalised and all those who have no access to power.

The activist called for parents to pay attention to the effects of early pregnancies on minors' rights and the benefits of safe abortion. For example:

Parents should consider that there are many negative consequences for a child in giving birth than in having an abortion. This is so because after abortion, a child can go back to school (Flash FM, Live talk show 4; 5 Dec 2021).

The activists called for parents to increase their consciousness of the rights of their children to abortion in the interest of their wellbeing beyond the morality contexts, making sense of the ideal public sphere where debates are constructed around citizens' rights and participants propose solutions to the issues affecting the public.

This section on activists' voices, provided evidence that radio stations encouraged free expression and reasoned debates on radio stations giving opportunities to all sides, whether opposing the reform of the law allowing abortion or supporting it. In the debate on the law expanding abortion for minors in the public sphere, activists supporting the law were mostly concerned about the right to abortion in relation to the sexual and reproductive health of minors to reduce maternal mortality and other dangers associated with early pregnancies and with illegal and unsafe abortions. The activists opposing abortion for minors maintained that the foetus needs to be protected like any child. The intervention of all these activists constitutes evidence that radio stations promoted an inclusive public sphere where opposing and supporting parties came together in debates on issues affecting society and had the opportunity to propose solutions.

Experts' voices

In this section, I analysed the voices of various experts included in the radio broadcasts. These included lawyers explaining the issues raised by the audiences regarding the legality of abortion; and medical doctors who explained the need for legalising safe abortion services and provided testimonies in order to show the dangers of unsafe abortions.

Lawyers' explanations about health workers' reluctance to abortion

Journalists from Radio Salus sought lawyers' views on issues of concern raised by some teenage mothers regarding the reluctance of some parents and healthcare providers to support minors' access to legal and safe abortion from hospitals. Regarding the right of a minor to decide on an abortion on her own, one lawyer explained:

The medical doctor is there to implement what the law says. If the parent is not there or refuses to approve the child's abortion, the medical doctor should serve that child (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

The lawyer highlighted that the law should be applied as it is written. For more clarification, the journalist asked the lawyer if it was necessary for a child to have parental approval for the procedure.

The lawyer replied:

It is not necessary. That is why I said that sometimes health workers are not aware of what the law says (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

Further, the lawyer referred to the lack of knowledge, which could result in some health workers evoking old laws and explained that there is a form on which the patient explains her reasons for requesting an abortion, noting:

The doctor may include that the child came alone because her parents did not agree to come with her, and then the girl signs. That is the only proof the medical doctor needs. Then he/she performs the abortion. If the child dies, no one can sue the doctor because of that, unless there is evidence of being negligent (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

The above provided clarification that there was no need for health workers to refuse minors abortions. Apparently, including this voice in the broadcast provided the audience with the much needed factual information that might counteract some of the myths or misconceptions around access to abortion as outlined in the legal reform. This is a testimony of the function of radio stations and the media in general in the public sphere where they denounce injustices and dissect issues of concern affecting the public in order to seek solutions.

Lawyers' explanations of the legal provision of abortion for minors

The content analysed showed that in four radio stations (Radio Salus, KT Radio, Flash FM, and Radio 10) of the eight stations, journalists sought explanations from lawyers through various formats.

In a live talk show on KT Radio, the journalist asked a question regarding the dilemma of considering abortion as a crime and then expanding its legal access. The journalist showed that it was confusing and the lawyer explained:

Abortion as it has always been long ago in the penal code, since 1977 we had an abortion law, which condemned the act of terminating pregnancy. It was reviewed in 2012, and again in 2018... so abortion is a crime in Rwanda. Abortion is a criminal act, and according to the law, it has huge punishments (KT Radio, Talk show 26; 2019).

The inclusion of this explanation for the audience clarified that despite the legal reform, abortion remained a crime; therefore, listeners had to be cautious because the law provides punishments.

In the intent to seek more information, the journalist asked the lawyer: *"Is there any circumstance when a crime can be given the right to be committed?"* The lawyer replied that it is possible for the law to provide exemptions for some cases. For example:

When a girl or a woman, or a child has been a victim of rape or sexual abuse and got pregnant. These reasons, as you understand them. If they make the person feel unhappy, and ashamed to keep that child or that pregnancy. It is good for her to go to the medical doctor and ask for the pregnancy to be terminated. For me, it is a way of respecting the rights of that pregnant woman,

who unwillingly got pregnant, sometimes after sexual violence. Being separated from that pregnancy in the time provided by the law and the medical practices for me, is better than keeping the pregnancy and the shame that it causes (KT Radio, Talk show 26; 2019).

The lawyer explained the exemptions to listeners from his point of view and his own understanding of the effects of unwanted pregnancies, which cause discomfort, trauma and shame to the pregnant person. He brought a new element in the debate concerning the right to abortion of unwanted and forced pregnancies to protect the woman's dignity.

The lawyer also explained the reason for easing access to abortion for girls and women in the legal framework:

Today, in the revision of the penal code, in the thinking of people (who amended the law), they supposed that abortion must be something only between the pregnant person and the medical doctor. If you observe the grounds on which abortion is allowed to be performed, they are highly sensitive. Most of the time when a pregnant person is obliged to go to court, it violates her rights. Sometimes she was ashamed to go and tell someone else what happened to her. Then many decided to go in secret and have abortions, which caused many deaths because they were doing it illegally, secretly and unsafely. Then during the amendment of this law people thought that the medical doctor is the only expert in this area. It is the only person who is allowed to do this. And you know that they even make an oath! So why can't we trust him in the same way as we used to trust judges? (KT Radio, Talk show 26; 2019).

To protect the rights to safe abortion and the dignity of the pregnant person, the lawyer highlighted that abortion had to be a confidential service only between a medical doctor and a pregnant person, like any other health service. He also explained that it is a way of protecting the survivors of rape from resorting to unsafe abortions and that doctors were the only professionals in this area capable to recognise a pregnancy which deserves an abortion and how to do that, rather than a lawyer. This indicated to listeners that abortion is a right when a pregnancy is a result of sexual violence and that since the reform was enacted, abortion is offered like any other health service.

While the law seemed to facilitate access to abortion for girls and women in the legal framework, the journalist asked a question about the abuse of the law, since there is no requirement for the pregnant woman to have medical abortion.

Some people argue that allowing abortion in this way, whereby a girl or a woman can have an agreement only with the medical doctor, it will be considered as if abortion is open and legalised to everyone! (KT Radio, Talk show 26; 2019).

The lawyer was invited to a live talk show, whereby the journalist was able to receive text messages (SMS) and people's reactions on social media, and that helped in asking some questions on behalf of the audience. The lawyers explained that the law did not fully offer abortion to all who needed it. The lawyer put a kind of guardrail and said:

In case, after abortion, it is evident that the person on whom abortion was performed applied for it with no legal basis, or she lied, such a person is punished as a person who performed a self-induced abortion (KT Radio, Talk show 26; 2019).

This argument informed the public that the law did not open access to abortion as they may think. The above-analysed lawyer's intervention in a live debate on KT Radio where he responded to the concerns of the audience and the journalist's questions provides evidence of the ability of radio stations to serve as a public sphere in the convergence with the new media and mobile phone, where participants contribute to the debate as if they were in one public space.

Radio Salus also interviewed another lawyer, raising concerns about the abuse of the law. The lawyer answered:

The categories are clear in the law. But if anyone can seek an abortion while she is not in those categories, anyone who is interested can take that woman to court (Radio Salus, magazine programme 36).

The lawyers warned other girls and women who sought an abortion and were not mentioned in the current exemptions about the possibility of being reported and arrested for illegal abortion. The lawyer who participated in a magazine radio programme on Radio Salus indicated that abortion in the law, it is not as easily

accessible as people may think, commenting: “*People have to be careful, for our law is tricky*” (Radio Salus, magazine programme 35; 2021). Including the voices of lawyers in the broadcasts shows that the radio stations wanted to provide the audiences with factual and balanced information about the interpretation and the reasons for the legal reform. The information from lawyers served to assure the audiences about the right to safe abortion for minors, and survivors of rape, incest and forced marriages.

The information legal experts provided through various formats can convince the public of the reason for the government to expand legal access to abortion for minors and with the possibility of influencing acceptance of legal access to abortion for minors and other circumstances, which can be considered as radio stations contributing to the government propaganda. However, it also highlighted the role of radio stations in mediating the debate on abortion and providing public education and information, regarding the legal provision of abortion for minors in Rwanda.

Medical doctors’ voices

The selected radio stations mediated the debate on the law expanding access to abortion for minors by seeking factual information from medical doctors who are authorised to perform abortions. Just three radio stations included health experts in their broadcasts, and this study analysed live talk shows from Radio Huguka and Radio 10, and two radio magazines from Radio Salus, which included health experts. Through those formats, the medical doctors explained the safety of abortion when performed by medical doctors in appropriate settings. The medical doctors based their factual explanations on scientific facts and on their own experiences with treating complications emanating from unsafe and illegal abortion.

In a live gospel show on Radio Huguka, the journalist invited believers from Christian churches, including Catholic and protestant believers, two Muslims: one male and one female and two medical doctors specialising in gynaecology. While the believers were defending their faiths and condemning abortion in this debate, the medical doctors supported abortion when it is done safely and supported the legal provision of abortion.

The journalist asked one of the medical doctors to clarify the reasons for terminating pregnancies while a foetus is considered a human being.

Doctor 2, tell us about this. People here are saying that from the moment of the woman's conception, she already has a human being in her. Can you say something about it? (Radio Huguka, live talk show 8; 2021)

This question was to encourage expression in a reasoned debate and seek factual explanations from the medical doctor. The medical doctor explained the concept of a foetus, which cannot survive outside the mother's body.

So, when talking about human beings we consider the viability. Which means the ability of that human being to live outside the mother's womb. Here we have a human being who has the ability to live outside the female's uterus and another who cannot survive outside. And that viability varies from country to country. The World Health Organization set a range of weeks below which a human is not viable and above those weeks, a human can live outside the woman's body. But in some countries, they set their respective range of weeks of viability depending on their capacity in terms of technological development. For example, in Europe or the USA, they can set a few weeks because maybe their technology can allow a foetus of three or four months to survive (Radio Huguka, live talk show 8; 2021).

The medical doctor brought a new element of when a foetus is considered viable and can survive on its own in the debate. The inclusion of the medical doctor's explanations about the viability of the foetus provided information contradicting the beliefs which portray abortion as killing a human being. The medical doctor was showing that the possibility of the foetus to survive outside the woman's body guides policies around terminating pregnancies. This indicates the radio station's capacity to mediate the public sphere and contribute to public education with factual and scientific explanations.

The medical doctor explained the reason for the range of the duration of the pregnancy that was set for abortion in Rwanda:

But here in Rwanda because we do not have the same technology, as gynaecologists we set that range of 22 weeks because we know that in Rwanda

a foetus at that age cannot survive. If ever per accident or illness, a woman had an abortion at 22 weeks in Rwanda, we cannot save that foetus. Because in the context of Rwanda, it is not viable. This is why even for those who are in the legal framework when the pregnancy age goes beyond 22 weeks, we cannot offer abortion service because at that time the foetus is viable (Radio Huguka, live talk show 8; 2021).

Although the debate was between medical doctors and believers, the doctor was addressing the radio's audience, which is made of the community where the radio station is located in Southern Province, mainly rural and where religious beliefs are prevalent, but also with realities of early unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions as research has shown (NISR, 2020). Therefore, by explaining foetus viability, the medical doctor was showing the community that it was important to understand that up to 22 weeks, there is no human right violated by a medical doctor or by a pregnant woman when they terminate a pregnancy. This argument served to challenge judgmental arguments and attitudes towards girls and women who are stigmatised as 'killers' if they have had an abortion.

The medical doctor also introduced the idea of the right of the pregnant girl to access an abortion in case the pregnancy affects her mental health. Observing:

We must take into consideration two things: a child who is pregnant and the depression it causes on her. She may prefer to commit suicide instead of giving birth. So we consider that even if she has that problem, she does not deserve to kill herself just because she is pregnant. In order to save her and help her, the government and the parliament thought that we could put in place laws which can help those people who do not want to continue their pregnancies (Radio Huguka, live talk show 8; 2021).

The medical doctor highlighted the importance of abortion in case the pregnancy and motherhood affect the child's mental health, which can lead to death. The doctor's argument highlighted the minor's right to life and abortion as a service aiming at protecting that right to life, the right to a life free of inhuman treatment and coercion, which is characterised by obliging the person to continue a pregnancy against her will. This argument constructs abortion as a right to the life of the pregnant person rather than the foetus.

These explanations can be perceived as an encouragement for minors and others who are on legal grounds to seek safe abortion services since they are convinced that they are not about to violate the right of the foetus, and this information can also help to deal with stigmatisation. This indicates the role of public debates in the search for solutions to issues of concern through factual and reasoned arguments generated in the public sphere.

Another medical doctor interviewed in a health magazine programme broadcast on Radio Salus confirmed the right to abortion for minors in order to eradicate unsafe abortions and their consequences on minors' health:

It is new, but it was needed especially in order to protect the rights of children, because these pregnancies that we help them to terminate are unplanned especially when pregnant persons are still minors. It is helpful because like, for those children who get early pregnancies, some used to resort to unsafe abortions, which resulted in complications, and some even resulted in death (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

The medical doctor's argument indicates the dangers of unsafe abortion for minors. The inclusion of these arguments by medical doctors defending abortion to protect the lives of their patients is important in this public sphere because they show the role of radio stations in providing credible information and education to the public.

The medical doctors on Radio Huguka and Radio Salus provided their first-hand experience on the dangers of unsafe abortion:

The first consequence is dying. They go and seek the service from someone who has no skills and who operates in bad settings. When they see that it is beyond their control, they send them to hospitals. When they arrive at the hospital, you find that it is a girl or a woman who is bleeding and, in such cases, it is even very hard to save their lives. Many die in front of us from excessive bleeding. And we are shocked to see that the person gets to the hospital very late, too late to be saved; and dies! (Radio Huguka, live talk show 8; 2021)

The medical doctor indicated that seeking abortion from unskilled traditional healers operating clandestinely, in inappropriate settings, can cause complications and even

death. This argument supports the importance of the legal provision of abortion in order to protect the lives of those in need of abortion services.

Another medical doctor who featured on Radio Salus clarified the safety of medical abortion compared to what is offered by traditional healers:

If a child can go and have an abortion clandestinely, there are many consequences for her life, which may even include death. This is why we take measures in advance so that she does not lose a lot of blood. And you know that when one is losing blood, she is also losing life. So that is the first consequence when she does it unsafely, she may bleed a lot and finally die (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

The medical doctor on Radio Salus highlighted that the way abortion is done in hospitals is cautious because it is possible to manage haemorrhage with blood transfusion, whereas traditional healers do not have that possibility. The medical doctor also recognised that not only does death result from unsafe abortion, but also long-term disability because of infections.

A child may not bleed to death, but because of those tools which are not cleaned as we clean them in hospitals, because most of the time they use dirty tools. Then while performing an abortion, the child gets infections. Which will attack her uterus, and after a long period of time she will start suffering from the uterus, which will lead to a third complication which is about removing the whole uterus (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

The medical doctor warned listeners about the lack of hygiene associated with illegal abortions and added:

Sometimes you look at her, you give antibiotics and sometimes it does not cure it, the uterus has rotten and continues to rot... then, as a medical doctor you decide to open the womb and find that it has rotten. Then in order to save her life you just take it out. But you understand that she has got a serious problem. And when there is no uterus, that child will never have other children. That is a serious consequence because not only can unsafe abortion lead to death, but also it can prevent her from having children forever (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

During these programmes, the medical doctors were using simple terms in the Kinyarwanda language for their listeners to easily understand. The above doctor repeatedly used the term 'rotting' in order to show the reality of the danger of unsafe abortion. This may be frightening to the audience, however, hearing this from a medical doctor, can result in convincing listeners of the importance of seeking safe abortion services in order to avoid the danger of unsafe abortions.

The medical doctors also criticised the kind of medicines and methods used by unprofessional people to perform abortions. One medical doctor suggested:

Some use a mixture of herbals, and some introduce harsh tools into the womb to remove the foetus. That causes injuries to all genital organs in general including the uterus and can even go deeper and pierce intestines! (Radio Huguka, live talk show 8; 2021).

The other doctor explained:

Even the way they do it shows that they do not know what they are doing. Sometimes we receive patients and when we check we find that even the intestines have been cut! Intestines are not in the same place as the uterus, but you wonder how they managed to get there and cut the intestines! (Radio Huguka, live talk show 8; 2021).

These experiences drew the audience's attention to the consequences that seeking an illegal abortion can cause, whose complications are sometimes beyond medical control. These experiences called for the audience's sympathy to consider the legal provision of safe abortion to save lives:

That person should not come and die in the hospital while the law gives her a chance to have that service from professional and skilled medical doctors in a safe way. There is no reason to die from unsafe abortion. No! (Radio Huguka, live talk show 8; 2021)

The medical doctors were defending the right to access safe abortion services, and playing an advocacy role for these services.

The inclusion of the above testimonies from medical doctors in the debate was important because they offered their first-hand information about the danger of unsafe

abortion, which was overlooked in other discussions on issues regarding abortion provision. Bringing this information into the public sphere can impact on audiences' negative attitudes around the legal reform, which highlights the role of radio stations in holding inclusive and informative debates.

How the radio content encouraged the expression of opinion on issues of concern

The legal reform allowing abortion for minors was controversial in Rwanda. As a result, it attracted radio stations' coverage. Throughout the coverage, journalists sought the views of the population in their news reports as well as in live talk shows and magazines. This indicated their concern to air people's reactions to such a controversial law, given the socio-cultural context.

In one news report, a journalist reflected that:

This article received divergent views from the population whereby some support it and those who oppose it think that it is a way of encouraging fornication among teenagers (Flash FM, news report 2, 3 Oct. 2018).

The above quote highlights the radio stations' interest in airing divergent views on the topic. In this section, I analysed radio content, showing that the radio stations offered a space for the expression of opinions on legal reform from different groups. The space that radio stations offered. I analysed parents' voices, teen mothers' voices, experts' voices, and religious leaders' voices as evidence of how the radio stations achieved inclusivity through a variety of formats.

Parents' voices

After the publication of the amendment of the law allowing abortion for minors, some people's voices equated allowing access to abortion for minors with "allowing fornication" or encouraging immorality among minors.

Many of the parents' voices in the public sphere debates drew listeners' attention to the importance of religious beliefs and socio-cultural values. The following argument is from a Christian parent who participated in a live talk show:

Even God's commandment tells us not to commit adultery. So, these last days especially, the youth behaves as if adultery/ fornication is no longer a sin while it is the main cause of all these problems leading to getting pregnant; and leading to committing abortions and killing innocent babies. They should pay attention to their behaviour and abstain from having sexual intercourse before marriage. Then they will be able to have their wives and husbands legally and have children appropriately (Radio Huguka, live talk show 8; 2021).

The guest in the live talk show opposed abortion based on his religious beliefs, linking early pregnancy to immoral behaviours focusing on what he considered to be a hierarchy of 'sins' where fornication results in early pregnancy and in abortion. This indicated the hostility of some Christian parents to the legal reform.

The following argument was featured in a news report where a journalist interviewed parents in the Southern Provinces seeking their views on the legal reform.

In the Rwandan culture, it is not a good thing. And when you try to judge yourself, you can see that abortion is not a good thing that the law could provide as a right (Radio 10, News report 29, 13 Aug. 2022).

The interviewee based his views on cultural values, considering that abortion in the Rwandan context could not be part of human rights. Another parent said:

So what? Is there any right which allows you to kill a human being? (Radio 10, news report 28, 2022).

The speakers opposed abortion as a right because they constructed abortion as murder. Other parents showed concern about the possible consequences of abortion and were worried about supporting children to have safe abortion services:

I cannot help a child to have an abortion. Because if ever the abortion results in infertility, she will say that I am responsible for it. And I will feel guilty for encouraging her to kill her firstborn. And she will consider me as responsible for her problems (Radio Huguka, news report 7, 2021).

The interviewed parent highlighted both moral and health concerns about minors accessing abortions. As infertility is stigmatising in Rwandan society, this also reflects cultural concerns. The above arguments show the extent to which cultural norms,

religious beliefs, and the fear of health complications such as infertility can stand as challenges to the implementation of the amended law allowing abortion for minors in Rwanda.

In addition to the various opposing voices, radio stations also included the voices of parents supporting the legal reform. In the course of debates on the legal reform, some parents' voices suggested that giving birth should be a decision which needs to be taken with caution, for it is about taking parental responsibilities of raising a child. Their opinions reflected their beliefs that pregnancy and parental responsibilities for minors are burdens, and their preference to avoid them instead of taking parental responsibilities when they are not yet ready.

It is not good to have a child who will be considered a burden. She can terminate it and then continue her life as usual. This is why we see girls and women who abandon their babies after birth or kill them just after birth (Radio 10, Live talk show 32; 11 Oct 2021).

This argument supports that the legal reform allowing abortion for minors would solve issues related to nurturing unintended pregnancies.

Another parent interviewed by a journalist from Radio Salus in the Southern Province appreciated the fact that the law had provided the right to abortion for minors. From her own experience and that of her daughter, she recognised that safe abortion is a needed service. She explained that:

When she got pregnant, she was traumatised because she was at school. I was expecting much from her, but it was the contrary. I started taking her to the hospital, and this affected our finances in a huge way. Her siblings had to stop going to school because all the money was used for her treatments. What happened to me also happened to my daughter. Because I also got pregnant when I was young and was abandoned by the family, it was very hard for me. She also was sexually abused at 15 years old and got pregnant. This increased poverty at home (Radio Salus, news report 33).

The radio station included another parent's testimony in the debate, showing that early pregnancies are traumatising for minors and confirming that they would have helped their daughters to have a safe abortion if this had been available.

My child gave birth when she was 17. If I were aware of this law, I would have approached a medical doctor so that he/she could terminate it for my daughter. She is now at home; she can't go to school anymore. It's like life has stopped (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

Another mother added:

Mine gave birth when she was 16. If I was aware, I would encourage her to go to terminate it at the hospital so that she could continue with her education (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

The parents regret not knowing the existence of the law and having missed the opportunities to seek safe abortions for their daughters. This highlights the importance of awareness and the role of the radio in sharing this important information. These are among a few parents who can openly claim the necessity of abortion in the interest of the right to education for their daughters.

Another parent from Kigali featured in a news report on Flash FM agreed:

Yes, it can happen for a child to be pregnant. If she can have a safe abortion from a good medical doctor, it is a good thing (Flash FM, news report 2; 18 years, 3 Oct. 2018).

The inclusion of parents' optimistic views indicated to listeners that abortion can be viewed as a need, and safe abortion services can be viewed as a necessary service.

While other parents' arguments were against access to abortion for minors in the name of culture and religious beliefs, the inclusion of these testimonies indicates that some parents are supportive of the law allowing abortion for minors. It also provides proof that the judgmental attitudes about abortion are personal as they are not shared by all members of society. These voices can encourage those parents who would like to seek a safe abortion for their daughters.

The testimonies of parents who would rather seek abortion services for their daughters indicated that the public sphere on radio stations was inclusive, whereby issues regarding abortion access were approached from different perspectives. These parents' testimonies challenged the morality perspectives raised by others by offering

facts from their own experiences, which highlight the role of media and radio stations in encouraging the free expression of opinions in the public sphere.

