Background: Abortions performed by persons lacking the requisite skills or in environments lacking minimal medical standards or both are considered unsafe. It is estimated that over 20 million unsafe abortions are performed annually and about 70,000 women die globally as a result, with the majority occurring in the developing world. This study aims to determine the socio-demographic factors involved in complicated unsafe abortions.

Methods: The study is a four-year retrospective evaluation of all cases of complicated unsafe abortions managed at the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital, Okolobiri, Bayelsa state, Nigeria between January 1, 2007 and December 31, 2010.

Results: The incidence over the study period was 4.10% and contributed 14.0% of gynaecological admissions: 34.92% occurred in adolescents less than 20 years of age of which the majorities (55.55%) were secondary school students. There were 55.45% of patients who were nulliparae, 60.32% were unemployed and 69.80% were unmarried. A total of 87.30% had never used any form of contraceptive. Abortion mortality rate was 256/100,000 deliveries and the case fatality was 4.76%. It constituted 30.0% of all gynaecological deaths and 17.64% of maternal deaths during the study period. The commonest cause of death was septicaemia (66.66%).

Conclusion: Unfavourable socio-demographic factors are major determinants of the high incidence of unsafe abortion in the Niger Delta despite strict abortion laws. Concrete measures must be put in place to address these, as unsafe abortion and its complications are a major cause of morbidity and mortality in the environment.