

Headline: Fake abortion providers are online too. Here's how to spot them

Blurb:

Abortion has been legal in South Africa for more than 25 years. Yet illegal providers continue to put people's lives at risk. Dubious providers can exploit platforms like Google Search and Facebook to advertise their services. Tshinondiwa Ramaite from the reproductive health organisation, Ipas, explains how to spot ads from a bogus clinic.

Bullet points:

- Under South African law, abortion has been legal for more than 25 years, but illegal providers still operate.
- Bogus abortion providers usually advertise on street poles and at bus stops. But they are also on the internet and social media – and their ads often make them look legit.
- Tshinondiwa Ramaite, a gender policy advisor at the reproductive health organisation, Ipas, says they have found many illegal and unsafe abortion providers online since 2020. She explains how to spot unlawful abortion providers on the internet.

Byline: Yolanda Mdzeke & Mohale Moloji

Script:

Abortion has been legal in South Africa since 1996.

Yet illegal abortion providers are still out there.

Tshinondiwa Ramaite is a gender policy advisor at IPAS.

Ipas trains health workers on safe abortions.

Why are illegal providers still around?

Tshinondiwa Ramaite: It's very difficult to trace these people, cause they move around quite a lot. They change their numbers quite often.

What is an illegal abortion provider?

An Illegal abortion would be, for example, someone has not undergone the prescribed training, but also you have to be designated by the provincial department of health that is accredited. So you would then need to have someone from the department of health, come to your facility and assess you on various criteria.

Why would someone go to a dubious provider?

Issues around confidentiality, if you go to a local facility and you know that the nurse there is your mom's friend, or is a relative or whatever, you might feel comfortable going to that person, because we fear that they might disclose your information. But also there's the reality of once you reach your second trimester, there are fewer facilities in the country that provide second-trimester services. Many women then opt to go back street.

How can you spot a fake abortion provider online?

1. Ads will make fake promises and websites will give no medical practice details

They will not provide the name of the practice practice number, HPCSA registration number. It will say maybe they have 'multiple offices across the country', something like that without being very specific.

2. Contact and address details might be sketchy

Most legitimate facilities will have a landline number, and will have an address and the name of the practice.

3. The website may not say exactly how the procedure will be done

So very minimal information provided about the actual practice, although some will provide some general information about what is surgical abortion, for example, what is a medical abortion? But it won't say anything much about the actual practice and who is providing the service.

4. They won't be registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)

To check, go to www.hpcsa.co.za and click "Search the register" to look up their registration number or name.

You can also call the HPCSA on 012 338 9300.

How can you spot a legit provider online?

Most of them will put their practice number and also the HPCSA registration number. So those are the things that you need to look out for.

Three things to help you spot a legal abortion provider

- i. You'll see details like registration numbers on their site
- ii. You'll be offered counselling before and after the procedure
- iii. To find a safe, legal provider, check out the Where to Care map

Go to www.wheretocare.org, and click 'Search the map'