The public sphere in broadcast engaging parents' voices included both arguments of parents supporting and opposing the legal reform allowing abortion for minors. Parents opposing abortion for children approached the debate from cultural and religious perspectives. It was also obvious that parents supporting the legal reform allowing abortion argument basing their reasoning on children's rights, including the right to education, future wellbeing, and sexual and reproductive health in general. The quotes above showed that the radio debates were inclusive and balanced, characterised by the free expression of parents' views.

Teenage mothers' voices and testimonies

In this section, I analyse some of the teenage mothers' expressions as broadcast on different radio stations. While this section analyses testimonies of minors who would like to have abortion services but did not, either because of ignorance of the newly amended law or because of a third party's reluctance, mainly parents and health workers; the radio stations also included teenage mothers opposing the legal provision of abortion for minors because of their ideas regarding morality.

A news report from Radio Izuba station in the Eastern Province covered an awareness campaign on the law allowing abortion for minors. The journalist from Radio Izuba station sought the opinions of some teenage mothers about this law. He first introduced teenage mothers who would not get abortion services, though it was provided by the law.

One teenage mother said:

"I cannot encourage anyone to do that abomination, they should have protected sex or to abstain to avoid pregnancy" (Radio Izuba, news report 14).

The teenager expressed her hostility based on her moral values in regard to the legal provision of abortion for minors, constructing abortion as an 'abomination'. Given her judgemental attitude towards abortion, she indicated that she would not have an abortion even when it was provided safely.

Another interviewed teenage mother in the same news report held a similar argument:

“It is not a good thing because when you abort you kill. You have to carry that pregnancy to birth” (Radio Izuba, news report 14).

Both teenage mothers held the same arguments as the opposing parents. Their views are dominantly influenced by religious beliefs and cultural norms representing abortion as an abomination and murder. Broadcasting these constructs alone could mean that abortion is only viewed in the context of socio-cultural and religious beliefs rather than sexual and reproductive rights. Amplifying the voices of teenage mothers opposing the legal provision of abortion could indicate to radio listeners that even teenagers who were in the legal reform do not agree with the legal reform and do not support abortion for minors. However, the same news report included the voice of one teenage mother who supported the legal provision of safe abortion in order to avoid unsafe abortion.

For example, there is a friend of mine who got pregnant and refused to tell it to her parents for fear of their reaction. She secretly went to seek abortion from traditional healers. The abortion was incomplete and she got an infection in her uterus. When she went to the hospital she had an operated, and they removed everything inside. Now she has no uterus, and she will never have another child. Maybe she would have gone to the hospital for a safe abortion, and all this could not have happened (Radio Izuba, news report 14).

The teenage mother’s experience described the role of the parent’s negative attitudes and fear of family stigma resulting in some teenagers seeking illegal and unsafe abortion, with possible serious consequences for their health. The inclusion of this perspective indicates the role of journalists in covering and broadcasting balanced information. Other radio stations covered the debate to show that some minors would have sought safe abortion services but did not because of a lack of knowledge of the newly amended law. As a result, some minors continued with their unwanted pregnancies:

I always knew that if you terminate a pregnancy, you go immediately to prison. And that is why I did not terminate it (Radio Isangano, news report 10).

Another teenage mother explained that:

The man who made me pregnant advised me to terminate it, but when I went to seek advice from others, they told me that if I terminated it, I would go to prison (Radio Isangano, news report 10).

Although the legal reform allows safe abortion on request for minors, these minors testified about their fear of the criminalisation of abortion and showed their ignorance of the law. On Radio Salus, another teenage mother explained:

I didn't know that it was possible! How could I accept to drop out of school knowing that the law is there to help me to continue my studies? (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021)

In some of their news reports and magazine programmes, Radio Salus, KT Radio, and Radio 10 included teenage mothers' voices relating their own experiences, highlighting that the law was indeed needed for it protects minors from facing challenges related to early pregnancies and early motherhood. The inclusion of these testimonies was another proof of an inclusive public sphere where the voices of those marginalised and with less access to power are made heard. So, including these voices is a commitment by the radio stations to democratising the public sphere.

A teenage mother interviewed in a health programme on Radio Salus in the Southern Province described how she tried to get an unsafe abortion so that she could continue her school. The journalist ensured the teenage mother's anonymity and modified her voice while explaining her experience.

I was 16 years old when I got pregnant. I was in senior four in high school. I got pregnant in an expected way, a man made me pregnant and that caused me trouble. I dropped out of school, I lost my family, and friends abandoned me. I tried to get an abortion several times, but I did not make it (Radio Salus, magazine programme 35; 2021).

Her testimony explained how she tried to get an abortion several times:

I had friends at school who knew someone who helped other girls to have abortions. Then they took me there and the person told me that I had to pay around 80 000 Rwandan Francs (RWF). I didn't have it! But before, they also

bought some tablets from the pharmacy. I took them but it (the foetus) did not get out. I also took a mixture of herbal medicines, and many other things but it did not come out. Then I continued to carry it. I was chased from home, then after my mother finally told me to come back home, then after that time I gave birth (Radio Salus, Magazine programme 35; 2021).

This quote indicates her lack of knowledge of her right to access safe abortion. In the flow of the interview, the journalist asked her:

When you consider how you suffered in searching for abortion in secret, and finally did not succeed to have it. If there was a way to have it in a legal way, would you take that opportunity? (Radio Salus, magazine programme 35; 2021)

The teenage mother replied:

I was thinking very much about my school which was about to stop and my long-term objectives that I could no longer achieve. So, if it was accessible easily and legally, I would have taken that opportunity and had a safe abortion. Because I was too young to have a child (Radio Salus, magazine programme 35; 2021).

As she continued her testimony, the teenage mother showed that she was among those who did not know that the law allowed access to safe abortion for minors as she further explained to the journalist: *“Even me, I was not aware of it, I recently heard about it.”* (Radio Salus, magazine programme 35; 2021).

Even if she affirmed that she did not know that the law allowed abortion for minors, she also told the journalist that she was aware of the risks included in having an illegal and unsafe abortion:

Yes, I knew it. I knew that if it was known I could go to prison with the person who was helping me. I also knew that I was putting my life in danger, that I could die, or have other problems like infertility, or infections. Because the way it is done it is not safe. But due to the way I wanted to continue my school and keep my family, I felt that it was really important for me to have it (an abortion) (Radio Salus, magazine programme 35; 2021).

Knowing well the risks of illegal and unsafe abortion and continuing to seek it anyway was proof of her determination to terminate her pregnancy and achieve her long-term objectives. This testimony served to show that unsafe abortions among teenagers are real in Rwanda and that in large part, they are due to stigmatisation and victimisation.

This is where the radio station's commitment to boosting the voices of the need for safe abortion services by showing the way traditional healers take advantage of pregnant minors and charge them a lot of money for illegal and unsafe abortion becomes important. An inclusive public sphere discussing issues related to the need for safe abortion could help limit many of those who need abortion from continuing to resort to unsafe abortions and risk post-abortion complications and prison.

KT Radio also broadcast the testimony of a teenage mother who testified about the hardships she went through after she got pregnant.

When I gave birth, the stress started since then! My father tried to help with the baby's clothes and other people with good hearts provided some utensils and clothes. But the big problem was about having something to eat. (KT Radio, News report 20)

Her testimony indicated poverty and food insecurity which affect teenage mothers and their children. Amid her poverty, she regretted having not known that she was allowed to get a safe abortion:

I damaged my future! If I had known it before, I would have taken that opportunity, and I could have continued my school. Because now I am suffering. I have to work hard to have something to eat with my child. I am obliged to carry a basket of fruits and vegetables and sell them on the street to see if I can survive with my child. If I knew it before (Crying ...) It (the law) is very important, if we had known it before, we would have gone to the hospital for a safe abortion. Because we take parental responsibilities while we are still young and that affects our lives negatively. We go through many hardships. (KT Radio, News report 20)

The teenage mother narrated how she was challenged by poverty, whereby she was obliged to be a street vendor and pay for her own accommodation with no support. This hardship of paying her rent indicates that she was no longer living with her family.

This provided proof of the reality of the stigmatisation, victimisation, and abandonment of teenage mothers by families and society.

The inclusion of these discussions about the lack of awareness about access to abortion, leading to keeping pregnancies, or resorting to illegal and unsafe abortion in the debate is an editorial decision that indicated radio stations' ability to hold an inclusive public sphere where all voices are heard.

The inclusion of these testimonies in the debate on the legal provision of abortion for minors is proof of the need for abortion services and the challenges minors face in accessing safe abortion services because of their ignorance of their rights. It also indicates the role of radio stations in promoting a democratic public sphere.

Radio Salus featured some testimonies in a health magazine programme that also focused on challenges in accessing safe abortion services for girls and women in the legal framework, which constitutes a barrier to the implementation of the legal reform. The quotes below show testimonies of teenage mothers who tried to get a safe abortion from the hospital and failed.

In order to protect the minor's rights, the journalist did not reveal her identity, and her voice was modified in order to allow her to testify freely.

I got pregnant when I was 13, now I am 15. The man who abused me sexually was over 38 years old, and when he heard that I was pregnant he escaped he is no longer in Rwanda. I knew that the law permitted me to go to the hospital and have a safe abortion. But I was hesitating to go there. On the one side, I thought that it was good to go there, but I also thought that it could be a bad idea, ... Many people came to advise me to go to the hospital for an abortion service. But my mother told me not to do that. And that if I dared, I could not come back home (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

The speakers' testimony provided proof of the lack of access to justice for some teenagers against adult men who raped them. It also highlights the judgemental attitudes towards pregnant teenagers from their families and negative attitudes toward abortion. The teenage mother recognised being aware of the legal reform which allowed her to get a safe abortion and recognised social-cultural attitudes from both parents and healthcare providers as being the main barriers to seeking safe abortion

services. In the course of her testimony, the journalist asked: *“But you could also go there alone, did you think that you can have the service?”* (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021)

The teenage mother replied:

No, I wouldn't have it. In fact, I went alone to the hospital. One day I had a dispute with my mother. She was angry and insulted me because I was pregnant. Then I was furious and went to terminate it (the pregnancy) at the hospital. When I reached there, they told me that they were going to help me, but I had to bring someone who would approve the abortion. When they told me that I was discouraged, then went back home and decided to keep it until I gave birth (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

This testimony provides evidence of how socio-cultural values and religious beliefs challenge access to safe abortion services even for minors in the legal framework. Including this testimony in the debate shows the public the reality of the unwillingness of some health workers which stands as a challenge to minors' access to safe abortion because of their lack of awareness of the details of the law and socio-cultural attitudes.

At the end of her testimony in the health programme, the journalist asked the teenage mother:

“That time, if you had someone to support you and sign to approve the abortion?” (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

And the teenage mother replied:

“I would have terminated it!” (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

The testimony provided information on the inaccessibility of abortion services for some minors even though the law allows them to access safe abortion services on request, it is not always put into practice as it is written in the law. This is not the only teenager who was not able to access safe abortion services legally at the hospital because of the unwillingness of their parents and health workers.

In the following testimony which was broadcast in the same radio magazine programme, a parent testified that in 2020 she refused to approve the abortion of her 17-year-old daughter, but also nurses and counsellors at the hospital's GBV centre

evoked the former law of 2012 in order to discourage the girl from seeking and having a safe abortion. She testified:

She was in Senior 4 in high school during COVID-19. You know that in 2020, they were obliged to come back home because of COVID-19. When she came home, at that time life was hard. She became a prostitute. Just at the moment she got pregnant, others were about to go back to school (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

The mother brought into the debate a new element regarding the concern about her daughter's sexual behaviours. Including this argument in the debate indicates parents' judgemental attitudes toward minors' sexual behaviours resulting in early pregnancies which end in abortions. The mother argued that when her daughter got pregnant she wanted to have a safe abortion without parents' help.

Then she went to talk to a nurse, the nurse advised her to go to the Hospital at Isange One Stop Centre. In these centres, they help children or anyone who has been a survivor of rape or sexual abuse (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

Even if the law says that minors can go alone to the hospital for an abortion, it seems that minors and survivors of rape prefer seeking support from GBV centres which are a refuge for GBV survivors based in each hospital with nurses and psychological counsellors. In this case, it was expected that the centre could link her urgently to the hospitals for quick safe abortion service. This provides evidence of the challenges to the accessibility of legal safe abortion services for minors, where the reality regarding the requirements to access safe abortion services is contrary to what is written in the law.

The mother's testimony showed that at the GBV centre, the girl did not get help, they instead asked her to bring her parents. The fact that she was afraid of her mother's reaction she decided to bring her to the hospital without letting her know about her pregnancy.

The mother narrated her surprise:

When we got there, I was shocked! When I heard her saying that she was pregnant she wanted them to help her get an abortion from the hospital! (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

The mother did not appreciate the way her daughter lied to her and brought her to the hospital to approve her abortion. In the mother's tone, she was angry and sad at the same time as she narrated her reactions after hearing that she was there to help her child get an abortion. This argument indicates that the girl's struggles to get a safe abortion in a legal way even by lying.

The mother narrated that her daughter provided information at the GBV centre to prove that she was a minor and got an unwanted pregnancy from sex work and from there she exposed her need to terminate that pregnancy. However, the mother opposed the idea of abortion:

But when they asked me my opinion, I said I cannot sign for a such thing! I cannot approve it! I did not support her to have an abortion (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

The mother's tone indicated a strong rejection of her daughter's demand and automatically suggested a solution: *"I have three children and the last is 9 years old. Let her give birth to that one, and I will take care"* (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021). While the girl wanted to terminate the pregnancy so that she could go back to school her mother chose for her to keep the pregnancy rather than approving her abortion because abortion is more stigmatising in society. After that, the mother indicated that the health workers evoked old laws which discouraged the girl and obliged her to keep the pregnancy to birth.

They asked her to reveal the identity of the person who made her pregnant to the police, then when the man was arrested, the police would give her an act that she would show to the medical doctor and have an abortion. Then she found that she could not know who that man was (Radio Salus, magazine programme 34; 2021).

The mother's tone indicated that she was relieved to realise that the nurses and counsellors at the GBV centre did not allow her daughter to get a safe abortion automatically.

The journalist asked questions for clarification to make sure that the girl requested an abortion before 2018 or 2019. However, he found out that it was “*October 2020*” which means that the law was already in force. This confirms that health workers mentioned an old law that discouraged minors from continuing to seek an abortion service, which provides evidence of their hostility and unwillingness concerning safe abortion service delivery.

These testimonies served to criticise the way the legal reform allowing abortion is applied in hospitals. In the case of the above testimony, instead of respecting the decision of the child to have an abortion, the decision of the mother was respected. While the mother’s reaction can find support among many other parents who support socio-cultural values regarding abortion, it can also discourage some girls from seeking abortion services for it seems difficult to get an abortion without parental support. However, the testimony can also serve as an advocacy, which shows the injustice against girls and women in the legal framework, and the challenges they face to get safe and legal abortion. The program broadcasts testimonies showing the unwillingness of health workers to apply the law allowing abortion for minors but specifically informed at informing the audience of their rights to abortion services so that they can be empowered with knowledge. The testimonies also indicated the role radio stations played in advocating and denouncing injustice.

The above testimonies from Radio Salus and KT Radio and in other broadcasts indicate that the public debate was more focused on concerns around teenage pregnancies and teenage mothers than on the legal reform itself. It also indicated that some pregnant minors face many challenges and injustices based on social and cultural norms and religious beliefs which are positioned against sex before marriage and abortion. Social values put more importance on what are accepted moral values rather than on the rights to sexual and reproductive health and decision-making, and these values are often driven by parents and healthcare providers.

The stigma associated with early pregnancies is obvious in all testimonies, and it is among the main reasons that send some to seek safe abortion alone or seek out unsafe abortions for fear of family abandonment, being forced to drop out of school, lack of assistance from parents, and the hostility and unwillingness of health workers.

Highlighting these problems indicates how the radio stations saw their role as expanding the debate on abortion service delivery and the rights of the patients.

Some minors' testimonies also showed how they gave birth and took parental responsibilities alone when families abandoned them. The role of fathers of those babies is also to be seen nowhere in the teen mother's testimonies. These show gender inequality and gender roles which are encouraged by social norms. The power relations between teenagers having sex with older men with no recourse to justice or support was also obvious. All these have an impact on teen mothers' health and their well-being and impact on the future of their children because of poverty.

Including voices of teen mothers testifying about the injustice they face and the hardship they go through indicated the role of radio stations in holding a more inclusive public sphere and advocating for the rights of vulnerable groups as voices of the voiceless and the role of media in challenging the social-cultural attitudes towards these sensitive issues.

The narrative nature of testimonies using the first person, testifying about the reality regarding the need for safe abortion and the challenges to access to abortion services is a unique contribution to the debate on the legal provision of abortion which included more coverage of the political narrative of public authority, and the activist voices. These first-person narratives which can be found in the coverage of four radio stations provide evidence of the fact that social and parental negative attitudes to abortion are as important as the ideal political discourse.

The radio stations did not include any testimony of a minor or any other woman in the legal framework who got a safe abortion in a legal way. This does not indicate that there are no girls and women in the legal framework who sought safe abortion and got it, but it indicated the radio stations' editorial decision to focus on informing about the challenges in implementing the legal reform allowing abortion for minors.

The teenage mothers' testimonies were broadcast in debates on the legal provision for minors in order to discuss issues of concern of public interest in order to express their oppression and injustice for which the public sphere helped to reach the attention of the decision-makers as issues worthy of the political authority's action. Testimonies also reach the radio's audiences in order to inform them about the reality of the

experience of teenage mothers the existence of unsafe abortions, and the need for liberalisation of safe abortion services.

Religious authority's voices

Radio stations also included religious views in the debates on the law expanding abortion access for minors in Rwanda. In the content from six radio stations, journalists cited, interviewed, and inserted voices of religious leaders warning their believers that they should not have an abortion or offer abortion service. Including religious views in the abortion debate is important because above 90% of Rwandans are Christians and the majority belongs to the Catholic Church. Although many Christian and Islamic religious organisations did not support the legal reform allowing abortion for minors, the Catholic Church was the most heard on the radio stations, opposing the revised law. At the end of a live debate on the controversy of the law expanding abortion for minors on Flash FM, one journalist read a paragraph from the Catholic Church's announcement published by the Conference of Catholic Bishops in Rwanda. It was published right after the publication of the law expanding abortion under some circumstances and the ministerial order which expanded access to safe abortion in 2018.

We would like to inform health workers in our health facilities that we do not allow abortion crimes to be committed in our health facilities (Flash FM, Live talk show 5, 22 May 2019).

In Rwanda, around 40% of public hospitals in Rwanda belong to the Catholic Church and other Christian churches (HDI, 2020). The journalist's choice of reading the announcement aimed at showing the Catholic Church's position regarding the abortion law. It also indicated for the activists supporting access to safe abortion that there is an important challenge to the implementation of the law based on religious beliefs and the control of the Catholic Church over a number of health facilities. Where abortion is constructed as a "crime" by the church, this can impact on listeners' opinions about the legal reform.

Other religious voices broadcast accused the government of violating the rights of the unborn and encouraging the murder of "*innocent babies*" (KT Radio, news report 18).

In this way, religious leaders used radio stations as channels to reach their believers, opposing the legal reform and preventing them from seeking safe abortion services. The inclusion of religious opinions in the debate on abortion indicates the inclusivity of the public sphere, whereby radio stations promoted the freedom of expression of all views regarding the legal provision of abortion for minors, but they can also boost negative attitudes and hostility to abortion among the audience.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed some of the elements of the public sphere found in the interviews with radio station staff and archived radio content. For the interviews, I analysed the format of coverage and feedback from the public, and the reasons for radios to cover the legal reform allowing abortion for minors.

The interviews with radio station staff revealed that non-state radio stations covered the legal reform allowing abortion for minors under various formats, which are news reports, pre-recorded magazine programmes, and live talk shows. These formats helped the radio stations to hold an inclusive public sphere and provide their audiences with a space for the free expression of opinions on the issues of concern regarding the legal provision of abortion for minors in Rwanda.

With the format of news reports and pre-recorded radio magazine programmes, radio stations' journalists conducted fieldwork to interview the audiences and various sources about the legal reform allowing abortion for minors in order to provide the audience with factual and balanced information. The analysis indicated that through live talk shows, radio stations offered a range of means to interact with the audience. The convergence of traditional radio with the Internet facilitated interactions in live debates with the guests in studios and the audience who could participate from different locations using social media, and mobile phones to call and send text messages. The three formats helped the radio stations to hold an inclusive and democratised public sphere where multiple categories of the audience, namely parents, the youth, teenage mothers, religious leaders, public authorities, experts, and activists participated in the debates on the issue regarding legal reform expanding abortion for minors.

The participants indicated various reasons which guided the coverage of the legal reform in order to provide information and raise awareness of the new law and the ministerial order. According to the participants, the coverage allowed the radio stations to inform their audiences about the updates in the law, especially the new articles allowing abortion for minors. Some participants believed that the radio coverage could allow the audience to have enough accurate information, which could influence their attitudes and acceptance of the access to safe abortion services for minors. The participants also believed that the debates on the law provided the youth with education and knowledge of their SRHR.

In the discussion of the issue regarding teenage mothers' hardship and the injustice they face in society, participants argued that the radio stations played a role as the voices of the voiceless in the public sphere and advocated for the right of minors to access abortion services. Similarly, the radio stations discussed the law to advocate for wider accessibility to safe abortion services even to other women who are not mentioned in the law. In that way, the radio stations carried out debates on abortion access as a controversial issue affecting society and encouraged expression and discussion about these issues with the hope that they could find solutions from the central government authorities.

From the analysed data, it was obvious that the eight radio stations contributed to providing factual and balanced information and raising awareness of the law in Rwanda. Radio stations ensured an inclusive public sphere whereby they amplified a range of voices. The radio stations included the public authorities and activists to provide information to the audience, and explanations on the reasons for expanding legal safe abortion services for minors in Rwanda. While the government authorities showed that the legal provision of abortion for minors protected the human right of survivors of rape, the activists supported the law as it is thought to reduce maternal mortality caused by unsafe abortions. The public also had an opportunity to express their views. Whereby some showed that they did not support the law as they believed it was against cultural and religious beliefs, and that allowing abortion for minors was inappropriate, for it encourages sexuality among minors, which is considered immoral. However, other people were heard appreciating the fact that abortion has been legally made available to minors because early pregnancies affect girls' education and the right to their wellbeing. Some parents and teen mothers were heard regretting not

having known the existence of the law, as they would have taken the opportunity and sought a safe abortion service.

Experts such as lawyers and medical doctors explained the legal and medical grounds for the law. The lawyers were explaining the possibility for abortion, generally considered as a criminal act, to be considered as a right in certain circumstances. The lawyers explained that in the case of pregnancies resulting from sexual violence, abortion can be allowed to be terminated because not only are they unwanted, but they are also traumatising for the pregnant minors. Therefore, the lawyers considered terminating those pregnancies in order to protect the rights of these individuals. The voices of medical doctors were included to explain the reasons they accepted to terminate pregnancies for minors in the Rwandan context where many believed that a foetus is a human being with a right to life. Medical doctors explained that they consider the foetus' viability and that when the foetus is viable, they do not terminate a pregnancy. Medical doctors also expressed that it is important to help minors have safe abortions as a way of saving their lives. They also explained to the audience that they consider the human rights of the pregnant person to be greater than the foetus' rights.

