

Abena's Story

Reader 1: My name is Abena. I am sixteen years old. I live 5 km from here and normally sell small snacks on the roadside to earn money for my mother and younger siblings. It was not easy for me to find the time and courage to go to the clinic.

I went because I have a boyfriend and I didn't want to become pregnant. Some of the girls that I sell with have become pregnant and for some of them, their lives have gotten much harder as they try to support a small child. Some of them don't have support from the father and some have even been sent out from their family homes. I had heard that there are pills you can take to prevent pregnancy so I wanted to find out if it was true.

Reader 2: I went to the clinic early in the morning because I needed to get back so I could make my sales before the day ended. When I arrived at the clinic there were several women waiting outside with small children. I stayed around the corner until I was sure none of them knew me, but then when I walked up they kept looking at me and whispering. One of the older women asked me why I was there since the clinic only served women who were older with children and a husband. She told me this was no place for a "small girl" like myself.

The staff was late to arrive. I sat there for over an hour waiting for the front doors of the clinic to open.

Reader 3: Once I was inside I wondered how I could talk with the nurse. I finally got up enough courage to speak to the woman behind the table with a sign saying "reception." When I approached, her face became hard. She asked me why I was here and why I wasn't in school. When I explained that I wanted to talk with a nurse, she questioned me. I was too embarrassed to tell her why I was here. She then told me that the morning hours were for prenatal and maternal and child health services only and that I would have to come back later in the day. When I asked her what time, she just shrugged her shoulders and ignored me.

Reader 4: I came back at 2:00 pm. I hadn't eaten anything and had nowhere to go while I waited, so I had sat down under a tree nearby for the last 4 hours, all the while watching out for familiar faces to make sure I wasn't seen near the clinic. Once, I thought I saw an aunty who sells near me, and had to hide for a while behind a different store to make sure she didn't see me. When I came back I asked the receptionist if I could see the nurse: she told me that the nurses had taken a break for lunch. They would be back in an hour. The receptionist was very unfriendly and I could tell she didn't think I should be there.

Reader 5: After an hour and a half, the nurses came back. I was told that I could go in and speak with one of them. The receptionist directed me to the exam area. When I went into the exam room, the nurse looked angry. She asked me why I was there. I told her that I didn't want to be pregnant and I had heard there were some pills to take. She told me that if I didn't want to become pregnant then I shouldn't have sex: I should be in school or helping out at home and

not running around with boys. She asked me if I didn't have plans for myself or my future, and told me that boys were only a distraction and only wanted one thing.

I explained that I wasn't running around with boys and that I only had one boyfriend. From the way she was looking at me, I could tell that she thought I was loose. She told me that before I could use the pill, I would need to have an exam and that she didn't have the time today. I would have to come back on Friday.

Reader 6: On the way home, I questioned whether I should return. I didn't want to become pregnant, but I also felt like the nurse thought I was a bad person and I wasn't sure I could lose another day of work. I was so tired from the day and upset I couldn't sell anything or see anyone that night. Finally, I decided that I would go one last time. Friday finally came, and this time I waited and arrived later at the clinic; checking like before for familiar faces in the line. After I arrived at the clinic, I went to the receptionist. It was the same person as last time. She again asked me why I was there, and when I told her I was there for the exam to get the pill, she repeated in a very loud voice 'you are here for family planning.' I could feel the eyes of the other women in the waiting room staring at my back. I was so embarrassed.

Reader 7: The receptionist told me to go back to the exam room. When the nurse came she told me to undress. She didn't give me anything to cover up with. I was a bit frightened looking at the equipment: I had never seen anything like the tools she had on her tray. She told me to put my feet in the stirrups. I didn't know what was going to happen next. The next thing I knew she was putting something cold and hard in my vagina and telling me to "relax." I felt panicked and like I was somehow doing everything wrong. Just then, there was a quick knock on the door and this other nurse just came right into the room without waiting to be asked. She started to ask questions about another patient. The whole time the two nurses were talking, the door was ajar. I wanted to die of shame.

Reader 8: After the exam, the nurse gave me a packet of pills and told me to take one a day at the same time of the day. She mentioned something called "side effects" but I didn't understand what she meant. She used a lot of words I didn't know to describe what might happen to me, it all sounded scary and medical and I didn't want to ask her more questions because I didn't want to stay longer. I wanted to ask if it was true what I'd heard; that the pills prevent pregnancy, but could make you not able to have children, or if they would make me loose like everyone seems to think. She told me to come back when I had two or three pills left. I left and started taking these pills every morning. It isn't easy, sometimes I feel like I might vomit, or sometimes I have a headache or am sore. I think about the words the nurse used and wonder if these are the side effects she mentioned. I don't know how I am going to get back to the clinic and the thought of seeing the nurse again makes me want to just stop taking them and pray to God that I don't get pregnant.