Radio stations also included opinions from religious leaders in the public sphere. Religious leaders were heard mostly rejecting every legal ground, defending the right to life of the unborn, and considering abortion as killing. They therefore prevented medical doctors from performing abortions in church-owned hospitals. From the analysed content from radio stations, it was obvious that there were gaps in the coverage. The first identified gap is that there were not many female activists and experts talking about the issues regarding abortion. This highlighted the public sphere was dominated by men. There was also increased coverage of the only HDI activists supporting abortion from all radio stations, while only two radio stations included activists opposing the legal reform expanding abortion for minors, which makes the radio stations' objectivity questionable. Despite the coverage of testimonies advocating for access to safe abortion services, there were no testimonies testifying about safe abortion services in Rwanda, or testifying about experiences of post-abortion complications from unsafe abortion. Despite these gaps which highlight some imperfections in the radio stations' public sphere, the analysed content provided evidence that the eight radio stations were a space for an inclusive public sphere. They

also provided factual and balanced information by encouraging free expression of opinion where all categories of people were given a space to discuss issues of concern regarding the law allowing abortion for minors. The next chapter analyses some arguments expressed in the public sphere, which could add to moral panics about the legal reform expanding abortion for minors in Rwanda, and which could detract from the aim of reasoned argument in the public sphere.

CHAPTER 6

RADIO AND MORAL PANICS ABOUT ABORTION IN RWANDA

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of radio content and interviews held with the radio station staff from the perspective of the Moral Panics Theory, which refers to emerging concerns about behaviours which are defined as threats to social values and generally increased by media coverage (Cohen, 2002, p.1). The Moral Panics Theory (Cohen, 1972) helped to critically analyse interviews held with the radio station staff and radio content, considering how abortion for minors was perceived as a threat to Rwandan societal values.

This chapter presents an analysis of radio broadcasts and interviews conducted with the eight participants under the guidance of the Moral Panics Theory to answer the following research questions: 2) How are Rwandan citizen voices reflected in non-state radio's coverage of this issue? 3) How do selected radio stations represent issues related to legal abortion for minors in Rwanda? 4) How do the radio stations' policies, guidelines, practices, and other news-making factors impact the coverage of abortion for minors in Rwanda?

In order to answer the above questions, using in-depth interviews held with the radio station staff, the researcher analysed the main categories: 'reasons' and their sub-categories which were generated by the Moral Panics Theory. For radio content's main categories: Information and opinions, the Moral Panics Theory guided the analysis of sub-categories generated from opinions against the legal reform expanding abortion for minors in Rwanda, as it is generated in (Table 6.1).

The presentation and interpretation of results from the interviews, radio content and the discussions of sub-categories belonging to moral panics is done in the form of texts with quotations taken from the selected materials for the sub-categories.

Table 6.1: Sub-categories analysed using Moral Panics Theory

Moral panics sub-categories from participant interviews	Moral panics sub-categories from radio content
Deviance	Deviance Portraying deviant
Hostility	Concern <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concern about death - Concern about infertility - Concern about psychological trauma - Concern about immorality - Concern about child abusers
Morality	Morality Threat to societal values Hostility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hostility to abortion - Hostility to immorality and deviance - Hostility to the law Religious authorities' hostility
Victimisation	Victimisation Stigmatisation
Stigmatisation	Exaggeration Sensational language and tone
Newsworthiness	

Source: The author

The chapter comprises two parts: the first part analyses the interviews conducted with the radio station staff and the second part analyses the radio content.

Part one: Moral panics and the reasons for radio coverage of the legal provision of abortion for minors

This first part analysed the interviews under the guidance of the Moral Panics Theory to understand the reasons that motivated radio stations to cover the legal reform legalising abortion for minors.

Newsworthiness

During the interviews, participants showed that the coverage of the legal reform allowing abortion for minors was influenced by some news values which determined that the legal reform was interesting to the public. One participant reported:

The main news value that influenced us is timeliness because it was still fresh and people were talking about the law easing access to abortion in different ways. It was interesting, thus pushing us to talk about it (Participant 5, Kigali).

In the above cited transcript, the participant indicated that the liberalisation of abortion for minors incited public opinion, which showed the extent to which the issue was unusual and interesting to the audience. Timeliness means covering new and unusual issues while they are still fresh (Brighton and Foy, 2007, p. 7).

All the interviewed participants claimed that they covered the legal reform allowing abortion for minors when the law was newly enacted and their focus was on the fact that allowing access to abortion for minors was also unusual and highly controversial. One participant noted:

We actually have a problem of early pregnancies among adolescent girls; so, because the law clarified that a child can be given abortion-related services and can even decide on her abortion, this was very controversial (Participant 5, Kigali).

This comment indicates that there were disagreements among members of the public regarding the law expanding minors' legal access to abortion. It also suggests that the radio station focused its coverage on the controversies around the legal provision of abortion. Therefore, these controversies were a news value that guided the coverage of the law expanding abortion for minors.

All the participants also affirmed that proximity to the audience and the knowledge of issues that were of interest to the audience informed their decisions to cover the topic. A participant indicated:

Because it happens near us, where we broadcast from, I cannot go to cover things about M 23 from DRC while there are stories of early pregnancy and the controversy around legal abortion for minors nearby here (Participant 7, Provinces).

The participant's comment indicates that the news value of proximity influenced the radio station's coverage of the law because members of the audience felt that they were directly concerned about the legal provision of abortion for minors. The three news values of timeliness, proximity and controversy added to moral panics because

the increased coverage focused on the controversies surrounding allowing abortion for minors, which can result in generalising panic around the law expanding abortion for minors. This provides evidence regarding the role radio stations play in mediating moral panics by abiding by the rule of newsworthiness (Jewkes, 2004) and by showing the intent to carry out reasoned and honest debates sired by concerns affecting society.

Hostility and deviance

The opinions of participants showed that there were elements of moral panic in the broadcasts that emerged from the audiences, whereby the legal reform was considered to be offering encouragement to 'deviance'. The participants also noted the hostility of the audience to the legal provision of abortion for minors because having an abortion was considered a violation of social norms. The following argument justifies this statement:

They say it is an abomination, a taboo, a murder, and a lack of cultural values. The even ask why the minors don't just give birth in a normal way (Participant 2, Provinces).

In their responses, all the participants reported that the majority of the population expressed their hostility towards the legal reform through various ways. The comment above indicates that the audience considered people seeking abortion abnormal and deviants contravening societal norms, for they thought that any pregnancy must be carried to birth.

Broadcasting content on abortion may spread stigmatising arguments against girls and women seeking abortion, discouraging minors and others from seeking safe abortion legally because of fear of stigmatisation and discrimination by members of the society.

Another participant suggested that this construction of abortion as deviance was driven by societal and religious norms, thus:

I think it is linked to society and the way religion exerts influence on our society. So, they cannot easily understand or accept things which are contrary to their faith and beliefs. Even if it is a ten-year-old girl who is pregnant, I think

many parents would rather let her give birth just to prevent her from sinning
(Participant 5, Kigali).

This argument evinces the power socio-cultural values exercise in building constructs around abortion and preventing members of society from accepting and supporting the legal reform because abortion is perceived as contrary to the generally acceptable social norms in the Rwandan society.

Both news participant from Kigali and the provinces indicated that they broadcast hostile and contradictory opinions on their radio stations.

The majority of our audience in Kigali and other provinces do not support this law. Even between ministries, there is no agreement. The Ministry of Justice requires the Ministry of Health to show or establish measures showing ways preventing early pregnancies neither putting in place an abortion law nor resorting to abortion (Participant 8, Kigali).

The participant's comment indicates the controversy surrounding the law and hostility from both ordinary citizens and ministries. The participant indicated that the main arguments from the public were generated in relation to the search for solutions that could help eradicate early pregnancies among teenagers. According to participants, this controversy provided motivation for coverage of the issue; however, broadcasting such arguments could reinforce the hostile views of the audience and stand as a challenge to the implementation of the law.

While seven participants affirmed that deviance and the public's hostility to abortion motivated their coverage of the story, one participant argued that the hostility to the law discouraged the radio's coverage of the story. It was reported:

Abortion is highly contested within the Rwandan culture; people do not openly discuss it. In addition, even when we engaged in debate, the invited experts talked while the audience was quiet! The audience did not seem to be interested in giving their opinion. So, when you start talking about a topic and see that there is no reaction from the audience, you also get discouraged
(Participant 4, Provinces).

The participant's comment indicates that the radio station was not motivated to cover an issue that was not interesting to the audience. This was obvious through the public's

reluctance to express their opinions about issues they considered taboo topics in society in radio talk shows. The following argument provides evidence of the radio station's reluctance to cover issues regarding abortion.

We also avoid talking very much about legal abortion because we fear that someone may attempt to abort because they heard it on our radio station
(Participant 4, Province).

While the Moral Panics Theory was criticised for generally considering the audience passive consumers of media information (Jewkes, 2004), the participant's views attested to the belief in the power of the media to change their audiences' attitudes and motivate abortion-seeking behaviours among them. This concern discouraged the radio station from increasing coverage of the law allowing abortion for minors.

Avoiding covering the legal reform by a radio station indicates the station's hostility towards the act of accessing an abortion, which can cause a lack of awareness about the legal reform among the members of the community where the radio station is based. This lack of awareness can result in some girls and women resorting to unsafe abortions or not seeking safe abortion services even when they are within the country's legal framework and therefore giving birth to children in spite of unintended pregnancies.

Some participants indicated that even some journalists were reluctant to support the legal reform, resulting in them showing disinterest in covering issues around the new law.

In fact, the reason is that journalists are also from this community. They share the same religious beliefs that abortion is a sin and subscribe to the same cultural and moral values as any member of the community. So, being journalists does not prevent us from being part of the community (Participant 2, Provinces).

When journalists are influenced by the same socio-cultural norms and religious beliefs, that scenario can present barriers to their coverage of a particular topic (Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018). Even when professional values oblige journalists to be impartial when informing, educating, and entertaining the audience (Ojala, 2021), the above arguments indicate that some journalists might cover the law in a particular way in

order to amplify the voices supporting their personal beliefs. As a result, this might increase hostility among their audiences, causing stigmatisation which can discourage girls and women from seeking safe abortion services.

Concern about the possible consequences of abortion

In the context of the Moral Panics Theory, concern is about the fear of the consequences the supposed deviance may cause on the future society (Ben-Yehuda, 1990, p.156). An analysis of data elicited from the interviews conducted with participants shows that emerging arguments attest to the fear of the supposed negative consequences of the legal reform on the minors' health. One interviewee said:

Yes, many say that abortion is not good at all. It is not good to let a child under the age of eighteen to start having an abortion and taking contraceptives at that age! It is not good at all (Participant 8, Kigali).

The participant's argument shows that the audience was concerned by laws and policies aiming at promoting ASRHR, whereby some members of the audience expressed their general opposition to the legal provision of both the use of contraception and resorting to abortion for minors, for they consider it too early for them.

In fact, even for adults, there are effects of abortion, and for those who take contraceptives, there are some side effects as well. So, we started to think about how a girl can start to abort or take contraceptives early as a teenager. Even if there are no side effects, there have been many debates about the consequences of abortion on young girls' health (Participant 5, Kigali).

All the participant affirmed that their radio stations were interested in covering the topic because the population's opinions showed that they were worried about the health-related effects of both contraception and abortion for minors. The above argument indicates that the radio coverage had been questioning the safety of abortion for minors as there was fear about possible health consequences in the future. Increased broadcasting of content that highlights concerns about the future consequences of abortion for minors can encourage hostility towards abortion-seeking behaviours, thus dissuading some girls and women from seeking safe abortion-related services.

Victimisation and stigmatisation

The participants indicated that their radio stations covered and broadcast arguments characterised by judgemental attitudes towards holding pregnant minors and survivors of sexual abuse responsible for their early pregnancies. This stigmatises and humiliates pregnant minors, making them feel worthless in society. One participant noted that abortion-related stigma and victimisation against pregnant girls and teen mothers are important issues, particularly in poor families. The participant said:

In poor families, members spend time insulting, humiliating, and stigmatising the girl instead of taking her to the hospital (Participant 6, Kigali).

The participant argues that family wealth plays an important role in contributing to the stigmatisation of pregnant minors and teenage mothers. The participant further noted the inaccessibility of SRHR information and the affordability of SRHR services for the poor. The participant said:

I have not carried out any research but as journalists, what we know is that the majority of the children who get pregnant are from poor families. They do not have information and money. But in rich families, their parents know that they can use contraceptives to prevent early pregnancies, and in case they get pregnant, parents can pay private doctors for executing safe abortions. Furthermore, children in rich families have greater access to information than those in poor families located in rural areas (Participant 6, Kigali).

While the increased coverage of stigmatising and victimising arguments can reinforce negative attitudes among some members of the audience, the participant noted that the way pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers were stigmatised in societies and their own families motivated their radio coverage in providing information to all. The participant indicated that: *“We want people to understand that such a law exists”* (Participant 6, Kigali).

The participant’s comment suggests that media sometimes increase the coverage of elements of moral panics even when they do not have the intention to increase panic among the audience, especially when the coverage is influenced by the rule of

newsworthiness, or when they have the intention to inform the audience on current issues. The participants of the eight radio stations recognised that they had been broadcasting audience voices which included arguments that victimised minors involved in early pregnancies. One participant said:

Most of them do not support it. Sometimes they use such heavy and rude words as: "If you accepted having sex, why don't you want to assume the outcome and keep that baby? You realise that they are angry as it is a serious problem (Participant 2, Provinces).

The participant reflected on how members of the audience hold pregnant minors responsible for their early pregnancies and condemn girls and women who seek safe abortion services portraying them as deviant because they behave in a way which is contrary to the social norms. Other participants opined that fear of stigma makes some Rwandans hide their positions regarding the legal reform. One participant said:

But what is dangerous here is that the population does not support it openly, but off the record, a person may tell you that that law should be there to solve the problems of those who want to terminate their pregnancies instead of resorting to clandestine, unsafe and illegal abortions that risk their lives (Participant 8, Kigali).

For the participant, stigmatising abortion is not only a barrier to girls and women seek or having abortions but also against anyone who supports the same cause. The participant considered the silence and secrecy around abortion as '*dangerous*', as people cannot freely express their views or are obliged to say the contrary of what they believe because they do not want to be "*heard supporting bad things*" (Participant 8, Kigali), thus supporting legal abortion for minors. His concern is that the increased coverage of more voices opposing abortion can result in radio coverage boosting the voices opposing access to safe abortion for minors in media instead of those supporting it. This can encourage stigmatisation which discourages minors from seeking safe abortion services. Another participant observed that:

They cannot disclose their intention to have an abortion just because it is a personal issue that they can solve secretly. Even if the law permits abortion,

there is stigmatisation thereof. Remember that girl needs to go back to school and get married again. Then, if people learn about her mother helping her to get an abortion, she risks never getting married because she will be stigmatised, and her family will be considered a family of murderers. This is why no parent can publicly testify that they brought their daughters to the hospital to have an abortion (Participant 2, Provinces).

The participant's comment indicates that abortion-related stigma is socially constructed and powerful and that in the Rwandan context, even service delivery around safe abortion needs secrecy to avoid judgmental attitudes stemming from society.

The participants recounted what made radio stations cover those elements of moral panic aiming at advocating for and informing the audiences about the issues of concern affecting society; however, the increased coverage of the voices portraying abortion as deviant and hostile arguments, increased coverage of concern and stigmatisation and victimising arguments can possibly increase opposition to the legal provision of abortion for minors and this can therefore increase moral panics among the audience.

The following section examines how these elements of moral panics emerged through radio content that the researcher analysed.

Part Two: The content of the broadcasts and moral panics

This second part of the analysis focuses on the elements of moral panics emerging from radio content whereby the researcher analysed sub-categories, making sense of moral panics from selected materials in the transcripts of the radio content.

Hostility

Public expressions that are broadcast through radio content show that there were hostile opinions to the legal reform allowing access to abortion for minors and in other circumstances, parents and other people who were convinced by social cultural values and religious beliefs opposed the law expanding access to abortion by minors by rejecting any grounds provided by the law.

In a news report from KT Radio, which covered the press conference held by the Ministry of Health and its partners to sensitise the public about the ministerial order of 2019; the journalist inserted a comment from a fellow journalist to the conference organisers and the invited journalists at the conference argued:

People used to kill children and now you are helping them to do it professionally, while you are there to protect life! (KT Radio, News Report 25).

The journalist uses this emotional argument and refers to killing to express his hostility to the legal reform, which can increase or maintain hostility and a sense of moral panic among the audience. The inclusion of the voice of a journalist opposing the legal reform can be understood as showing that the legal reform was not supported and that journalists were the first to express themselves against it. The argument can also detract the public from the explanations provided by the Ministry of Health and its partners defending and explaining arguments supporting the law expanding access to abortion by minors.

In another news report on KT Radio, one woman argued:

This means that the Government allows people to kill other people! (KT Radio, News Report 17).

Given that abortion is portrayed as murder, the speaker shows her opposition to the legal reform, highlighting the criminality of abortion.

Another woman expressed herself on Flash FM in the following way:

For me, if a child gets pregnant, I will let her give birth because if you encourage her to terminate the pregnancy, she will get pregnant again after that and terminate it again. But if she gives birth, she will have time to repent and make new decisions for her life! (Flash FM, News Report 2; 03/10/2018).

The interviewee highlighted the context of religious beliefs where she constructs early pregnancy as a consequence of sin, using exaggerations to describe how the girls would be getting more pregnancies and terminating them, which might increase people's hostility to the legal reform. When people exaggerate issues, it enhances moral panics because they provide distorted information about the issue of concern, which can aggravate the hostility.

The analysis shows that the voices of hostility were represented in all the selected radio stations. The journalists' choice of hostile arguments representing abortion as deviance indicates the way radio stations participate in increasing moral panics among members of their audiences because hostile arguments broadcast on radio stations can maintain negative social attitudes toward abortion or increase moral panics about the law expanding access to abortion in society.

Religious hostility

The legal reform allowing abortion for minors was challenged by religious beliefs. The religious opposition to the law was based on arguments advocating for the rights of the unborn, perceiving abortion as a sin before God and an injustice against innocent babies. KT Radio inserted an extract of a Catholic Bishop showing the Church's position toward the legal reform that allows abortion under certain circumstances. The Catholic Bishop said:

The life of a person must be respected. Abortion is a great sin, no matter how it is done. What makes it worse is that it is about killing an innocent person (KT Radio, News Report 18).

The argument is a reminder to Catholic believers that abortion is prohibited. However, the Catholic Church was not alone in opposing the law; a Protestant evangelist in a gospel show on Radio Huguka read the Bible verses on the radio and argued:

Abortion is not a good thing but a punishment according to the word of God that we have just read. It is a severe punishment. Normally, abortion is unfortunate. When a woman has a miscarriage because of sickness, for example, it is very sad. In our culture, when there is a miscarriage, even if it is a four-month pregnancy, we mourn for that baby as if it was an old person. We organise burial as we do for other people. So, it is very sad to have an abortion and none can wish to have it. In the same way, the Bible says, abortion is not something that a person should voluntarily seek (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021)

From the perspectives of both the Bible and the Rwandan culture, abortion should not be legally allowed and voluntarily seeking abortion is perceived as deviant behaviour

by the Christians. Another argument from a Muslim leader in the same Gospel Time Show on Radio Huguka suggested that abortion results in punishments from God.

Those who do abortion must know that it is among the greatest sins that lead to destruction, sins which provoke God's curses (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

In the same way as the Catholic Bishop, the Muslim leader labels abortion the greatest sin because "it is about killing innocent souls" (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021). He continued warning Muslims, thus:

I would like to remind Muslim believers to pay attention and not commit this sin because killing a human soul without reason is a sin (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021)

The guest in the Live Talk Show's argument indicates that people must fear having an abortion because God will punish them. The guest said:

"It attracts severe punishment from God; this involves being burnt on fire" (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

The Bishop on KT Radio openly announced that the Christian church does not support abortion on all legal grounds. The Bishop said:

Article Number 125 published in the Penal Code has the title "Exemption from criminal liability for abortion". I wish to tell you that a child is a child from the day of conception. Therefore, we do not agree with any grounds that are advanced in order to support legal abortion and take the lives of innocent babies (KT Radio, News Report 18).

The above arguments from a Muslim leader and Protestant evangelist show that the Catholic Bishop's argument provides proof of religious hostility against the legal reform allowing abortion for minors and other circumstances in Rwanda. On different occasions, the Catholic Church showed concern about the consequences of the law allowing abortion on the youth and society in general. In the Live Talk Show on Radio Huguka, the journalist included an extract from another Catholic Bishop showing concern about this law. The Bishop said:

Killing, homicide, or murder is a great offense which is punished by Rwandan law and the forms of punishment can be as severe as the one given to someone who murdered and made to spend all his life in prison. But all over the world, killing a baby, including a child who is still inside the mother's womb, is criminal. Such a killing is a concern for us because it causes psychological wounds even in families because of trauma. That trauma is now among the youth and will have huge consequences on their mental health. Seeing that the country's law allows a child to be killed, saying that now it is legally accepted, people can do it. We know that they first resisted but now, it seems like it has been blessed. It is a big concern for us. I do not know about you who are in charge of the family if you also believe that a person who has been conceived another person can violate his rights and kill him and the laws support that person, and the medical doctors help them to do it. That was my question (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

The argument was formulated as a question to the Minister of MIGEPROF; the sounds of the audio indicate that the question was asked during a big Catholic event where the Bishop started his reasoned and emotional argument by showing the evidence that killing is a crime in Rwanda. With a calm and sad tone, the Bishop opposed the way the Government of Rwanda 'they' expanded legal access to abortion for minors, including other circumstances that he qualified as legalising killing children, and expressed his concern and the concern of the Catholic Church 'us' regarding the consequences of abortion, especially on the youth.

The arguments illuminate the Catholic Church's hostility towards the legal reform allowing abortion for minors. Although the extract was broadcast in the Live Talk Show to balance the information, as there was also the response from the Minister's broadcast at the same time, broadcasting church leaders' hostility can also spread and maintain hostility towards abortion among the members of the audience, heightening stigma against those who seek or provide abortion-related services.

Both Muslims and Christians support abortion only in cases when the pregnancy jeopardises the life of the pregnant person. A Protestant evangelist said:

So, having an abortion just because you do not want that pregnancy and many other reasons that you have been mentioning is not good. Only a medical doctor is allowed to decide on abortion in case the pregnancy puts the life of the pregnant person in danger (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

Similarly, the Muslim leader commented:

A Muslim believer who only has an abortion because she does not want that pregnancy should be considered as having killed a soul and God will punish her (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

The Catholic Church, which has many hospitals in Rwanda, was the only one that officially announced that abortion should never be performed in their hospitals. However, it can be assumed that even other Christian churches and Islam do not allow their believers to have or perform abortions. In Rwanda, religious hostility is important as it can be understood as a challenge that the law expanding abortion for minors is facing, where a combination of Christians and Muslims constitute over 95% of the whole population (NISR, 2022). Hostility caused by religious beliefs is also obvious among medical doctors who are meant to offer abortion services. A medical doctor explained to Radio Huguka that some qualified medical doctors refuse to deliver abortion services to avoid contravening their religious beliefs. The doctor said:

Another challenge is still about mindsets because even some qualified medical doctors refuse performing abortions. They say it is a sin. Some of them do not agree to perform abortion even when they have the right to do so, because of their faith. So, when a medical doctor refuses to perform an abortion people who need the service will not have it (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

The medical doctor clarified that the unwillingness of medical doctors to perform abortions results in a shortage and unavailability of abortion-related services for those who need it. This provides the reasons some girls and women, on legal grounds, are refused abortion services at hospitals. Similarly, it was observed in the previous section (Chapter Five) that in health facilities owned by churches, medical doctors are not allowed to perform abortions in these settings.

The medical doctor continued:

It is sad because many of those who request the abortion service are young girls who get pregnant while they were still under the legal age of majority. Sometimes they seek abortion against the wishes of their parents who disapprove of the practice. However, those children may lack the abortion service not because of their parents but because the medical doctor does not want to do it (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

The medical doctor clarified that the unwillingness by medical doctors to perform abortion affects women's access to abortion services, especially for minors. The medical doctor noted the following consequences:

"Then, this discourages a lot of girls and women who would like to have abortions" (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

Therefore, religious beliefs add to moral panics as they deny women the right to abortion, obliging them to keep unintended pregnancies. Of all the eight radio stations, six broadcast arguments against the legal reform based on religious beliefs about abortion or invited religious leaders or believers to express their views on the legal reform. Apart from those specific mentions, most arguments opposing the law were embedded in religious beliefs.

The content analysed below shows that it is obvious that the law faced strong hostility from religious leaders who would not allow their believers to seek abortion services, help children seek safe abortion services, and even approach medical doctors in hospitals to perform abortions. The religious leaders' hostility indicates that abortion is tantamount to deviance and a threat to society. Religious opposition broadcast on radio stations can add to moral panics about the legal reform of the law allowing abortion for minors, which can result in the perpetuation of negative attitudes and stigma, thus discouraging girls from seeking safe abortions or encouraging them to continue to seek unsafe abortions.

Deviance

The analysis of the content from radio shows that all radio stations covered expression of opinions in debates and in the news reports representing abortion as deviant behaviour which aligned with the characteristics of moral panics, and where certain issues are exaggerated and stigmatised as threats to societal norms. It was reported:

Abortion is a great sin; it is the killing of a child, one's own baby. It is a taboo and an abomination (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

The argument advanced by a Catholic Church leader was read from Twitter by the host of the Gospel show on Radio Huguka during a live talk show. The tweet was also read on another live talk show on Radio 10. The choice of reading this tweet during live debates on abortion was a way of stimulating discussion on the issue, simultaneously showing how issues of abortion were covered with sensationalism, promoting religious beliefs opposing the practice. Broadcasting the issue could result in the rest of the audience considering abortion-seeking behaviours as deviance. This can result in, on legal grounds, the girls, women, and parents being discouraged from seeking safe abortion services to avoid being represented as sinners, deviants, and immoral individuals.

A woman or parent interviewed in the Western Province on Radio 10 echoed this sentiment, saying:

"I personally cannot support abortion because it is a kind of murder. It is a form of killing!" (Radio10, News Report 28).

The interviewee, once again, represented abortion as '*murder*'. This particular news report only broadcasts opinions where the local population from Nyabihu District of the Western Province showed their opposition to abortion in general and the law in particular. This indicates that the journalist wanted to show the way the in which the population in this district reacted to the legal reform, whereby many interviewed citizens qualified abortion as deviance and refused to support it. An activist on Flash FM featured:

"Others say one evil cannot be replaced by another evil" (Flash FM, Live Talk Show 4; 05/ 12/ 2021).

In the comment above, the first 'evil' means early pregnancy resulting from what is considered a sin of fornication while the second one is about abortion as murder. Although the speaker was an activist who was explaining the challenges impeding the implementation of the new law, the argument indicated how the law and abortion were constructed as deviance in society. Some participants viewed allowing abortion as inappropriate. One man said:

Killing a child who is not yet born is not permissible! A girl who decides to terminate a pregnancy also deserves death because she would have killed a president of the republic; she would have killed a minister, warrior or soldier! Don't you see that it is not appropriate? (Flash FM, News Report 3; 24/07/2020).

The interviewee's arguments portrayed those seeking abortion services as murderers, which can increase stigmatisation, discrimination, and violence against girls and women seeking abortions as these are considered dangerous for the future of the society.

Broadcasting such arguments on radio stations may increase girls' fear of seeking safe abortion services on legal grounds, to avoid being stigmatised and discriminated against for being deviant. It can also result in others seeking unsafe abortions illegally, where secrecy is assured. Another man called in during a live talk show on Flash FM and commented:

Oh, Rwandans you are very courageous! They sit and take days discussing a law that legalises killing! They get their heads stressed! (Flash FM, Live Talk Show 5; 22 /05/2019).

Given that this live talk show was not edited, anyone could call on the phone or send an SMS; therefore, the hosts had limited possibility to edit the broadcast. The caller added to moral panics against the legal provision of abortion by suggesting that the law was inappropriate and a waste of time for parliamentarians.

In another live debate aired on Radio Huguka, a Christian believer argued that:

So, as I said, terminating a pregnancy at one month is not different from terminating it at eight months; in both cases, you would have killed a person (Radio Huguka, live talk show 8; 2021).

The discussion was centred on the viability of the foetus; however, the guest constructed any form of abortion as homicide, despite the explanations of the medical doctors about foetal viability. Airing these arguments during a gospel show can discourage Christian listeners from seeking abortion services even when they are in the legal framework for fear of being labelled murderers.

In the content from all the eight radio stations, and across its different formats, there were arguments constructing abortion as a crime, with girls and women seeking abortions being portrayed as criminals and deviants. Although abortion was decriminalised for minors and in other circumstances, journalists often questioned the legality of the reform legalising abortion and asked if abortion was no longer a crime in Rwanda. In a live talk show aired on KT Radio, the journalist asked a lawyer:

We used to think about abortion as a crime, maybe you will tell us some reasons that can make exceptions. But today what is it? Is it a crime? Isn't it a crime? Is it accepted? Or is it not accepted? Tell us! (KT Radio, Live Talk Show 26; 2019).

The question shows the confusion around whether abortion was fully legalised or not. The question also shows that at a given point, the amended law was vague regarding about who exactly should get access to abortion. The lawyer's response confirmed that abortion remained an offence according to the standing Rwandan law which considers abortion as deviance. Responding to a follow-up question on punishment for this crime, the lawyer answered:

The sentence goes from one year to three years of imprisonment and a fine amounting to anything between 100, 000 and 200, 000 Rwandan francs is charged for self-abortion (KT Radio, Live Talk Show 26; 2019).

The details on the huge punishment for abortion give the idea to listeners that abortion is still considered a crime and deviant in Rwanda, which reinforces social attitudes against abortion and panic. For further clarification on the law, the journalist asked about the reform:

Even if you say that the law is against abortion because it is a crime, when I was reading this law, I read that a patient can seek abortion services from a medical doctor, which shows that in some cases abortion is allowed or legal! (KT Radio, Live Talk Show 26; 2019).

In response to the question, the lawyer explained that the law allowed abortion only in limited circumstances. The lawyer said:

The law provides five good reasons for allowing abortion. The first reason is that the pregnant person is a child; a child is anyone who is under 18 years of age; the second one is when the person intending to have an abortion had become pregnant as a result of rape, the person having an abortion had become pregnant after being subjected to a forced marriage; the third is when the individual is forced to marry someone, and that once she reaches there she gets pregnant; the fourth relates to when a person intending to have an abortion had become pregnant as a result of incest up to the second degree, maybe by her brother or her father. That is where the second degree ends. Then the fifth and last one is when the medical doctor realises that if the pregnancy continues it will put at risk the health of the pregnant person or the foetus (KT Radio, Live Talk Show 26; 2019).

The lawyer read and explained Article 125 of the Penal Code and explained the exemption from criminal liability for accessing abortion in Rwanda, and added:

When one of those five grounds is approved, a woman can request to terminate a pregnancy, and she will not be punished (KT Radio, Live Talk Show 26; 2019).

The lawyer explained that even if the law did not liberalise abortion for all women, it protects the rights of minors from unintended pregnancies, including other circumstances cited in the law. The opinions expressed above show the reasons for allowing abortion under limited circumstances.

Activists from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), mainly CLAHDO advocating for human rights and HDI promoting sexual and reproductive health, also insisted that the amendment to the law did not change the fact that abortion is a crime in Rwanda:

Before talking about a child's access to abortion, I first want to say that in Rwanda there is no law permitting abortions. What we have is an exception stipulated in the Penal Code of 2018, with Article 125 enumerating the grounds which may justify why a person can be allowed to have an abortion. There is

also a Ministerial Order Number 002/2019 of 08/04/2019 (Radio 10, Live in News 31; 13/08/ 2022).

This reinforces the idea that abortion in Rwanda is always strictly criminalised by the law, which can result in some women being afraid to either seek abortion services or resort to illegal abortion.

Abortion was also discussed as deviance in the context of religious beliefs. In a live debate on Radio Huguka, and many other news reports and live talk shows, both Christians and Muslims confirmed perceiving abortion as a crime and a sin in the religious context. It was reported:

The Quran considers criminals the ones who terminate a pregnancy. Therefore, the one who commits abortion and the one who helps and individual to have that abortion would have committed an offence (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

The Muslim leader, who cited the Quran, which is considered a holy book guiding the Muslim faith, argued that in the Islamic faith, the termination of certain pregnancies is allowed. The leader said:

Islam only tolerates abortion in case the continued pregnancy may put the life of a woman in danger (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

This indicates that in the case of abortion not resulting from a medical decision, such as the circumstances allowed by the legal reform, the Muslim faith does not condone abortion. The Muslim leader showed that the Islamic religion is against both the woman who commits abortions and the one who helps another to have an abortion. The broadcasts emphasising deviance can result in the maintenance and reinforcement of negative attitudes towards abortion amongst Muslim listeners, thus discouraging some girls and women, even under the legal framework, from seeking abortion services because of fear of their religious leaders and being labelled sinners.

Similarly, according to Christians' beliefs, abortion should not be provided as a right because, at any stage of pregnancy, this is considered terminating a human life. It was indicated:

I believe that the life of a human being starts at the conception stage. A child who is in the mother's womb at conception is a human being. From my own understanding, abortion is a sin. It is the killing of an innocent soul. That is a crime. No matter the reasons that may lead to that person's death, it is always murder (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

The Christian believer's argument provides evidence confirming that religious beliefs and cultural attitudes play an important role in constructing abortion as a sin and deviance and discouraging girls and women from seeking abortion services for fear of being discriminated against and stigmatised by society.

The above arguments and many other views expressed in the radio content show that abortion was often constructed as a crime, sin, form of murder and many other qualifications to highlight that having an abortion is deviant behaviour. The analysed content showed that the Rwandan law as well as religious beliefs criminalise abortion. Therefore, girls and women seeking abortions or who had an abortion as well as those who help them to terminate their pregnancies are also constructed as deviant. As a result, such constructs aired on radio stations may reinforce the attitudes against abortion and discourage girls and women from seeking safe abortion services even when the abortion is within the legal grounds.

Concern

In terms of moral panics, 'concern' is characterised by the fear from the majority of the population regarding the possible consequences of an emerging behaviour which is the object of panic (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p. 150). For this study, the audience's expressions indicated that some people were worried about the possible effects of providing access to abortion for minor's health and, more broadly, for the entire society.

Concern about death

In the radio content, some people expressed their fear of post-abortion complications that may lead to death. On Radio Salus, one woman who was interviewed in a health programme argued:

I cannot do it because of fear. I am afraid of dying together with that baby that I will be taking out. Even if it is at the hospital, I can accept giving birth even hundreds of times than having one single abortion. I always think that I can die! (Radio Salus, magazine Programme 34; 2021).

The woman's argument indicates that she did not trust even abortion performed by health professionals in hospitals. In another broadcast from Radio 10, a woman who was interviewed in the Northern Province said:

There are cases where they can try, but unsuccessfully, to induce an abortion. Others risk dying in the process, losing both the mother and the baby (Radio10, News Report 28)

As a mother, the speaker showed the reason for not encouraging seeking abortion for children because she fears the death of her child even if the abortion is done by a professional medical doctor.

The two interviewees noted the fear of dying or losing life, which can signify the lack of sufficient information about safe abortion and the difference between safe and unsafe abortions. Amplifying the voices that show concern and the fear of death can discourage some girls and women from seeking safe abortion services because they do not have trust the safety of the abortion procedures. Resultantly, they could prefer giving birth to unwanted pregnancies even when the abortion is in the legal framework. This indicates that concern for death adds to moral panics regarding the legal reform.

Concern about infertility

People's reactions showed that apart from fearing death many were worried about the inability to have children that abortion may cause in the future even when it is performed by a professional medical doctor. In a live debate on Radio Huguka, a journalist asked a medical doctor:

Sometimes we hear people saying that when you have an abortion once in life you cannot have other children. Others say that to perform an abortion they clean the uterus, to the point that after no one can conceive again. Is that true? (Radio Huguka, Gospel Live Talk Show 8; 2021)

The journalist based the question on speculations around post-abortion complications indicating the concern about infertility resulting from abortion even if the procedure is done at the hospital. Fear of infertility may cause some girls and women not to seek abortion for fear of infertility because remaining childless is also stigmatising in Rwandan society. The host of the live talk show on KT Radio asked the lawyer in a live talk show:

Someone asked me to ask you if you will be able to receive these people who will be traumatised by having had abortions. Because she/she knows that in countries where abortion is legally allowed, there are consequences like infertility. It can happen for a girl to have a safe abortion then when she is married, she fails to have children (KT Radio, Live Talk Show 26; 2019).

The journalist was in a live talk show receiving people's comments and reading them so that the lawyer who was the guest could respond. The question highlights the concern of possible infertility resulting from legal abortion. Citizens through various content showed they were also concerned by infertility. An older woman who was interviewed in Kigali by a journalist from Flash FM said:

We have heard that when a woman has had many abortions and gets married, she remains childless (Flash FM, News Report 2; 03/10/2018).

The interviewee was concerned about the number of abortions which might lead to infertility. In some instances, it was men who complained, being concerned that girls' infertility would not only affect the health of minors who have abortions but also men and the whole of society. A man featured on Flash FM:

So, the problem will be with the person who will marry her (Flash FM, News Report 2; 03/10/2018).

This comment highlights that men think women who have abortions may fail to have children. In a live debate on Radio 10, another man called the host and commented:

Because one can abort many times until she cannot have children. The consequences will be on us, men, because we are the ones who marry them

and do not have children, maybe because the wife had had many abortions in the past. I do not support that (Radio10, Live Talk Show 32; 11/10/ 2021).

The man's concern about infertility also showed that he was among those who would be affected in case abortion results in infertility. These arguments indicate that if minors who seek abortion were known in society, it would result in discrimination and stigmatisation. Therefore, many would remain unmarried because they had had an abortion in the past, because men fear not having children with them. This provides evidence of the challenge for women in general to have full rights to control their own bodies and their sexual reproductive health in Rwandan society because the society considers women's bodies in terms of reproduction, and the contrary is considered deviance and results in stigmatisation.

Concern about future infertility as a result of legal and safe abortion was observed in content from all eight radio stations. The coverage focusing on the risks of infertility, based on myths rather than on accepted medical knowledge, constitutes an element of moral panic, and when radio stations increased their coverage of this issue might also have amplified moral panic. It might also result in some people abstaining from seeking abortion despite the explanations provided by experts.

Concern about psychological trauma

Some analysed content showed that people who oppose the legal reform expressed their concern about the psychological trauma which can follow abortion and affect the minors' mental health. Concern about psychological trauma was mostly advanced by religious leaders and believers. In the live talk show on KT radio, the journalist said that:

I remember when I was reading the news that the Pope said something about abortion. He showed that abortion can never be a solution for that person who had been in trouble and got pregnant. She has been a victim of rape, and sexual abuse, yes, but she has the burden already of being denied her human rights, and then to that, she adds committing murder because that is a human being (KT Radio, Live Talk Show 26; 2019)

This argument highlighting the opinion of the Pope suggested that women or girls who had experienced sexual abuse or rape and had an abortion could also be considered criminals in the same way as the perpetrators.

So that person who was really sad initially, because of the injustice she faced, but she is also offered a way to be relieved from her cross of shame and sadness. Then the pope said that it does not solve her problem instead it increases the burden of her cross (KT Radio, Live Talk Show 26; 2019).

The journalist indicated that allowing abortion for survivors of rape would be increasing their pain and trauma by adding the sentiment of guilt that those who had an abortion would carry in their hearts. In the live talk show on Radio Huguka, a Christian believer echoed this opinion:

Many say that when she is a child, sexually abused she can be traumatised then the solution is to take that foetus out. Let me tell you that abortion itself also causes psychological trauma. Yes, she is free from that pregnancy, but the psychological trauma will not go away. She will now carry two kinds of trauma (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021)

The guest highlighted that abortion is not good for the mental health of minors and other survivors of sexual violence. Broadcasting the fear of this possible trauma can also be a cause for reluctance to support legal and safe abortion for minors.

Radio Isangano in the Western Province had interviews with some religious leaders, and a Catholic priest commented on the emotional consequences of having an abortion:

Abortion is a crime with bad effects on the life of the individual who committed that crime. She always feels guilty, and for anything happening to her, she tends to consider it as a punishment for the crime she committed (Radio Isangano, News Report 11).

The priest highlighted his view that abortion is a 'crime' and has long-term effects on the lives of those who have abortions. He added that "*abortion leaves deep and incurable psychological wounds*" (Radio Isangano, News Report 11). This indicates

the concern of religious leaders and other people opposing abortion about the possible future mental health effects of abortions on minors.

A Muslim leader also outlined the opinion that psychological trauma was God's punishment for having an abortion:

God will put fear in her heart and her soul will always be traumatised because of the soul she killed. The God almighty continues saying on the last day, those foetuses who have been killed will ask their mothers, saying, "Mum, why did you kill me? What was my fault to deserve death?" (Radio Isangano, News Report 11).

The Muslim leader intended to warn Muslim listeners against seeking abortion services to avoid God's punishments. The language used to describe punishments for females who have abortions is terrifying and can discourage females from seeking abortion for fear of the punishment they could receive from God.

The above quotes are examples of the radio stations broadcasting opinions showing that some people do not support the legal reform allowing abortion for minors because of the concern for the consequences that abortion can have on girls' mental health. Broadcasting these opinions and concerns can affect the acceptance of the legal provision of abortion for minors. As a result, some may fear to seek abortion services for fear of that feeling of culpability which may follow abortion. These arguments indicate that radio stations contributed to spreading moral panics by covering these subjective concerns, based on beliefs rather than on research or scientific fact.

Concern about encouraging immorality

Radio stations also broadcast some citizens' voices accusing the government of encouraging immorality:

They should not encourage bad behaviour of thinking that fornication is normal, they will not fear evil (Flash FM, News Report 2; 03/10/2018).

The interviewee did not support the government allowing abortion for minors and defended moral values which oppose sex before marriage as abnormal immoral behaviour. To the listeners, this argument communicated the concern about the probability of the legal provision of abortion making girls engage in sexual activity early

which is a socially prohibited behaviour in Rwanda. It also implied that having sex before marriage then getting pregnant and further seeking abortion are deviant behaviours.

Others echoed these concerns:

The consequences it will cause is that it will make many children become delinquents because they know that even if they get pregnant the government allows them to have abortions easily (KT Radio, News Report 17).

Another said:

If someone can do something bad knowing that there are no risks, and even if there are some risks the government support them, you understand that they cannot be afraid of committing such bad sins (KT Radio, News Report 17).

In Rwandan society where sex before marriage is prohibited, any sexual activity for young people is considered immorality, delinquency and bad behaviour. The above comments on KT Radio indicated that the risk of getting pregnant served as a guardrail to prevent the girls from having sexual intercourse, and that allowing legal access to abortion for minors removed the guardrail. This indicated the speakers' views that the government gave girls the right to engage in sexual intercourse. These comments highlight concern about the possible consequences of legalising abortion for minors; where the audience was worried about immoral behaviours which might develop.

In a discussion on legal reform in a live talk show on Radio 10, one woman called and argued:

I think that encouraging abortion for girls below 18 will encourage fornication (Radio 10, Live Talk Show 32; 11/10/ 2021).

And the journalist responded.

Yes, it is encouraging fornication. Because when she gets pregnant, she goes to the hospital they terminate it and goes back to get another one and so on (Radio10, Live Talk Show 32; 11 Oct 2021).

The above comments are based on cultural attitudes against sex before marriage and against abortion. The journalist's argument provided distorted and misleading

information with no facts on how allowing abortion can increase sexual activity among young girls.

Another interviewee from the southern province complained in a news report on Radio 10:

Nowadays, young people are having sexual intercourse as if it is a game. Some girls have started to be sex workers, and they are making money. They no longer fear pregnancies because they know that once they are pregnant, they will easily access abortion services (Radio 10, News Report 29; 13/08/ 2022).

The interviewee found that expanding access to legal abortion demystified sexuality and the fear of having early pregnancies for girls with some starting to engage in sex work while they are still minors.

Another man commented:

The fact that a girl gets pregnant is no longer a big deal she can terminate it without any problem. It has negative effects on our good cultural values as Rwandans (Radio 10, News report 29; 13/08/ 2022).

The speaker is concerned about how access to abortion was made easier. For him, it is a problem when girls can access abortion on request.

Again, they used to fear dying from unsafe abortions, but now that they know that the law allows safe abortion they have nothing to worry about (Radio 10, news report 29; 13/08/ 2022).

The three interviewees believed that fear of the consequences of sexuality, mainly pregnancies before marriage was a guardrail to encourage girls' abstinence from sexuality before marriage. These show the concern about immoral behaviours caused by the legal reform.

The comments highlighted that Rwandan society is against sexual intercourse before marriage, especially so for girls more than boys. For this reason, in the above arguments, the speakers only mention and condemn the law for liberalising sexuality before marriage for girls. This provides proof of gender inequality and gender-based discrimination in Rwandan society when there are different social standards for men and women.

In a news report broadcast on Radio 10, from Musanze District in the Northern Province, a journalist introduced:

Parents in Musanze do not agree with the articles in the law legalising abortion, they do not even want to hear about it because they think that anyone who gets pregnant must give birth too (Radio 10, News Report 30; 13/08/ 2022).

The above comments show how Rwandan society considers having sex, early pregnancies and having an abortion as immoral behaviours, and considers the legal reform as promoting this immorality. The arguments also victimise minors and others who are in the legal framework to access abortions, as the speakers do not consider the aspect of pregnancies resulting from rape and other forms of sexual violence as a reality. Many arguments showing concern about immorality suppose that all pregnancies result from consensual sex and suggest that such pregnancies do not warrant being terminated.

Broadcasting these negative attitudes to the law adds to moral panics in society and may be a barrier to the implementation of the law allowing abortion for minors, where minors can be discouraged from seeking abortion services or parents discouraged from helping their daughters to seek abortion services.

Concern about violating the rights of the unborn

Some arguments from the radio broadcasts showed that speakers were concerned about how the legal reform violates the right to life of the unborn child. In a news report on Radio 10, from Musanze District in the Northern Province, a journalist interviewed parents in the Northern Province, and one woman commented:

I do not support it at all. The law legalising abortion is bad, I cannot support it! It is like you are strangling a baby inside the womb, you better let the baby be born instead of strangling him in the womb. Yes, it is strangling! Don't you think that when you terminate a pregnancy you are strangling a baby? Yes, it is! (Radio 10, News Report 30, 13/08/ 2022).

The woman was emotionally opposing abortion in that she represented it as “*strangling a baby*” and expressed general opposition to abortion as an act of cruelty. This kind of emotive argument adds to moral panic because it can spread stigma to

girls and women terminating their pregnancies as they might be perceived as wicked. Another woman in the same news report said:

“I cannot support people violating a baby’s right to life” (Radio 10, News Report 30;13/08/ 2022).

Here, the speaker focused on the unborn foetus as a baby who has the right to life, therefore terminating a pregnancy would violate these rights. The news report with parents showing their concern about the new law allowing abortion for minors as violating the right to life of the unborn aimed at encouraging debate on the new law and to show the position of some parents in the Northern Province. However, the way they represent abortion can amplify moral panics and can result in maintaining negative attitudes to abortion and discouraging some girls and women from legally seeking safe abortions.

In a debate on Radio Huguka, one Christian believer argued:

For me the good thing would be to help them along the nine months with counselling, in this country we have good psychologists. They can help them. Instead of killing that person because he cannot take his own defence (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

The guest to the Live Talk Show appealed emotionally opposing the law and constructing the foetus as a ‘person’. The argument also constructs abortion as an injustice against the unborn.

And we also know that all human beings are equal before the law. So, none has more rights than another. So, the foetus has the same rights as the mother or anyone on earth (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

This argument provides evidence of the fact that many of those opposing the right of women to abortion consider the foetus and the mother as having equal rights to life. To this argument, the journalist reminded the guest of the sensitive grounds for which abortion is legally offered especially for minors:

What if they say: we have to let her have an abortion because it is a child and being pregnant and giving birth is dangerous for her health? Especially when she has been sexually abused by a close family member. Don’t you see that

the law is protecting another human life? (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

The speaker replied:

Protecting a human's life while persecuting another one is injustice!

The reason is that the baby in the womb is being killed just because he has no defence. He cannot speak for himself in the same way as his mother (Radio Huguka, Live Talk Show 8; 2021).

The speaker emotionally constructed abortion as an 'injustice', where a 'defenceless baby' would be denied the right to life. The arguments focusing on protecting the rights to life of the unborn add to panic because they construct abortion as another crime and injustice against innocent unborn children. These arguments can maintain and reinforce the hostility to abortion.

Threat to societal values

Many people expressed their opinion through the radio stations that abortion is a threat to societal values and that it should be avoided for the benefit of the whole society:

Rwandans you like attracting curses on yourselves! You will see how these Western laws that you are imitating and bringing into our country will affect us! You have forgotten the word of God. Please remain in the Rwandan cultural values (Flash FM, Live Talk 5; 22 /05/2019).

The speaker opposed the legal provision of abortion for it violates cultural values and therefore adds to the moral panic of considering abortion as a threat to societal values. His argument highlighted the fact that abortion is contrary to Rwandan values and not appropriate in the context of the Rwandan culture because it is inspired by 'Western laws'.

An interviewee from the Southern Province featured on Radio 10 said:

It is not good at all. It should change. They should say it clearly that abortion is a crime as it has always been in the Rwandan culture. It is a crime, even before God (Radio 10, News Report 29; 13/08/ 2022).

The speaker opposed the legal reform of abortion as a believer and defender of cultural values; and argued for 'change' so that abortion continues to be criminalised because he assumed that abortion is against cultural values.

Another interviewee gave his opinion in the same news report on Radio 10 and said:

In Rwanda, we rely on our culture to guide our actions and practices (Radio10, News Report 29; 13/08/ 2022).

The interviewees' opinions indicated that Rwandan culture is central to dictating people's behaviours and deeds. They argued that the legal reform is contrary to the culture, religion and laws of the country.

Given that the culture attaches important value to a child, another interviewee insisted on KT Radio:

*You do not even know what kind of person that baby will become in future!
She does not even know if that child will be Kagame or another leader! (KT Radio, News Report 18).*

It is said in the Kinyarwanda language that no one knows the kind of person a child will become in the future. This means that children, including the foetus in the uterus, must be protected for they will probably become important people. The argument called the attention of listeners to the fact that the culture considers that all important people start by being foetus and then babies and grow up. Therefore, the argument represents abortion as contrary to societal values. The panic about abortion as a threat to societal values represents abortion as inappropriate in the context of Rwandan cultural values. Broadcasting these constructs on the selected radio stations can challenge the implementation of the legal reform allowing abortion for minors. Because many voices portray abortion as a threat, it can maintain and reinforce the negative attitudes to abortion and encourage reluctance to support abortion, encouraging stigmatisation of girls and women seeking abortions. Given that culture influences people's attitudes to abortion, it also may challenge some minors and others on legal grounds from seeking abortion services. The speakers were also concerned about the future effects of decriminalising abortion on Rwandan society and

suggested Rwandans continue holding to their cultural values. This indicates the role of radio stations in fuelling moral panics.

Victimisation of girls and women who seek abortion services

The content from radio stations included a lot of judgemental expressions victimising the teenagers who get early pregnancies as if it was their fault to get pregnant. A woman featured on Radio Ishingiro argued:

When you agree to have sex with anybody you also have to assume the consequences (Radio Ishingiro, News Report 13).

The interviewee highlighted what they see as the personal responsibility of the woman or girl in getting an unwanted pregnancy. The argument is judgemental and denies the right to plan for when people are ready to have children. She also denied the existence of non-consensual sex in Rwanda, considering that any sex resulting in pregnancy cannot be considered unwanted. Telling this to a person who has an unintended pregnancy, especially to a minor, or survivor of rape can make her feel guilty, that she did what was not appropriate and condemns herself for not having good behaviours.

Other people's opinions suggested that those unintended pregnancies result from a girl's or woman's carelessness. In a radio talk show on Radio 10, people commented that:

"Getting a pregnancy is not an accident" (Radio 10, Live Talk Show 32; 11/10/2021).

This is a victimising argument and makes the pregnant girl or woman seeking an abortion feel guilty, careless and irresponsible. It can also add to the stigmatisation and discrimination of girls and women who have unintended pregnancies and those who seek or have safe abortions.

Another man on the same talk show called and added:

"No! But a child of seventeen years is mature enough to know what she does" (Radio 10, Live Talk Show 32; 11/10/2021).

This argument indicates that some minors are considered mature enough to assume the consequences of their actions. The argument is victimising because of its judgemental nature, supposing that a mature person cannot have an unintended

pregnancy or cannot be sexually abused, or a mature person can assume parental responsibilities. In all these cases, the argument is stigmatising for minors who get early and unintended pregnancies.

Others were concerned with the abuse of the law and supported the idea that proof of rape should be provided before an abortion is performed:

They will be lying that they have been abused in order to get an abortion. Because if a girl is raped, her neighbours know it and it is easy to have proof. But because they will not be required to provide any proof, they will be cheating (Flash FM, Live Talk Show 5; 22 /05/2019).

Research suggests that many survivors of rape, including minors, do not reveal a rape unless it results in pregnancy (Basinga *et al.*, 2012); however, the speaker supposed that in the case of rape, there must be witnesses. The argument treats some girls and women seeking to terminate early and unwanted pregnancies as liars. This is victimising and denies the right to access to safe abortion for pregnancies resulting from rape and sexual violence. The argument also denies the right of the pregnant person to decide whether to keep the pregnancy or not.

In a news report on KT Radio, a person commented:

I heard one girl saying, "I got pregnant from my father who raped me!" But if it was not by force (not rape), and you agreed to have sex, you should carry that pregnancy to the end (KT Radio, News Report 17).

The interviewee rejected incest as a reason for abortion and denied the reality of this occurrence, accusing the girl of having consented to sexual intercourse with her father. This argument holds that the girl was the only one responsible for what happened to her and it is another example of a victimising viewpoint.

Another person called in a live talk show on Flash FM and commented:

But we also know that at that age many girls become prostitutes and start to work for money. They should go first and stop them from doing it because they are children. But they wait until they get pregnant and help them to have an abortion (Flash FM, Live Talk Show 5; 22 /05/2019).

For this speaker, girls under 18 are not supposed to be sexually active and he victimised minors as responsible for their unintended pregnancies if they become sex workers. While prostitution is not among the professions which are formally allowed in Rwanda, the argument holds the Government responsible for watching the minors engaging in sexuality and doing nothing to stop them but provide legal abortion for their early pregnancies. The argument adds to moral panics for it is judgemental and offending.

Another victimising argument denied the fact that children can be pregnant:

But what we know is that no child can get pregnant. Even if we say that those are children, there are countries where they get married (Flash FM, Live Talk 5; 22/05/2019).

The speaker indicated that if a girl engages in sexuality, she can no longer be considered a child. The argument is victimising because it considers that minors are mature enough and responsible to take parental responsibilities.

Other speakers did not agree with the idea that minors needed protection, as they consented to sex resulting in unwanted pregnancies:

When they were having sex, they were happy. No reason to kill that baby (Radio10, Live Talk Show 32; 11/10/ 2021).

The argument victimised girls seeking abortion by suggesting that they should keep unwanted pregnancies resulting from consensual sex.

One woman called on Radio 10 opposing the legal reform and said:

And you find people crying to God asking for babies... I think that if someone is not able to use a condom or abstain then get pregnant. They should let her give birth (Radio10, Live Talk Show 32; 11/10/ 2021).

Generally in Rwanda, women with issues of infertility pray to God requesting children. The argument is victimising for it condemns those women who get infertility resulting from abortions as if they were responsible for their own infertility, and condemns them for having had an abortion in the past. By generalising women who fail to give birth,

the argument is stigmatising and victimising all women who are childless because abortion is not the only cause of infertility.

The above analysed arguments and many others from the radio broadcasts show that the public expressed victimising arguments rejecting the basic human rights of pregnant girls. Some advise or coerce girls to keep unwanted pregnancies, holding them responsible for having their early pregnancies, denying the fact that they are minors and holding offending judgemental arguments against pregnant minors.

Foregrounding these opinions creates moral panic and can spread stigma against girls and women seeking or having abortions. Victimising arguments can also prevent some from seeking safe abortion services for they feel guilty and responsible for having those pregnancies. Such arguments can make girls continue pregnancies even when they do not want it, or others continue resorting to unsafe abortions for secrecy, which can be dangerous for their health.

Stigmatisation

In the content from all eight radio stations, some people opposed the law allowing legal access to abortion for minors and expressed stigmatising arguments showing that girls and women who seek or terminate their pregnancies are different from the ideal Rwandan women.

In a live talk show on Radio 10, a man argued that:

I want to ask a question to the girl who decides to have an abortion. How do you feel inside yourself? Aren't you ashamed? Do you think that you are still a girl? Or don't you think you are the mother of the deceased or late baby? Because you are responsible for the death of your own child, God will give you the same punishment as many other killers (Radio10, Live Talk Show 32; 11/10/2021).

This argument indicates that the idea of an 'ideal girl' in Rwanda is the one who has never given birth and aims to humiliate girls who have abortions, portraying them as killers and not fitting in Rwandan society. This argument is stigmatising and offensive to any girl or woman who had an abortion. Even if it was a live talk show which was open to the public, the argument was full of insults and humiliations for girls who have

already had abortions because they feel that they do not belong to either category of women, girls or mothers. It also makes them feel guilty and cruel for having abortions and in fear of punishment from God.

A man on Radio Flash FM said angrily:

“You become a murderer because you have killed a person!” (Flash FM, News Report 3; 24/07/2020).

The man showed that a girl who has terminated a pregnancy becomes immediately a murderer. Being a murderer is a general label for those who seek or have abortions in Rwandan society because abortion is considered killing. The fact that girls having abortions are described as killers obliges secrecy because no one would like to be considered a murderer. As a result, the stigma can be a challenge to minors willing to seek abortion services as they may fear being known and stigmatised after they have abortions.

In some broadcasts, girls and women terminating pregnancies as well as medical doctors are described with stigmatising attributes. On Radio 10 one caller argued:

“They are evil, bad people who kill babies!” (Radio10, Live Talk Show 32; 11/10/2021).

The argument is stigmatising against anyone who is implicated in receiving or providing abortion services. This can affect the decision-making of some girls and women in the sense that some may fear being seen or known in this way, and it may oblige them either to keep unwanted pregnancies or seek abortion clandestinely. It can also affect medical doctors' decisions in providing abortion services as they may refuse to do it for fear of stigma.

A journalist in a live debate directly amplified this stigma for doctors:

But let me ask our medical doctors: are you going to spend your time performing abortions instead of treating people? Are you allowed to do that? Or will you accept to do that? (Radio10, Live Talk Show 32; 11/10/2021).

For the journalist, performing an abortion is not the task of medical doctors who should focus on providing medical treatment. This argument can add to the stigmatisation of

healthcare providers who provide abortion services in the same way that girls and women seeking abortion are stigmatised and constructed as killers. This argument provides evidence of the way that healthcare providers are stigmatised for helping women have abortion services in Rwanda, which may result in some refusing to perform abortions in order to avoid the stigma associated with abortion.

Conclusion

This chapter presented results from the interviews with radio station staff and radio content under the guidance of moral panics. The researcher analysed data to understand the way non-state radio stations covered the legal reform expanding abortion for minors in Rwanda, and the way they generated elements of moral panics mainly through 'hostility' which was characterised by the opposition of the majority of Rwandans to the legal provision of abortion for minors and abortion itself (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p.150), with the big part of religious leaders in spreading panics through opposing speeches against the law allowing abortion for minors. Elements of Moral panics were fanning fears of 'deviance', whereby having an abortion was considered a behaviour violating social norms (Cohen, 2002); they 'heightened concern' where the majority of the population was worried about the consequences of expanding abortion on children's health and the society (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 1994, p.150); there was 'consensus of threat' that legal provision of abortion for minors is a threat to societal values, there were also elements of 'victimising and stigmatising' characterised by judgemental and humiliating arguments against girls who have early pregnancies and seek abortions, and the portrayals of those minors as deviants.

The interviews with radio station staff showed that they were first influenced by professional news values such as timeliness, controversy, and proximity, among others. The fact that the law was controversial also contributed to the increased coverage of moral panics. The participants showed that the hostility, controversy, and deviance, which are elements of moral panics, motivated the radio stations to cover the law expanding abortion for minors. While this points to the possible sensationalisation of the topic, the participants also recognised wanting to provide the audience with credible and balanced information, and to raise awareness of the law. Participants also said that they covered the stigmatisation and victimisation of minors because they wanted to advocate for the implementation of the law allowing abortion

for minors because some of them were harassed in their families for early pregnancies.

The analysis of radio content showed the legal reform was intensively covered as a threat to societal values, whereby the majority of the public expressed themselves against the law for fear of harm it might have on social values. The analyses pointed out that the majority of Rwandans expressed their hostility to the law and to minors who get pregnant and then seek abortion services, and they were portrayed as deviant. The analysis of the radio broadcasts indicated that the majority of the public voices constructed abortion as murder because it is seen as terminating pregnancies which were recognised as the beginning of every human life. Both in the socio-cultural context and the religious context, many people expressed their opinion that girls seeking abortion were killers, murderers, cruel, and evil people. Abortion was also constructed as infanticide, an abomination, a taboo, and a great sin of killing innocents thus allowing legal abortion as an injustice against unborn babies.

The fact that the Rwandan law maintained strict punishment for girls and women who have abortions apart from the five categories mentioned in the law, it was obvious that abortion remained a criminal offence in the Rwandan law, and thus would be seen as deviance. The broadcast content also highlighted concerns about the possible consequences of the legal reform. During the analysis, it was obvious that many people were concerned about the future effects of abortion on minors' health including infertility, death, increased immorality, and psychological trauma. It was obvious that abortion's consequences were imagined in terms of post-abortion complications of unsafe abortion, but these consequences were based on conjecture rather than on research or scientific fact. Others showed concern about the behaviour of girls, whereby they thought that the law would increase immorality among young girls who might engage more in sexuality, and in having more abortions of the resulting unintended pregnancies.

The radio content also foregrounded voices showing concern about the rights of the unborn. For religious speakers, they showed that there are God's punishments for anyone who attempts to have an abortion. The religious views also showed concern about the future consequences of abortion on minors' mental health. They indicated

that abortion leaves psychological trauma and can affect the current and future generations of young girls.

The analysis of radio content has also shown victimising arguments whereby there were judgemental arguments and condemnation of girls specifically those who get early pregnancies. They were condemned for the perceived immorality of engaging in sexuality before marriage which was constructed as fornication or prostitution resulting in early pregnancies. Minors who get early pregnancies are constructed as 'delinquents' and 'prostitutes'. This kind of victimisation was obvious in the arguments holding girls responsible for an unintended pregnancy. Many of the broadcast voices rejected the fact that there are many reasons why a girl or a woman can get unwanted pregnancies including rape. Arguments victimising girls denied that sexual abuse or sexual assault was to blame but held that girls get pregnant as a result of 'immorality', 'fornication', 'prostitution' and 'delinquency'. The arguments deny the fact that they are minors or children and argue that if some consent to sexual intercourse, that means they are not children but mature enough to assume the consequences of engaging in sex before marriage and mature enough to assume parental responsibilities. The arguments also maintained that in case there is consensual sex, there should not be unintended pregnancies, therefore victimising arguments coerced minors to keep pregnancies. These voices deny the reality which is that unintended pregnancies can result from both consented sex and coerced sex, and that girls do not always have a say in preventing pregnancy.

The analysis of elements of moral panics in the broadcast content highlighted stigmatising arguments. Not only do people's arguments label minors who have early pregnancies as immoral and those seeking or have abortions as murderers and killers there were also arguments humiliating girls for having abortions or for being different from ideal or 'normal' Rwandan girls and women. The victimisation and stigmatisation directed against girls who seek or have abortions deny girls' sexual reproductive health and rights which is also discrimination against females. Issues regarding sexuality and early pregnancies involve both males and females, however, many of the broadcast arguments condemn only girls for what was considered as bad behaviours, fornication, and immorality of having abortions, and only girls are portrayed as deviants. However, a few content mentioned the role of boys and men in making those girls pregnant, or

for contributing to the immoral behaviour of which girls are accused. Instead, men were heard complaining about the perceived possible effects of abortion such as infertility which would affect men who might marry girls who would have terminated pregnancies. Some men represent themselves as victims of the legal reform allowing abortion for minors because they risk not being as reproductive as they wish.

Victimisation and stigmatisation can not only be analysed as gender discrimination but also as a social injustice against Rwandan females in terms of sexual and reproductive rights. While the participants' interviews indicated that the coverage aimed at raising awareness of the law among their audiences, contributing to public education, and influencing negative attitudes to abortion in order to promote access to safe abortion for minors; the arguments included in the broadcast coverage can have negative consequences on the implementation of the legal reform.

Numerous elements of moral panics were present in the news, live talk shows, and radio magazine programmes broadcast on all eight non-state radio stations from the five provinces in Rwanda. This provides evidence of coverage that can reinforce negative social attitudes about abortion and stigma against girls and women who have abortions, as well as medical doctors who provide these services. This coverage can also discourage some girls from seeking safe abortion services for fear of stigma. Those girls who might not seek safe abortion can either keep the pregnancies or resort to unsafe abortion for secrecy. However, given the radio stations' intention was not that of amplifying moral panics, this can be understood in the context of unwitting biases.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings and concludes the study by drawing from the previous six chapters, demonstrating the way the findings provide answers to research questions and the way in which the study has an original contribution to the scholarship and makes a recommendation for future studies.

This study analysed the way Rwandan non-state radio stations covered the decriminalisation of abortion for minors in Rwanda. It analysed data under the guidance of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989) and moral panics (Cohen, 1972) theories. The study employed a qualitative research design, and the data collection was undertaken through a collection of 36 broadcasts of radio content from the eight selected non-state radio stations from all provinces of Rwanda and interviews with eight participants, one from each of the eight non-state radio stations. The researcher analysed data through an inductive qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2014).

This study drew conclusions to answer the research questions of this study to show how non-State radio stations played a role in holding the public sphere on the legal reform expanding abortion for minors and how arguments emerging from the public sphere contributed to the construction of moral panics around abortion.

The analysis found responses to the following research questions:

- 1) How did the selected radio stations cover the legal amendments to abortion access for minors in Rwanda?
- 2) How are Rwandan citizens' voices reflected in non-State radio's coverage of this issue?
- 3) How do selected radio stations represent issues related to legal abortion for minors in Rwanda?
- 4) How do the radio stations' policies, guidelines, practices, and other news-making factors impact the coverage of abortion for minors in Rwanda?

Summary of findings and discussion

Radio coverage of the legal reform to expand abortion access for minors in Rwanda

The analysis of radio content and interviews with radio station staff under the guidance of public sphere theory helped to find the answer to the question about the way non-state radio stations covered the legal reform allowing abortion for minors.

This study revealed that the eight non-state radio stations covered the legal reform under various formats, specifically news reports, live talk shows and pre-recorded radio magazine programmes. These formats are common and recognised internationally in radio programming where news reports compile a mixture of information in a short format commonly broadcast during news hours (Kustiawan *et al.*, 2023; Kuyucu, 2014; Chignell, 2009). For pre-recorded radio magazine programmes journalists have time to interview various sources and make one long content with more detailed information regarding the issue under coverage (Chignell, 2009; Kustiawan *et al.*, 2023). In this study, the analysis of the participants' responses to interviews indicated that radio stations covered the issue of legal provision of abortion as an issue of concern affecting society, mostly in news reports live talk shows and pre-recorded magazine programmes formats in order to balance the discussions on the issue. Studies have pointed out the importance of radio live talk shows in facilitating public discussions between the audience and the programme host (Chiumbu and Motsaathebe, 2021), in these interactions currently social media and mobile telephones play important role in helping the audience to participate in the programme production (Chiumbu and Motsaathebe, 2021; Kustiawan *et al.*, 2023).

Each radio station's contribution to this study was unique because while all participants indicated having produced the three formats, the analysis of content showed that all eight radio stations produced news reports either covering events as hard stories or feature stories based on public opinions (Reinemann *et al.*, 2012). In addition to news reports, Radio Salus was the only one to produce pre-recorded radio programmes that I analysed in this study, there were no live talk shows as the participants indicated. The pre-recorded programmes helped the radio station to provide factual and balanced information, raise awareness on the new law and help the radio station to hold inclusive discussions about the issue of legal provision of abortion for minors in

Rwanda. Pre-recorded magazine programmes were appreciated by researchers for their quality of 'flexibility' and the way they combine information (Chignell, 2009) to broadcast to the audience.

The four community radio stations (Radio Huguka, Radio Isangano, Radio Ishingiro, Radio Izuba) focused on coverage of news reports mostly made of hard stories covering awareness campaigns and a few feature stories. All their combined content had only one talk show from Radio Huguka. The coverage of news reports helped these radio stations to provide information about the new law and participate in raising awareness, especially with event coverage of hard stories. The coverage of feature stories helped to voice public opinions in regard to the law allowing abortion for minors.

The study revealed that the three commercial radio stations in Kigali (KT radio, Radio 10 and Flash FM) increasingly covered news reports to provide factual and balanced information to the audience. Through live talk shows the three radio stations mostly encouraged debates and inclusive discussions where all categories of people had opportunities to express themselves about the legal provision of abortion for minors. The analysis of talk shows indicated that radio stations both in rural and urban areas interacted with the audience which permitted them to express their views live on the issues regarding the legal reform allowing abortion for minors. The convergence of traditional radio with the internet and mobile phones facilitated interactions during live debates with the host and guests in studios and the audience who could participate in live shows from different locations (Bonini and Monclús, 2015).

As was first pointed out in the introduction (Chapter One) of this study, scholarly attention on radio coverage of abortion was limited, whereby there were no other examples of radio stations which have covered abortion in different or similar formats as the ones analysed here. The analysis of the radio coverage of abortion under news reports, pre-recorded magazine programmes and live talk shows indicates the unique contribution of this study to which it subscribed to fill the gap in the literature.

Citizen voices as reflected in non-State radio's coverage

The study public sphere is a space where opinion is formed when people come together and discuss issues of concern affecting them (Habermas, 1989). The literature review (Chapter Two) of this study has pointed out that broadcasting media especially radio is an ideal space for the public sphere where opinion can be formed

(Butsch, 2011), with the help of the internet which has revolutionised the functionalities of the traditional media, it helped radio be closer to the ideal public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002) where despite people being in different areas can participate in radio discussions and express their opinions about issues affecting the public as it was in the Habermasian public sphere (Chiumbu and Motsaathebe, 2021).

Under the guidance of the public sphere, results revealed that the law expanding access to abortion for minors received a lot of coverage from selected radio stations as an issue of concern affecting society. The analysis of radio content in this study revealed that radio stations gave voices to ordinary citizens or people in general, representatives of religious authority, public authority, NGOs, and all experts who participated in the discussions in the public sphere that radio stations created. This indicated that radio stations were closer to the ideal public sphere because citizens had the opportunity to exercise their rights to expression and rights to citizenship in public discussions (Habermas, 1996) and that the public sphere as Habermas imagined it, is supposed to be a space accessible and inclusive to all (Deane, 2005).

Studies in the literature review came back on the fact that media include voices of citizens in general without specifying who was included in the public sphere (Purcell et al., 2014; Nyathi and Ndhlovu, 2021). However, the analysis of radio content revealed specific categories of people who expressed themselves over the legal provision of abortion for minors. The analysis indicated that people in general, especially parents, considered allowing abortion for minors as inappropriate for it could encourage sexuality among minors which is considered bad manners and immorality in the society, and they worried about other health effects of abortion on minors. The majority of voices accused the government of promoting immorality and violating moral, socio-cultural values, and religious beliefs. However, the analysed content also showed that there were a minority of voices from Flash FM, Radio 10, and Radio Salus where ordinary citizens including parents, were appreciating the fact that abortion has been legally made available for minors. This support was due to the fact that early pregnancies have become an issue of concern which affected girls' education and their well-being in general.

The literature review did not find any study relating to radio coverage of teenage mothers and abortion; however, this study found that radio stations also included teenage mothers' voices that, through their own first-hand experiences, showed the need for liberalisation of safe abortion for minors to protect children's rights in various ways. The inclusion of these voices in the public sphere is evidence of an inclusive public sphere and the radio stations' decision of democratising the public sphere. The inclusion of all citizens' voices is also a unique contribution of this study to the academic literature. Other studies have revealed that religious beliefs are among the main challenges to the acceptability of abortion where they construct abortion as a sin of killing a human being (Nyathi and Ndhlovu, 2021; Sambaiga *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, this study found expressions from Religious leaders mainly Catholic Church, Protestant Churches and Islam who contributed to the controversy of the law allowing abortion for minors where they opposed all legal grounds and openly prevented their believers from having and supporting the law allowing abortion by supporting minors to seek or to have abortion services because it was considered a sin and murder.

While some studies in the literature of this study mentioned the opposition of religious beliefs in general or mentioned only one religion opposing abortion (McDonnell and Murphy, 2019; Larsson *et al.*, 2015). In this study, it was obvious that the Catholic Church opposed all legal grounds through a communiqué to all believers and the government requesting believers not to have abortions and health care providers in catholic-owned hospitals to never perform abortions in these settings. The communiques were read on Flash FM, Radio 10; and Radio Huguka and KT Radio broadcast the extract of the Catholic Bishops reading the communiqués. The Muslim leaders also expressed themselves through two community radio stations, Radio Huguka and Radio Ishingiro supporting abortion on medical grounds only and warning their believers not to have abortions otherwise if not they would attract a curse on themselves and severe God's punishment of burning them in an everlasting fire.

The researcher analysed these arguments were also analysed as making sense of moral panics in Chapter Six because they incite fear of abortion and can contribute to the stigmatisation of girls and women who have abortions in society, they can contribute to maintaining or increase hostility to the law allowing abortion which can also lead to discouraging girls and women in the legal framework from seeking safe abortion services for fear of stigma and societies' judgement. The clarification of whose

religion's voices are included in the public sphere is specific to this study and their overt opposition to abortion broadcast through the radio content is unique to this study and a contribution to the scholarly literature.

In the imagined Habermasian public sphere the public debates engaged public authorities so that they could debate on issues affecting society and help in the search for solutions (Habermas, 1989). In the literature review, other studies showed the government reacting to the media coverage in Ireland by a referendum (McDonnell and Murphy, 2019) and in the USA (Rohlinger, 2015) to liberalise abortion on request. However, there were no studies showing how the public authority intervened in the public sphere to address the public's concerns and provide explanations on issues affecting society, like it was in this study. The analysis of radio content revealed that some radio stations (Radio Huguka, Radio Ishingiro, KT Radio, Flash FM) included the voices of public authorities explaining the law to the listeners. The public authorities responded to the people's concerns about the legality of abortion for minors and explained the reasons which motivated the government to expand access to abortion for minors. The public authorities explained that the legal provision of abortion for minors aimed at protecting the child's rights and the rights of victims of rape and other victims of sexual violence. In this way, radio stations participated in educating the public and providing factual and balanced information. The government authorities' voices were analysed in Chapter Five to show the role of radio stations in engaging the public authorities in the public sphere. The inclusion of public authorities' voices highlights the unique contribution of this study and the gap in literature this study filled.

In the literature review of this study, HDI was among the NGOs who showed that they were concerned by the implementation of the law expanding abortion for minors in Rwanda because 40% of the public hospitals belong to the Christian Churches while abortion is not performed in these settings. This is to indicate that activists from various NGOs participated actively in the reform to allow abortion for minors and other circumstances (Umuhoza *et al.*, 2013).

All seven of eight radio stations broadcast activists from HDI explaining in deep the law and the reasons for the legal provision of abortion for minors and other circumstances on radio stations through news reports, live talk shows and radio magazines explaining the law to the listeners and the benefits of having a law allowing

abortion for minors in Rwanda. The activists appreciated the law because they believed that it was a way to eradicate illegal, unsafe abortions and maternal mortality resulting from illegal and unsafe abortions and other dangers of resorting to unsafe abortions. Besides the HDI activists defending the legal provision of abortion for minors, there were other NGOs such as CLADHO, expressing their opposition to the law expanding abortion for minors. They only supported abortion when the pregnancy puts the life of the pregnant person in danger and opposed all other legal grounds. CLADHO appeared in two live talk shows from two radio stations (Flash FM and Radio 10) in debates where they defended the importance of protecting child rights, which means pregnant minors' and their future babies' right to life as opposed to HDI activists who supported the right to abortion for minors.

Including the activists supporting the legal reform allowing abortion for minors and others opposing abortion in the same debate provided evidence that Flash FM and Radio 10 wanted to provide balanced information regarding the new law. The fact that the HDI activists were the most represented both in the radio stations located in Provinces and Kigali city and in all formats, can indicate that many radio stations chose to broadcast mostly activists' positions that focused on promoting the rights to abortion for minors. Nevertheless, the analysis indicated that activists' voices defending the law were most of the time broadcast with the voices of the people in general, in various categories and in all ages and genders expressing their controversies to the law. Chapter Six of this study analysed those voices opposing the legal reform as making sense of moral panics expressed in the public sphere.

The analysis of content under public sphere guidance (Chapter Five) indicated that the radio stations sought factual information from experts mainly lawyers and medical doctors to explain the legality of abortion. Radio Huguka, KT Radio, Radio Salus, Radio 10, and Flash FM included experts' voices in the debate on the law expanding abortion for minors, inviting either medical doctors or lawyers, or both. The lawyers explained the possibility for abortion to be considered a right despite remaining criminal in Rwandan law, and that abortion of pregnancies resulting from sexual violence can be allowed to protect the rights of the pregnant person who is the victim. Medical doctors had time to explain the reasons they accepted to terminate pregnancies for minors, explaining that abortion is not a crime when it is done before the foetus is viable, they cannot terminate a pregnancy. Radio Huguka was the only

radio station to raise the issue of foetus viability in a controversial live talk show between medical doctors and religious believers in a debate regarding foetus as human beings. Medical doctors also explained to Radio Huguka and Radio Salus the safe methods used to terminate pregnancies in hospitals as opposed to traditional methods that traditional healers use to perform illegal and unsafe abortions. Medical doctors consider that it is important to help minors have safe abortions as a way of saving their lives and preventing them from the dangers of resorting to unsafe abortions. The inclusion of experts' voices was another piece of evidence that radio stations held an inclusive public sphere and that they provided factual information from experts to explain the law to the population. It is also a unique contribution of this study because there were no other studies mentioned in the context of this study where experts participated in the media public sphere explaining abortion to the people.

Radio stations' representation of the legal provision of abortion for minors

The analysis of radio content found that the issue of radio stations covered the legal reform allowing abortion for minors as an issue of concern regarding morality including teenage pregnancies, teenage sexuality, and in relation to religious beliefs and cultural values which preoccupy Rwandan society nowadays. Through the lens of moral panics theory (Cohen, 1972), this study showed that socio-cultural values and religious beliefs dictated the way the public represents issues related to the law allowing abortion for minors.

Research has indicated that the fear or concern about the possible consequences and effects of a social problem on societal values heightens moral panics (Ahmed, 2004), as that was the case for the panics broadcast in radio content about fear of abortion consequences for minors in Rwanda. Moral panics regarding abortion for minors is also associated with the fear of the other as Ahmed (2004, p. 64) suggests, the fear of the other causes moral panic because it constructs the other as dangerous to individuals and society.

The analysis of this radio content in this study found that in all eight radio stations the public constructed abortion as deviance in general with terms such as murder, killing, infanticide, abomination, taboo, strangling babies inside the uterus, great sin, injustice and killing innocents. The public represented girls and women seeking abortions, or having had abortions, as killers, murderers, cruel, and evil, prostitutes, and adulterers.

The public represented the law as a threat to societal values and expressed their concern about the harm it might have on minors' physical and mental health in the future such as infertility and psychological trauma; therefore, some voices were requesting that the law should remain criminalising abortion in order to avoid deviance and immorality. The local community members victimised pregnant teenagers by holding them responsible for their pregnancies and believing they should continue their pregnancies as a social punishment for their immorality of having sex before marriage, consent to sexual intercourse, delinquency, fornication, prostitution and many more negative portrayals. Victimising arguments make sense of moral panics as they encourage stigmatisation of pregnant minors and other girls and women who seek abortion as different from the ideal Rwandan girls and women. This way the public constructs the deviant in this study indicates that it is stigmatising to pregnant minors so that the fear of stigma of being different makes them consider their behaviours and become normal and acceptable people in accordance with the norms of society (McRobbie and McRobbie, 2003, p. 193).

This study revealed that radio stations contributed to increasing moral panics about the law expanding abortion for minors. The fact that those were representations broadcast on eight radio stations across the country can challenge the implementation of the law allowing abortion for minors, as they can reinforce negative attitudes against abortion and reinforce stigmatisation against girls and women seeking abortions and those having abortions. Studies revealed that discussions around abortion are also dictated by gender discrimination (Choonara *et al.*, 2024; Coast *et al.*, 2019)

The analysis of radio content in this study also revealed gender discrimination against girls in issues regarding sexuality. While both boys and girls are involved in sexuality. The arguments show the concern about the possibility for girls to engage in sexuality and in case the sexuality results in pregnancies, most people's voices condemn pregnant girls for bad manners of immorality. These elements of moral panics were broadcast in the news, live talk shows and radio magazine programmes on all eight non-state radio stations from the five provinces in Rwanda. They were mostly broadcast with activists' explanations in news reports and radio magazines, and in live talk shows where journalists interacted directly with the audiences alone or with guests and the audiences. It was obvious that radio stations gave voices to the elements of moral panics in the content mostly from ordinary citizens who either were interviewed

or who participated by calling in the studio or by commenting on radio's social media platforms. This provided the real image of the law expanding abortion for minors and the perception of abortion in general in Rwanda.

Therefore broadcasting moral panics spreading the fear of that stigma and the supposed negative effects of consequences discourages girls and women on legal grounds from seeking abortion which is critical to the public sphere created by radio stations. However, researchers mentioned that debates creating fear could not be interpreted as democratising the public sphere (Millar, 2015).

The analysis through the lens of moral panic showed abortion is not an issue which is easily and openly discussed in the public, which recognises the existence of public and private spheres (Habermas, 1989) regarding the issue of abortion. This was obvious when some participants showed that it was difficult to know what the audience thought because some might oppose the legal reform in public while inside themselves, they support it. As a result, while only opposing voices are the most heard they can challenge the decision-making of girls in the legal framework to seek abortion services because they encourage discrimination, and stigmatisation and violate the right to abortion of girls and women on legal grounds.

Factors affecting coverage of the law expanding abortion for minors in Rwanda

Studies in the literature review of this study have pointed out that there are many reasons that make media cover abortion issues mainly newsworthiness when the issue interests the audience (Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018), the defence of human rights especially women's rights to abortion when media take the position of advocating for women's rights to abortion (Feltham-King and Macleod, 2015) and the social-cultural context when media want to promote social values (Nyathi and Ndhlovu, 2021)

The radio participants indicated various factors which influenced the coverage of the legal reform allowing abortion for minors to provide information and raise awareness of the legal reform allowing abortion for minors. The analysis showed that among the main reasons for coverage, the participants mentioned newsworthiness, which means that the radio stations covered the law because it had some news values mainly because it was new, controversial, of the public interest, and because of its proximity to the audience, among others. This indicated that the law expanding abortion for

minors interested the population in various categories and radio stations' coverage aimed at informing the public of the new issues happening in society and boosting their listenership.

In the analysis of interviews with radio participants in Chapter Five, seven participants indicated that information about the new law aimed at influencing and changing negative attitudes toward the law expanding abortion for minors. The eighth participants declared that they covered the law to inform the audience about the new law however did not increase the coverage because of fear of advertising the law and prompting the listeners to seek abortions while it is not their intent to encourage abortion-seeking behaviours as they are contrary to socio-cultural values. Others indicated that radio station staff believed that the debates on the law allowing abortion for minors provided young people with sexual education and knowledge of SRHR. This implies that all participants believed in the power of the radio to encourage acceptance of the new law. However, much of the coverage highlighted the negative attitudes that people had towards the legal reform allowing abortion for minors. This can question the real end effects of the radio coverage which could be different to the intent of the participants.

In the discussion of the issue regarding teenage mothers' hardship and the injustice they face in society, participants argued that it helped the radio stations to be the voices of the voiceless in the public sphere and advocated for the right of minors to access abortion services. Similarly, the radio stations discussed the law to advocate for wider accessibility to safe abortion services even to other women who were not mentioned in the law expanding abortion under limited circumstances. In that way, the radio stations carried out debates on abortion access as a controversial issue affecting society and encouraged expression and discussion about these issues with the intent that they could find solutions from the central government authorities.

Given that this study's literature did not identify the coverage of radio stations of abortion, the participants' reasons for coverage of the law expanding abortion for minors is a unique contribution to the scholarly literature.

Study's contribution to the scholarly literature

This study is unique in the literature because it is the first attempt to show the way media especially non-State radio stations in Rwanda mediated and broadcast the law expanding abortion specifically for minors.

A study explored how abortion is represented in some Ugandan newspapers (Larsson *et al.*, 2015). This study showed a predominance of religious discourse in the media debate around abortion. In Tanzania, Sambaiga *et al.* (2019) analysed the media discourse around abortion regimes in Tanzanian newspapers, and they found that religious frames dominated medical and human rights in relation to abortion provisions. Another study was based on the framing of abortion on Kenyan Televisions and showed that abortion positive frames of abortions can empower adolescents with information on SRHR (Kafu *et al.*, 2021). However, there was a need for academic attention on the way radio, which is the most influential medium in Africa (Myers, 2008) covers or represents abortion in EAC counties and beyond.

Available studies show that the abortion regime in the EAC countries varies from country to country, however, in most countries, abortion is provided when the pregnancy jeopardises the life of the pregnant woman like in Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda (Blystad *et al.*, 2019; Larsson *et al.*, 2015), only in Kenya and in Rwanda abortion is provided under limited circumstances (Aliongo, 2021; Rugema *et al.*, 2023), in DRC abortion is provided “in cases where continuing the pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the woman.” (Magalona *et al.*, 2023: 2). Beyond the EAC, research shows that in ESA, some countries like South Africa and Zambia have liberalised abortion laws (Blystad *et al.*, 2019; Varkey, 2000).

Given the fact that Rwanda is the only country to have liberalised abortion specifically for minors and other specific circumstances in the East African Community, this study is the first to critically examine how abortion is mediated through broadcast media, more specifically in radio stations. It is also the first scholarly attempt in the area of mass communication and health communication to show how media especially radio stations mediated the public sphere and moral panics on abortion in Rwanda and Sub-Saharan Africa as well as ESA regions.

While it was obvious in the literature that there was less scholarly attention on the way radio broadcast abortion issues, this study contributes to filling that gap by showing the motivations influencing the coverage of abortion in non-State radio stations, and the way they both held inclusive public sphere and fuelled moral panics with the negative portrayals of abortion and the legal reform allowing abortion for minors in radio content.

This study recognises that media plays a crucial role in communicating SRHR information (Schiavo, 2007; Lewis and Lewis, 2015; Kafu *et al.*, 2021) and that media houses are influenced by the social norms of society because those social norms play a role in determining deviance, good and bad deeds in societies (Jewkes and Linnemann, 2018). Therefore, this study's findings support that socio-cultural attitudes to abortion and religious beliefs are the main barriers to the implementation of legal reform allowing abortion for minors, as they play an important role in constructing elements of moral panics which oppose the legal provision of abortion for minors. The uniqueness of this study compared to other studies in the literature review is that it was the first to collect radio archives and interviews with radio station staff between October 2023 and February 2024 and analyse how non-State radio stations covered the legal reform of 2018 and 2019 expanding abortion for minors in Rwanda. This is the first study to critically explore how the radio mediates legal reform of abortion in Rwanda. It is also unique because it analysed a range of testimonies or personal experiences from teenage mothers and some parents supporting the law expanding abortion for minors. This study also analysed opinions from medical doctors' first-hand accounts explaining the dangers of unsafe abortion in hospitals.

The study is inclusive itself because it gathered data from various radio stations to show perceptions of Rwandans from the whole country regarding the law expanding abortion for minors. While other studies focused on adolescent pregnancies mainly regarding the reasons for the increased teenage pregnancies in Rwanda (Uwizeye *et al.*, 2020); the study by Coast *et al.* (2021) focused on the consequences of adolescent motherhood on girls' lives. Internationally in ESA, Choonara *et al.* (2024) analysed adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights policies in nine countries in the region. These studies were not conducted in the area of Mass communication; the current study is original in that its findings show relevant discussions on abortion in the area of media and mass communication.

This study's findings complete the findings of other studies in relation to the legal reform expanding abortion under some circumstances of 2018 in the area of public health in Rwanda (Rugema *et al.*, 2023; Påfs *et al.*, 2020) which examined the perceptions of the law among women leaders in Rwanda (Rugema *et al.*, 2023); whereby this study found strong opposition to the legal provision of abortion based on socio-cultural attitudes among women leaders in Rwanda. The other study on challenges to the implementation of the law among health workers in Kigali found that those cultural and religious beliefs are the origin of stigma against health care providers which prevents some of them from providing abortion services (Påfs *et al.*, 2020). In addition to these studies and others which assessed the implementations of the legal reform, this study is unique in having focused on the analysis of radio stations' coverage of the legal provision of abortion specifically for minors in Rwanda, and the findings confirm the issue of moral panics around abortion for minors in Rwanda.

Limitations of the Study

As discussed earlier in the methodology chapter (Chapter Four) this study had some limitations. The researcher conducted this study in Rwanda and the study considered only some selected eight local non-State radio stations, therefore the content of the result on the coverage of the law allowing abortion for minors is specific to Rwanda and, therefore, cannot be generalised to the region because the study only dealt with non-State radio stations covering the Rwandan territory only, not beyond the Rwandan boundaries. However, even if the study cannot be generalised and transferable, the conclusions can be generalised to other socio-cultural contexts in the region of the SSA, EAC, and ESA where there are other contexts with the socio-cultural norms and religious beliefs dictating the ways of living of the populations.

The fact that I only focused on analysing the coverage of the legal reform expanding abortion for minors on non-State radio stations by excluding State radio stations is a limitation because the study does not show the perspectives from state-owned radio stations. This study analysed data with qualitative content analysis but did not conduct a quantitative or mixed-methods study, therefore the results of the study do not show the reality regarding radio coverage of abortion for minors in figures and numbers.

The study was limited to archives of the content from only eight selected radio while there were more non-state radio stations, therefore the perspectives from other radio stations which were not included did not appear in this study. Conducting a study that focused on radio station staff (responsible for encoding messages) and the content (representation or text), did not research how the radio listeners interpreted the broadcast material. The lack of audience reception study is a major limitation. This study only explored radio, rather than other broadcast media (television), print media (newspapers), or digital/online media (Social Media sites, online debates, etcetera). This is another limitation because the study did not show the way the media in general covered the law expanding abortion for minors in Rwanda. Another limitation of this study is that it only focused on analysing the way radio covered the legal provision of abortion specifically for minors, while there are other categories. Therefore, the findings of this study did not focus on the perspectives regarding other specific categories mentioned in the law.

Although the study was limited by only exploring how the legal reform allowing abortion for minors was covered on non-state radio stations in Rwanda, the study does comprehensively critically explore how non-state radio stations have covered abortion where it showed that the eight non-State radio stations held a strong democratic and inclusive public sphere, where the public was able to share their concerns and opinions on the legal provision of abortion for minors in Rwanda. The analysis was able to show that the coverage of the legal reform allowing abortion was made of sensational arguments portraying the legal reform as a threat to Rwandan societal values thus making sense of moral panics which can have impacts on the implementation of the law and to the access to abortion for minors and other women in the legal framework.

Scope for future study

Considering the above limitations to the study, the researcher recognised that the study used a case study of non-State radio stations, with a qualitative approach to enquiry. There is a need for a larger mixed-methods study which could consider media coverage of the law expanding abortion under some circumstances as they are stated by the law both in broadcasting and print and online media coverage of abortion in Rwanda.

This study using Moral Panics Theory assumed the consequences of the elements of moral panics for the listeners because it was extended on a short time frame. There is a need for a more extended time frame which could both analyse the discourse in media and their effects on the audience. In addition, there is a need for an audience study to really know the effects of the media messages specifically radio coverage of the legal reform allowing abortion for minors.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Table of the revisions of the RPC 1977-2019

<p>Decree-Law No. 21/77 of 18 August 1977 establishing the Penal Code</p>	<p>Organic Law N° 01/2012/OL OF 02/05/2012 Instituting The Penal Code Pages 209-214</p>
<p>Article: 325 Anyone who, by food, drink, medicine, manoeuvres, violence or any other means, deliberately causes an abortion to be given to a pregnant woman or a woman who is supposed to be pregnant and who has not consented to it, shall be punished by imprisonment for five to ten years.</p> <p>If the woman consented, the offender would be punished by imprisonment for two to five years.</p> <p>A woman who voluntarily has had or attempted to have an abortion or has consented to the use of the means administered for this purpose shall be punished by imprisonment for two to five years.</p> <p>Article : 326 When the means used to abort the woman have caused her death, the person who has administered them or caused them to be administered or procured for this purpose shall be punished by imprisonment from five to ten years if the woman had consented to the abortion, and to imprisonment from ten to twenty years if the woman had not consented to it.</p>	<p>Article 162 Self-induced abortion Any person who carries out self-induced abortion shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of one (1) year to three (3) years and a fine of fifty thousand (50,000) to two hundred thousand (200,000) Rwandan francs.</p> <p>Article 163: Causing a woman to abort with or without her consent Any person who causes a woman to abort without her consent shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of ten (10) years to fifteen (15) years.</p> <p>In case of mutual consent, a person who causes a woman to abort shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of two (2) years to five (5) years.</p> <p>Any person who, through recklessness or negligence causes a woman to abort shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of six (6) months to one (1) year and a fine of two hundred thousand (200,000) to five hundred thousand (500,000) Rwandan francs or one of these penalties.</p> <p>Article 164: Abortion resulting in death A person who administers, delivers or orders a substance which he/she knows the effect, to a woman and causes abortion which results into death shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of</p>

	<p>fifteen (15) years to twenty (20) years if the woman had consented to the abortion or to life imprisonment and a fine of two hundred thousand (200,000) to two million (2,000,000) Rwandan francs, if such a woman had not consented to the abortion.</p>
<p>Article: 327 However, by way of derogation from articles 325 and 326, there is no criminal liability for a doctor who has performed the abortion, or for a woman who has consented to it, if the following conditions are met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. that it be ascertained by two doctors, after examination and discussion, that the continuation of the pregnancy seriously endangers the woman's health; 2. that this statement be made in writing, in four copies signed by each of the doctors Consultants; 3. that one of the copies of the consultation be given to the person concerned, and that a second copy be addressed to the doctor in charge of the medical sector in whose jurisdiction the abortion is to be performed, other copies kept by the consulting physicians; 4. that the abortion be performed by a State doctor or approved by the State, and that it takes place in a public hospital establishment or in a private hospital establishment approved by the State. 	<p>Article 165 : Exemption from criminal liability for abortion There is no criminal liability for a woman who commits abortion and a medical doctor who helps a woman to abort if one of the following conditions is met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1° when a woman has become pregnant as a result of rape; 2° when a woman has been subjected to forced marriage; 3° when a woman has become pregnant due to incest in the second degree; 4° when the continuation of pregnancy seriously jeopardizes the health of the unborn baby or that of the pregnant woman. <p>The exemption from criminal liability under items 1°, 2° and 3° of Paragraph One of this Article shall be permitted only if the woman who seeks abortion submits to the doctor an order issued by the competent Court recognizing one of the cases under these items, or when this is proven to the Court by a person charged of abortion.</p> <p>The Court where the complaint is filed shall hear and make a decision as a matter of urgency.</p> <p>Article 166: Requirements for exemption from criminal liability for a medical doctor who performs an abortion or a woman who consents to an abortion A medical doctor who performs an abortion or a woman who consents to an abortion or her legally recognized</p>

representative if she cannot decide for herself whether to abort is not criminally liable in accordance with item 4° of Paragraph One of Article 165 of this Organic Law if the following conditions are met: 1° after the medical doctor finds that continuation of the pregnancy would seriously endanger the health of the woman or that the unborn child cannot survive; 2° the medical doctor has sought advice from another doctor where possible, and:

- a. the medical doctor makes a written report in three (3) copies signed by him/herself and the doctor he/she consulted;
- b. one copy is given to the interested party or her legal representative if she cannot decide for herself;
- c. another copy is kept by the medical doctor who consulted her;
- d. the third copy is given to the hospital medical director.

Article 167: Self-induced abortion or performing abortion to another person by a medical professional

For offences provided for under Articles 162 and 163 of this **Organic Law, if the offender is a medical doctor, a midwife or a pharmacist**, he/she shall be liable to an additional penalty of **suspension from exercising his/her profession for a period of three (3) years to five (5) years.**

In case of recidivism, the suspension from exercising the profession shall become definitive.

A person, who contravenes the provisions of Paragraphs One and 2 of this Article, shall be liable **to a term of imprisonment of more than five (5) years to seven (7) years.**

Article 168: Advertising means of abortion

	<p>Any person who, by any means, advertises drugs, materials and any other substances believed to induce abortion shall be liable to a term of imprisonment of six (6) months to two (2) years and a fine of one million (1,000,000) to three million (3,000,000) Rwandan francs or one of these penalties.</p>
<p>Law n°68/2018 of 30/08/2018 Determining Offences and Penalties in General Pages 120- 124</p>	<p>MINISTERIAL ORDER N°002/MoH/2019 OF 08/04/2019 DETERMINING CONDITIONS TO BE SATISFIED FOR A MEDICAL DOCTOR TO PERFORM AN ABORTION</p> <p>Pages: 5-8</p>
<p>Article 123: Self-induced abortion</p> <p>Any person who self-induces an abortion commits an offence. Upon conviction, she is liable to imprisonment for a term of not less than one (1) year and not more than three (3) years and a fine of not less than one hundred thousand Rwandan francs (FRW 100,000) and not more than two hundred thousand Rwandan francs (FRW 200,000).</p> <p>Article 124: Performing an abortion on another person</p> <p>Any person who performs an abortion on another person, commits an offence. Upon conviction, he/she is liable to imprisonment for a term of not less than three (3) years and not more than five (5) years.</p> <p>Any person who, because of negligence or carelessness, causes another person to abort is liable to imprisonment for a term of not less than one (1) year and not more than two (2) years and a fine of not less than three hundred thousand Rwandan francs (RWF 300,000) and</p>	

<p>not more than five hundred thousand Rwandan francs (RWF 500,000) or only one of these penalties.</p> <p>If abortion causes disability certified by a relevant medical doctor, the offender is liable to imprisonment for a term of not less than twenty (20) years and not more than twenty-five (25) years.</p> <p>If abortion causes death, irrespective of whether or not the person having an abortion has given her consent, the offender is liable to life imprisonment.</p>	
<p>Article 125: Exemption from criminal liability for abortion</p> <p>There is no criminal liability if abortion was performed due to the following reasons:</p> <p>1° the pregnant person is a child; 2° the person having abortion had become pregnant as a result of rape; 3° the person having abortion had become pregnant after being subjected to a forced marriage;</p> <p>4° the person having abortion had become pregnant as a result of incest up to the second degree; 5° the pregnancy puts at risk the health of the pregnant person or of the foetus.</p> <p>Abortion is performed by a recognized medical doctor. Conditions to be satisfied for a medical doctor to perform an abortion are determined by an Order of the Minister in charge of health.</p> <p>If, after abortion, it is evident that the person on whom abortion was performed applied for it with no legal basis, such a person is punished as a person who performed a self-induced abortion.</p>	<p>Article 3: allowed grounds for abortion</p> <p>Abortion is performed on the following grounds: 1° the pregnant person is a child; 2° the person requesting for abortion became pregnant as a result of rape; 3° the person requesting for abortion became pregnant after being subjected to a forced marriage; 4° the person requesting for abortion became pregnant as a result of incest committed with a person to the second degree of kinship; 5° the pregnancy puts at risk the health of the pregnant person or of the foetus.</p> <p>Without prejudice to the provisions of Article 11 of this Order, the person requesting for abortion is not required to produce evidence of the grounds she invokes.</p> <p>If, after abortion, it is proved that the person on whom abortion was performed provided false information, she is liable in accordance with the law.</p> <p>Article 6: Procedure by which an application for a child to abort is made</p>

Article 126: Procedure by which an application for a child to abort is made

If a person wishing to abort is a child, the application to do so is made by persons with parental authority over her after agreeing upon it.

If persons with parental authority over a child disagree among themselves or if they disagree with the child, the wish of the child prevails.

A person requesting abortion for the child over whom he/she has parental authority, files a request with a recognised medical doctor, accompanied with the child's birth certificate containing the date of birth.

Article 127: Advertising the means of abortion

Any person who, by any means, advertises drugs, materials or any other substances believed to induce abortion, commits an offence. Upon conviction, he/she is liable to imprisonment for a term of not less than one (1) year and not more than two (2) years and a fine of not less than two million Rwandan francs (FRW 2,000,000) and not more than three million Rwandan francs (FRW 3,000,000) or only one of these penalties.

If a person who wishes to abort is a child, the application to do so is made by her legal representatives after agreeing upon it. If her legal representatives disagree among themselves or if they disagree with the child, the wish of the child prevails.

article 8: Giving written consent to receive abortion services

A person requesting for abortion must give her written consent to receive abortion services after a comprehensive explanation on abortion. If the person requesting for abortion services is a child or a person with mental disability, her legal representative gives the written consent for abortion. If her legal representative refuses to give consent, the consent of the child is considered.

Article 9: Access to abortion services

A person who wishes to get abortion services has the right to access an accredited health facility of her choice and to receive the service

Article 10: Confidentiality

The medical doctor and the health facility that received the person requesting for abortion services must ensure the respect of the right to confidentiality.

Appendix B: Maps for Radio stations' coverage

Figure 2: Coverage for Ishingiro Radio (RURA, 2024)

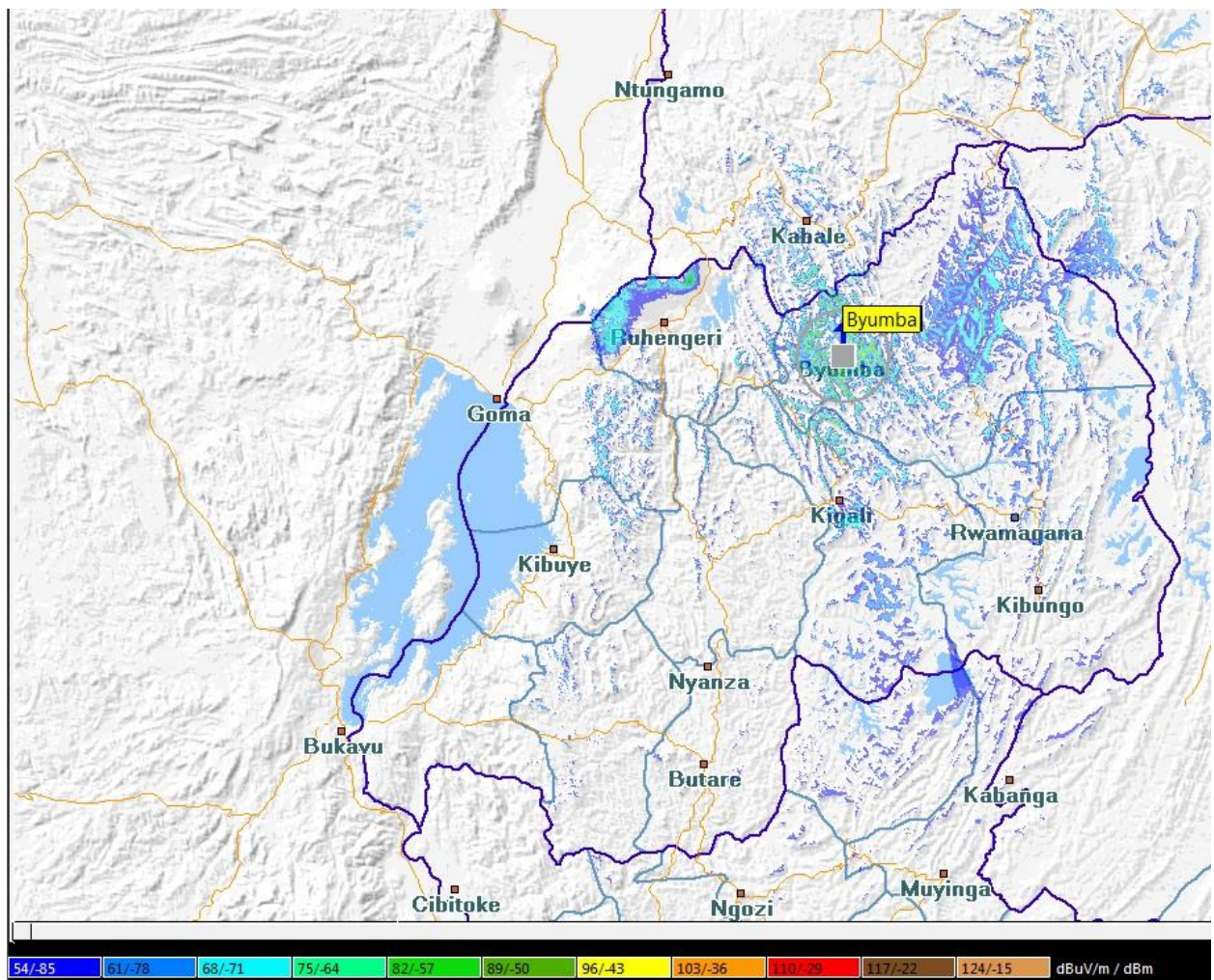


Figure 3: Coverage for Radio Huguka (RURA, 2024)

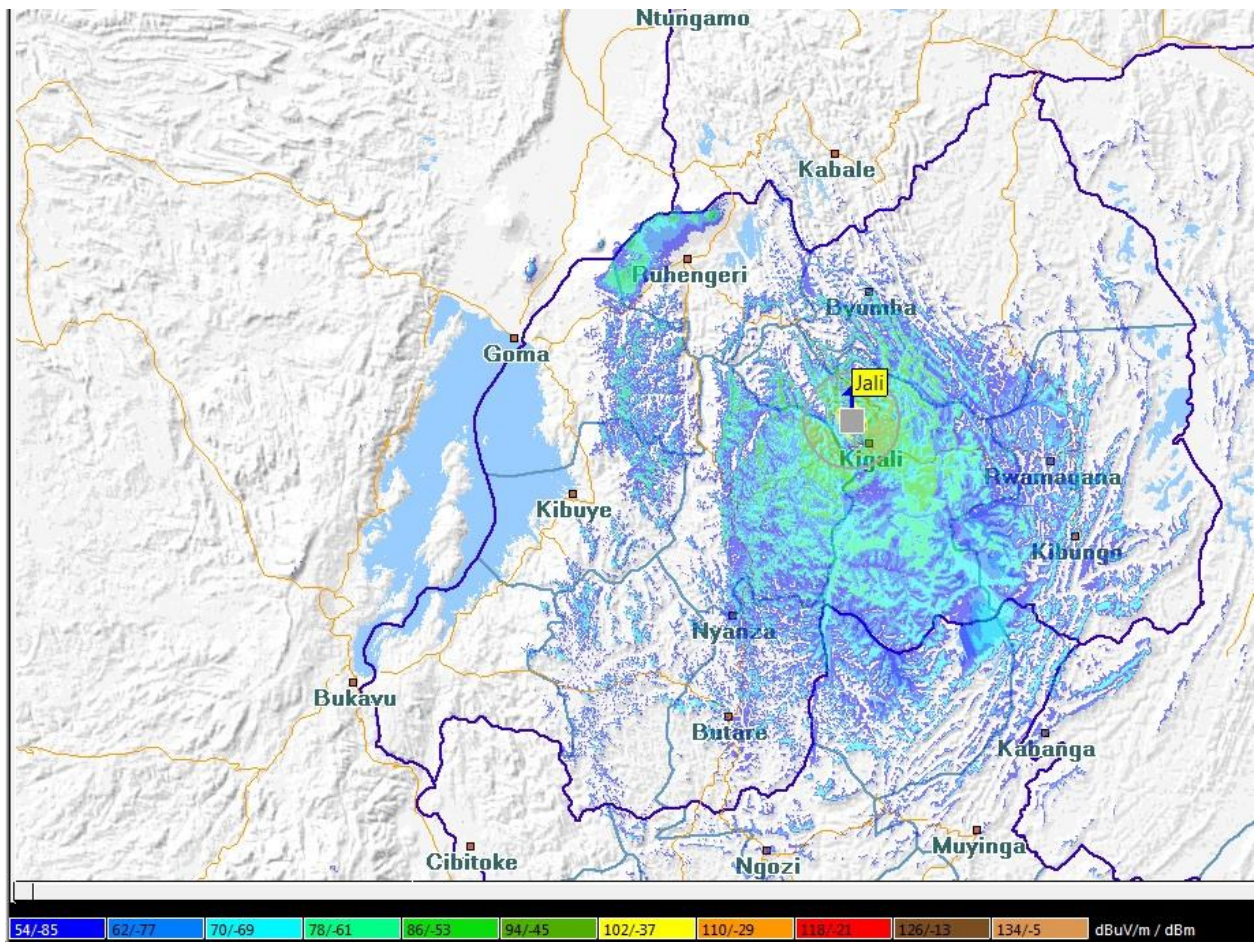


Figure 4: Coverage of Salus Radio (RURA, 2024)

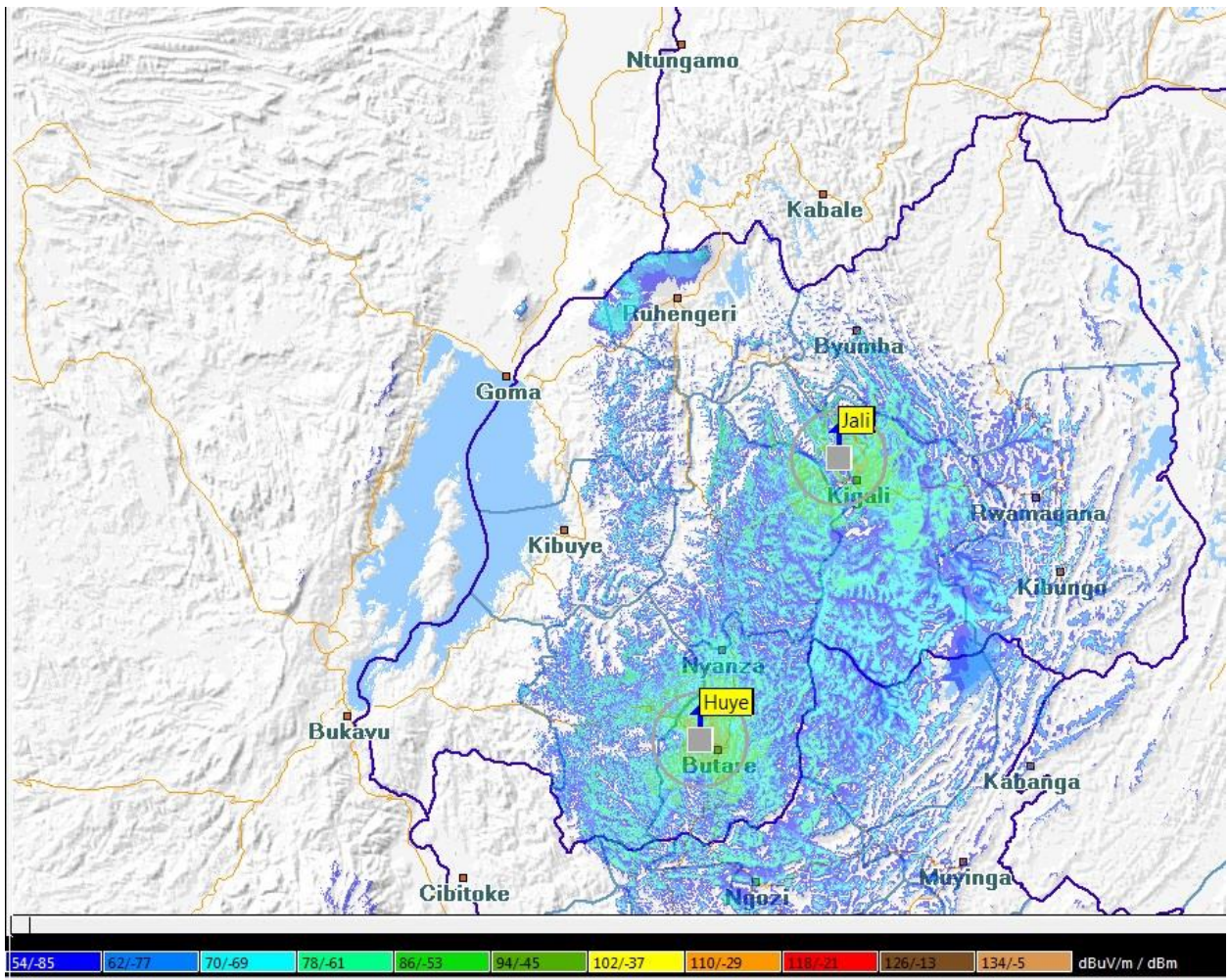


Figure 5: Coverage for Izuba Radio (RURA,2024)

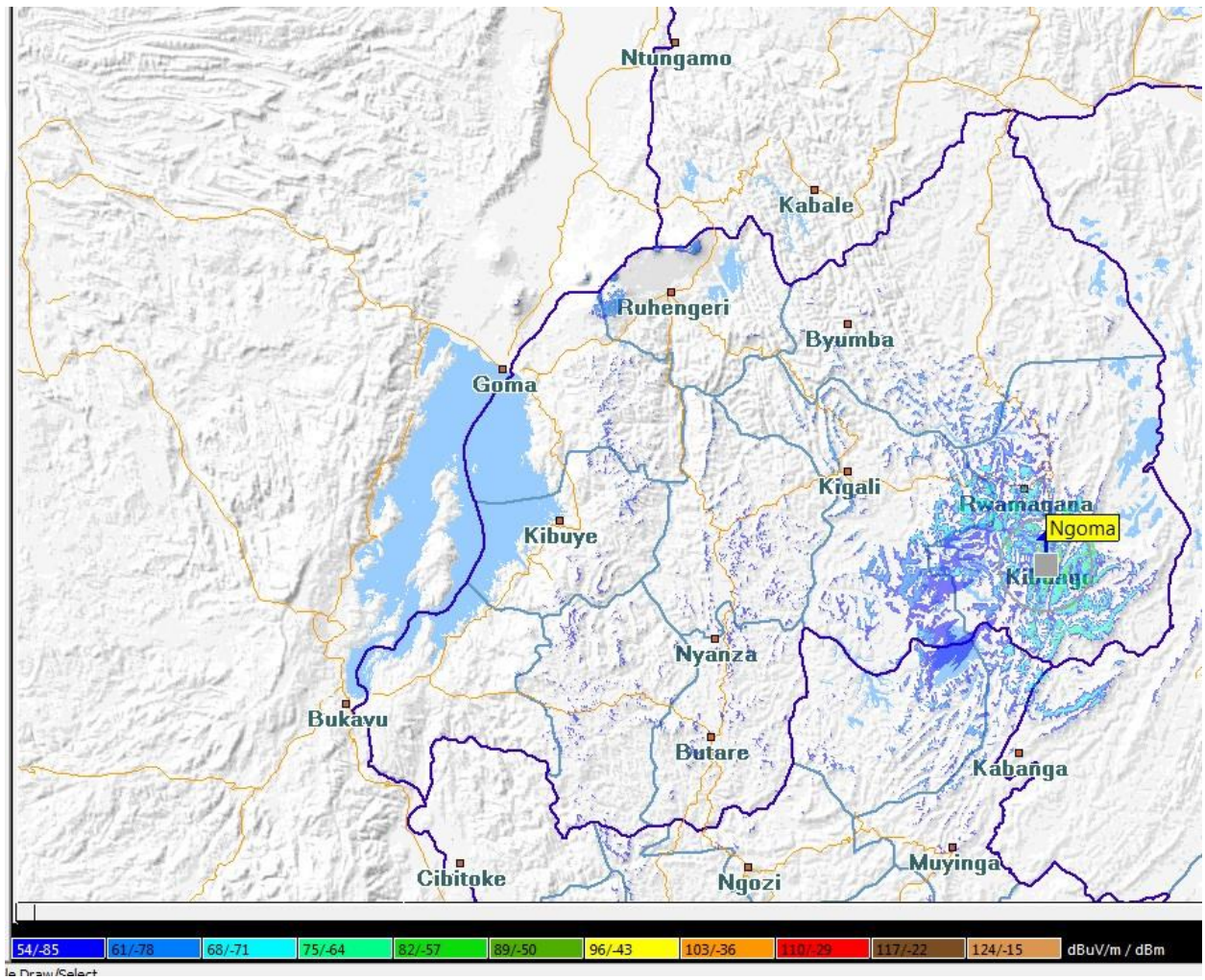


Figure 7: Coverage of Radio Flash FM (RURA, 2024)

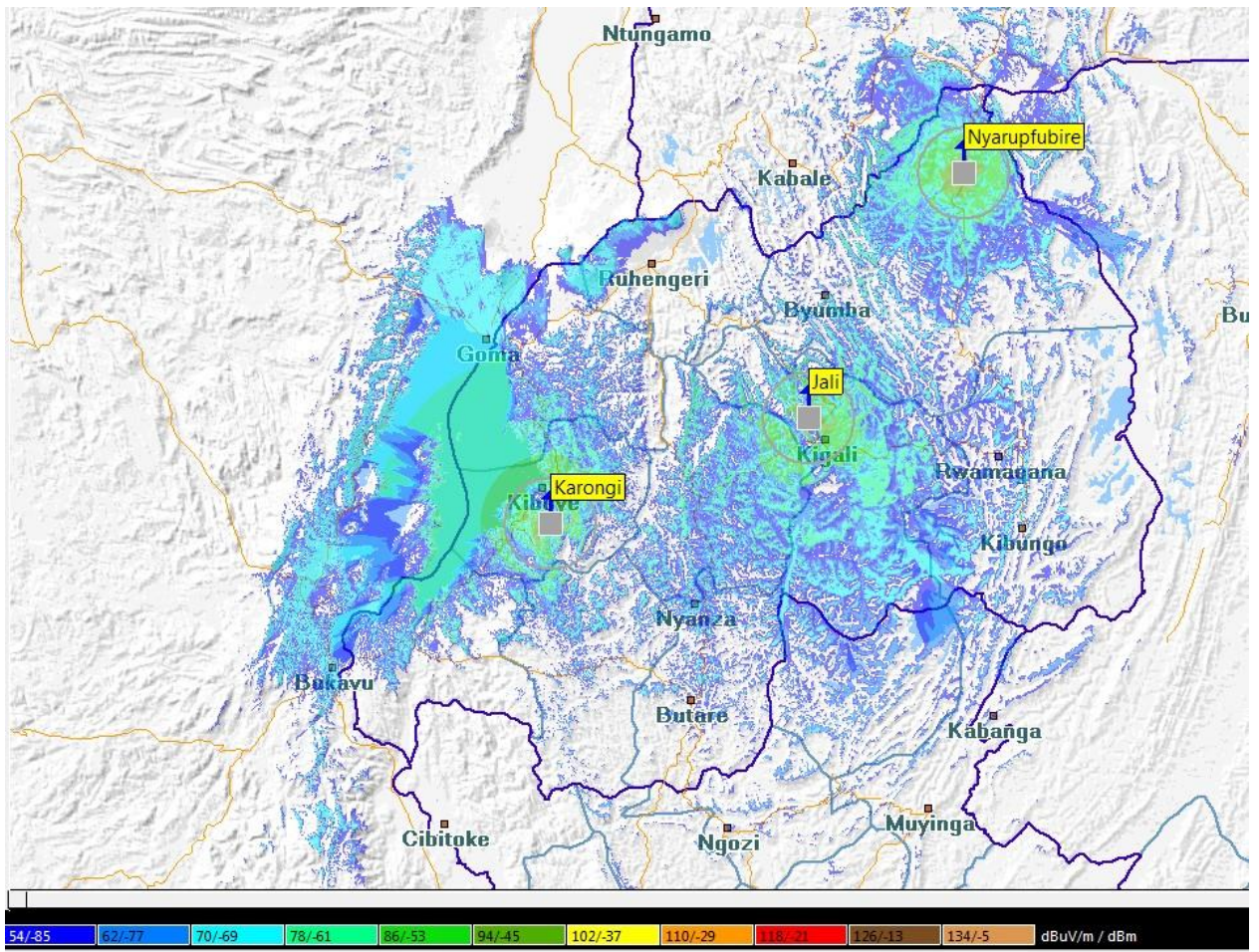
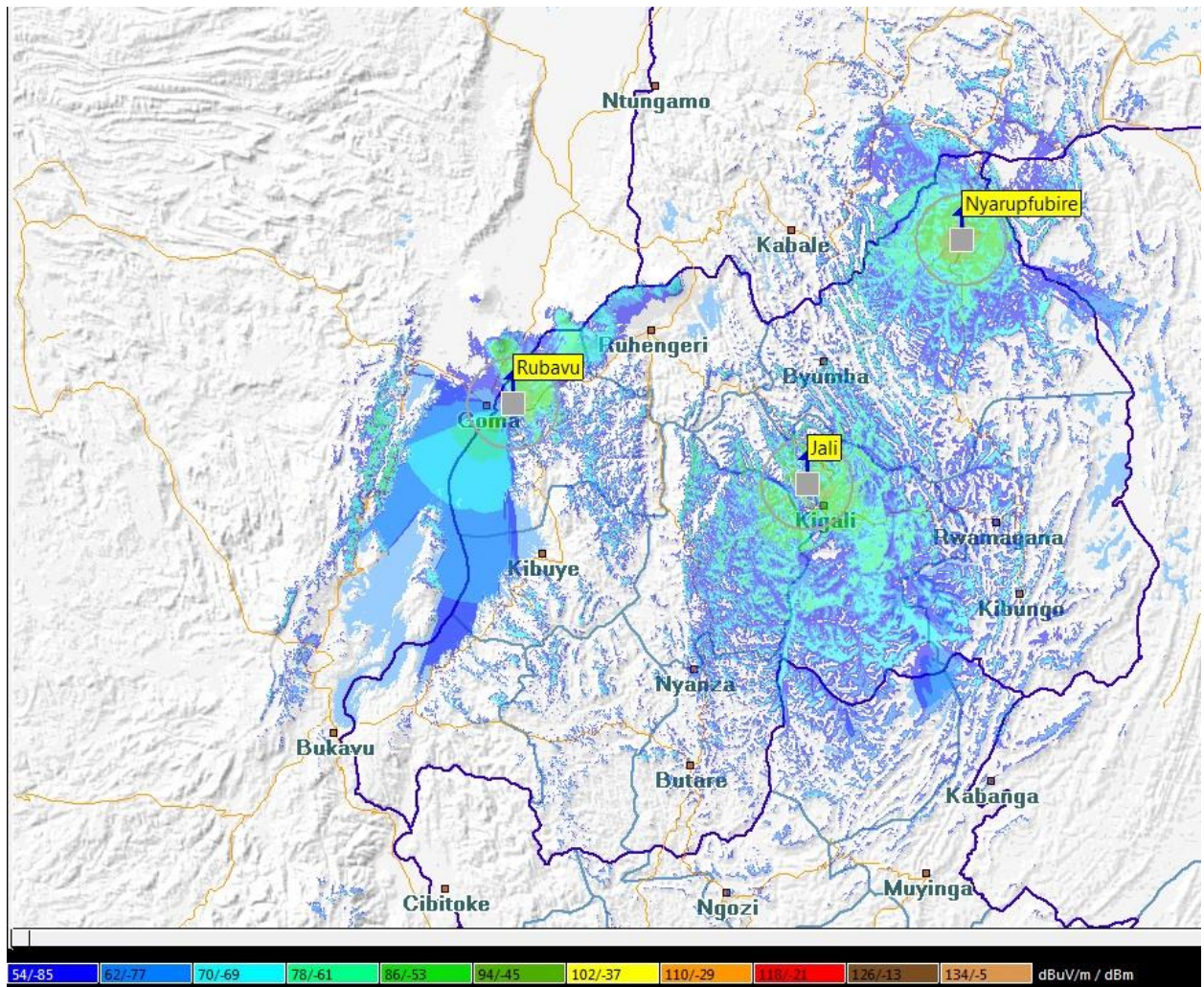


Figure 9: Coverage of Radio 10 (RURA, 2024)



Appendix C: Signed gatekeeper permission letters

KIGALITODAY LTD

CHIC Mall, KN 2 Ave, Kigali

P.O Box 2229

Cell: + [REDACTED]

24

Email: [REDACTED]

Kigali May 29th, 2023

To: Ms. Jeanne d’Arc Mukamana
University of KwaZulu Natal
School of applied Human Sciences
Center for Communication, Media and Society
Howard College Campus
Durban 4041
South Africa

Dear Jeanne d’Arc,

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH WITH KIGALI TODAY RADIO STATION

Reference made to your letter addressed to us on 24th October, 2022, requesting to access to KT Radio content for your academic research intitled: **“An analysis of coverage of the decriminalization of abortion for minors on non-state radio stations in Rwanda”**.

I have the pleasure to inform you that the permission requested was granted to you. You are also authorized to conduct an interview with one of KT Radio journalists as you requested.



Prosper BITEMBEKA

Director of KT Radio

To MUKAMANA Jeanne d'Arc
PhD Student at University of KwaZulu-Natal
School of applied Human Sciences Center
for Communication, Media and Society

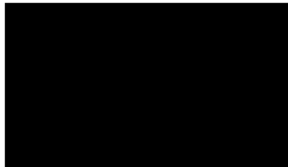
Re: Acceptance letter to conduct research

Dear Madam,

Reference made to your letter dated September 09th, 2022 requesting Radio Ishingiro to allow you to access its content and make use it for the purpose of academic use;

We are allowing you to conduct the research in our radio station and we will allow you to access the needed content and also you will be facilitated to conduct interview in whomever you will want.

Would you need any other support, feel free to let us know via my email: [REDACTED] and my phone number: + [REDACTED]



SINABUBARIRAGA Iidephonse

Managing Director- Radio ISHINGIRO

University of KwaZulu Natal
School of applied Human Sciences
Center for Communication, Media and Society
Howard College Campus
Durban 4041
South Africa

Wednesday 31st May 2023

To whom it may concern

Re: Permission to conduct research with Isangano Community Radio

I hereby authorize Ms. Jeanne d’Arc Mukamana, a PhD student affiliated with the Center for Communication, Media, and Social Sciences (CCMS) at the School of Applied Human Sciences, University of KwaZulu Natal-South Africa, to have permission to access radio content from Isangano Community Radio station and conduct an interview with one of our staff members.

I have been made aware of her research project titled "Analyzing the Coverage of the Decriminalization of Abortion for Minors on Non-State Radio Stations in Rwanda." I am also familiar with the objectives and methodologies of her study, which aim to explore how the media frames changes in abortion laws and how radio stations can influence the acceptance of new policies on sexual reproductive health and rights for minors, despite existing cultural norms and beliefs.

This letter serves therefore, as an official endorsement, allowing researcher Jeanne d’Arc Mukamana to access the necessary content from Isangano Radio and conduct an interview with one of our staff members.

Sincerely,

Charles TWAGIF
Managing Director
Isangano Community Radio





100 MHz

ADECCO/RADIO IZUBA&TV



B.P.21 Kibungo

104 Startimes

TIN:101555859

Website: www.izubaradio.com

Phones: [REDACTED]

To Jeanne d'Arc Mukamana
University of KwaZulu Natal
School of applied Human Sciences
Center for Communication, Media and Society
Howard College Campus
Durban 4041, South Africa

Dear Jeanne d'Arc,

RE: ACCESS TO RADIO CONTENT

Reference made to your letter of September 9th, 2022 requesting access to Izuba Radio content in regard with decriminalization of abortion for minors, and given that your request is for PhD research purpose, we are happy that you chose Izuba Radio among your scope.

We therefore inform you, that we give you access to our content but it solely must be used for the purpose of the research.



Managing Director



On 31st May, 2023



Acceptance letter

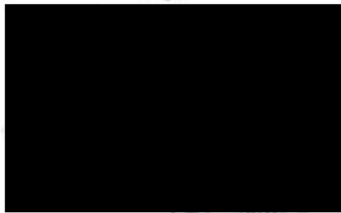
Dear Jeanne D'arc,

I, Athanase MUNYARUGENDO, the Acting Director of Radio Salus, am writing to inform you that we are pleased to accept your request to collect research data for your PhD research entitled "An analysis of the coverage of the decriminalization of abortion for minors on non-state radio stations in Rwanda."

Our station personnel are well-prepared to provide you with the necessary information to assist you in completing your PhD research. We are committed to supporting your efforts and ensuring your success in this endeavour.

Please feel free to reach out to us if you have any specific requirements or questions regarding the data collection process. We look forward to collaborating with you on this important project.

Sincerely,



Acting Director of Radio Salus



Radio Huguka

District de Muhanga, province du Sud,
B.P 350 Butare/Rwanda, Tel: +250752846189/+250758896162, E-mail: radiohuguka2016@gmail.com

Muhanga, on June 1st, 2023

To: Mukamana Jeanne d'Arc
University of KwaZulu Natal
School of applied Human Sciences
Center for Communication, Media and Society
Howard College Campus
Durban 4041
South Africa

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH WITH RADIO HUGUKA GATEKEEPER'S LETTER

Dear Mukamana Jeanne d'Arc,

With a great pleasure, I am writing to notify you that you are guaranteed to access radio content from Huguka Radio, and the interview with one of our staff in the framework of the study you are conducting entitled "An analysis of coverage of the decriminalization of abortion for minors on non-state radio stations in Rwanda".

You can reach out to Mr Aimable Uwizeyimana, our editor in chief for any additional information you need. His Email address is aimuwizeyimana@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Desire Uwamadin



Radio Huguka
Muhanga District
Southern Province
Box: 350 Butare



Membre du groupe TELE- 10 Avenue de l'Aéroport Tele-10 Building Gishushu-Remera
VAT Registration : 100464158 PO Box 4307 Kigali Rwanda [REDACTED]

Kigali, June 2nd, 2023

Jeanne d'Arc Mukamana
KIGALI-RWANDA

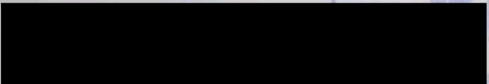
Dear Madam,

RE: Your Request to access some of our Radio content

We are pleased to grant you the access to Radio10 content covering issues of legalization of abortion for minors in Rwanda, and the interview with one journalist from our radio station.

This access is granted to you only in connection with your PhD. Research at KwaZulu Natal University: **An analysis of coverage of the decriminalization of abortion for minors on non-state radio stations in Rwanda.**

Sincerely Yours,



MUHIRWA Augustin
Managing Director





Kigali, Gasabo - Kagugu, KG 4 Av. St 766

[REDACTED] / + [REDACTED]

www.flash.rw

ceo@flashfm.rw / accounts@flashfm.rw/ sales@flashfm.rw

Kigali 12th June 2023

RECOMMENDATION LETTER

To Jeanne d'Arc MUKAMANA, a PhD student with the Centre for Communication, Media and Social Sciences in The School of Applied Human Sciences, University of Kwa Zulu Natal-South Africa,

With reference to your letter, requesting the use of Radio Flash contents in your academic research, **“An analysis of coverage of the decriminalization of abortion for minors on non-state radio stations in Rwanda.”**

I hereby grant the authority and access to all of them, meaning Radio data and conducting any sort of interviews with our radio presenters.

Approved by Alphonse TV [REDACTED]

Chief News Editor/ Radio [REDACTED]

Appendix D: Research Instrument: In-depth semi-structured interview guide

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE –Radio Station Staff

The objective of the in-depth interview

The in-depth interview aims at understanding the way that issues related to legal abortion for minors are covered in selected non-state radio stations. The key informants will tell in detail the way radio stations' policies, guidelines, practices and other news-making factors impact the coverage of the legalisation of abortion for minors in Rwanda; and about the news values that motivate the coverage of issues related to the legalisation of abortion for minors in Rwanda.

At the start of the interview, the informed consent form will be shared with the participant, and he/she will be requested to sign the consent form and give permission to record the interview. The interviewer will remind the participant that their name will not be reflected anywhere in the written reports associated with this study.

1. What is your position in this Radio station?
2. How long have you worked in this Radio station?
3. How long have you worked on radio?
4. In your news management / as a program presenter on this radio station, how frequently do you cover issues related to sexual reproductive health and rights?
5. What usually inspires the coverage of these stories on SRHR?
6. How have you covered the topic of the legalization of abortion for minors on this station?
(Probe: has this been news coverage only, or has the topic been covered in other formats?)
7. What motivates you and your colleagues in the newsroom/ in your production team to specifically cover issues related to the decriminalization of abortion for minors in Rwanda?
8. How do the policies and guidelines of your radio station influence the coverage of legal abortion?
9. What other factors influence the decisions around how and when you cover this topic?
(Probe: access to resources, newsroom culture, individual choices)
10. What news values inform the choice of angles when covering issues related to the decriminalization of abortion for minors in Rwanda?

11. What has the listener's response been to your coverage of the legalization of abortion?
12. Through which formats and engagements are the voices and opinions of your listeners on this issue expressed in your radio station?
13. Do you have any other comments on the coverage of this issue by your station?

Appendix E: UKZN ethical clearance letter



20 June 2023

Jeanee D'Arc Mukamana (222120315)
School of Applied Human Sc
Howard College

Dear JD Mukamana,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005648/2023

Project title: An analysis of coverage of the decriminalization of abortion for minors on non-state radio stations in Rwanda

Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 11 May 2023 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 20 June 2024.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Appendix F: Sample informed consent form

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL
For research with human participants

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date:

Dear Sir /Madam,

My name is Jeanne d'Arc Mukamana, a PhD student with the Center for Communication, Media and Social Sciences (CCMS) in the School of Applied Human Sciences, University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN)-South Africa. My address details are [REDACTED], 222120315@stu.ukzn.ac.za, Tel: + [REDACTED].

You are being invited to participate in a study that involves research on the coverage of the decriminalization of abortion for minors on non-state radio stations in Rwanda. The study will analyse data in the form of radio news reports, and live discussions on this topic broadcast from 2018 to 2022. This study is funded by NORHED II under the project 'Preparing Media Practitioners for Resilient Media in Eastern Africa'.

The aim and purpose of this research are to understand how the changes in the law on abortion are framed in the media and how radio stations might influence the acceptance of new policies on sexual reproductive health and rights for minors.

The study will analyse content from eight non-state radio stations namely, Izuba (East), Huguka (South), Ishingiro (North), Isangano (West), Salus (South), KT Radio (Kigali), Radio 10 (Kigali), and Flash FM (Kigali). It is expected to enroll eight participants in total in individual interviews, thus one journalist per radio station who will provide an understanding of the station's policies and regulations and the way these affect the coverage of issues related to the topic. The staff required for interview purposes may be an editor or radio presenter with an understanding of this coverage.

The duration of your participation in the in-depth interview, if you accept to enroll and remain in the study, is expected to be 45-60 minutes. The interview will be recorded with an audio-recorder in order to accurately recall the contents of the interview. The interview questions are in English, but can be translated into Kinyarwanda during the interview, and you can respond in the language of your choice.

Participation in this study will not involve any risk or discomfort to you as the participant, and your confidentiality will be maintained. There will be no direct benefit to you, but we hope that the study will benefit the field of health communication through a better understanding of radio coverage of this topic. The interview will be face-to-face, but could also be carried out via mobile phone, depending on your preference.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee with approval number_____.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at [REDACTED], 222120315@stu.ukzn.ac.za, and + [REDACTED] or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Participation in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw participation at any point. In the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation, you will not incur a penalty or loss of benefits. There are no likely events that will result in the researcher asking you to withdraw from the study. If you choose to withdraw, please advise the researcher in writing via email.

As a participant in this study, you will be treated with respect and dignity. You will remain anonymous, and your name will not be mentioned in the research, although the name of the radio station will be included for the purpose of analysis. The data will be kept securely for five years for purposes of verification by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, thereafter it will be destroyed. An electronic copy of the final project will be sent to you on completion if you wish to have it.

There is no cost for you to participate in the research. The researcher will meet you at your workplace or call you on the phone if it is what you prefer. There are no incentives or reimbursements for participation in the study.

CONSENT

I, have been informed about the study entitled: An analysis of coverage of the decriminalization of abortion for minors on non-state radio stations in Rwanda.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study of this research.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at [REDACTED], 222120315@stu.ukzn.ac.za, and [REDACTED]

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview: YES / NO

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix G: Editors Letter



Mufasa Research Consultancy

SERVING WITH DISTINCTION

03 January 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Editor's Letter

AN ANALYSIS OF COVERAGE OF THE DECRIMINALIZATION OF ABORTION FOR MINORS ON NON-STATE RADIO STATIONS IN RWANDA

Below is the scope considered during language editing of the above titled doctoral thesis:

- Grammar check
- Sentence construction
- Spelling check
- Punctuation
- In-text referencing
- Formatting/document layout

As a professional editor, I pledge that the above aspects of the doctoral thesis were, to the best of my knowledge, meticulously and correctly done at the time the work was sent to the candidate. However, I am not responsible for any corrections that were made after the editing process was finalised.

Yours faithfully,

Kennist Shumba (PhD)

PhD in Health Promotion: University of KwaZulu-Natal [UKZN]
Master of Social Science in Health Promotion (*Cum laude*): UKZN
Bachelor of Social Science ~~Uppu~~ in Cultural & Media Studies: UKZN
Postgraduate Certificate in Education: Great Zimbabwe University
Bachelor of Arts (English): University of Zimbabwe

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