



Aya Contigo Platform

“A big part of our society covers their mouth when they talk about abortion”:
why context matters when implementing digital solutions for sexual and reproductive health



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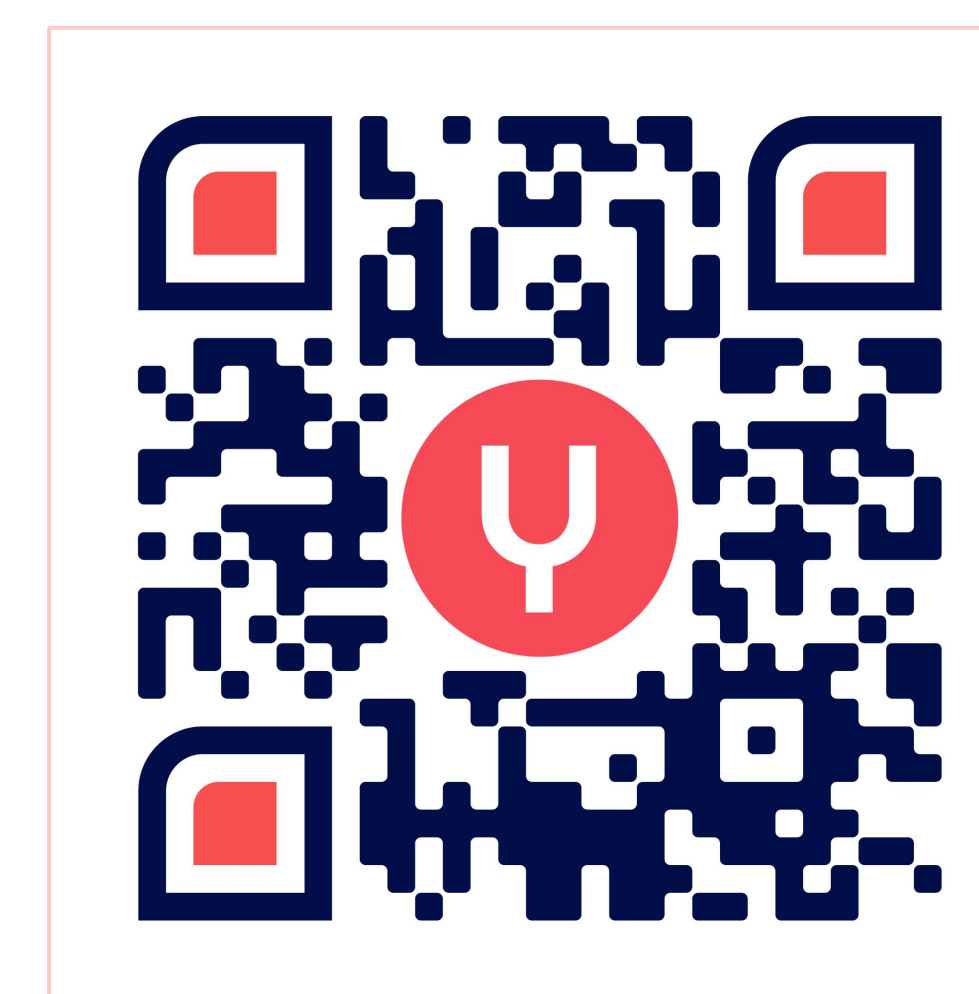
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Background

- **Beliefs, cultural and legal contexts are still the biggest access barriers to abortion care** and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care in general around the world.
- Activists, health care providers, and civil society have had to **create strategies to overcome those access barriers** and ensure that people seeking abortion and post abortion care get safe and evidence-based solutions.
- **Aya Contigo** is an **evidence-based mobile application**, that provides support to people seeking medical abortion and post abortion care, and contraception guidance in highly restrictive environments.
- To **adapt Aya Contigo** to different countries and context we conduct a thorough **contextual analysis to understand** belief systems, fears, risks and perceptions about SRH using qualitative research and implementing human-centered design tech tools.



Results

- **“No one is willing to fight for abortion”**: this is a generalized feeling among the grassroots organization, accompaniment and feminist groups and health care providers. There is a generalized fear of openly fighting for reproductive autonomy and freedom in the country due to their restrictive legal environment.
- **Access to care and education**: There are important barriers of access to comprehensive and culturally appropriate sexual and reproductive care and education preventing everyone, but specially indigenous and rural communities from accessing timely and high quality care.
- **Gatekeepers**: Teachers, conservative, and religious groups often serve as gatekeepers of information, filtering and restricting access to SSR resources.
- **Networks and strategies**: there are networks and systems in place that have design safe communication procedures to ensure access to abortion care. It is key for **Aya Contigo** to participate of these networks as a support tool to continue the work towards reproductive autonomy.

Conclusion

- Undergoing a contextual analysis has been a key learning as we adapt and implement **Aya Contigo** in different contexts, highlighting the need to understand the context to assist with the integration of digital solutions within existing ecosystems.
- Developing a deep analysis of contexts allows us to take into consideration the barriers and facilitators to the successful and effective implementation of **Aya Contigo**.

Acknowledgements

To all the feminist indigenous groups, accompaniment groups, health care providers and grassroots organizations that participated and continue participating from our app adaptation activities.

Objective

To explore and analyze the abortion context in Guatemala to effectively adapt and implement **Aya Contigo**.

Methods

- We conducted **11 semi-structured interviews** with key stakeholders in Guatemala including feminist indigenous groups, accompaniment groups, health care providers and grassroots organizations.
- **Desk review** of studies, policies and legal documents based on results provided by Google Scholar, PubMed and World of Science, and official reports of the country.
- Once the context analysis was completed, we presented the results to the participants to collectively check and confirm the results.

Cybersecurity in FemTech: Protecting Users of Digital Abortion Tools in Restrictive Contexts

A Commentary

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Background

- The sexual and reproductive health (SRH) of millions of women and girls across the globe is under threat from repressive political regimes and legislation
- Abortion laws in the Latin American and Caribbean region are the most legally restrictive in world, with close to 10% of maternal deaths attributable to preventable abortion-related complications
- Digital SRH tools to support abortion and contraception can offer critical and life-saving resources in restrictive contexts
- Despite the possible benefits of digital health solutions for SRH, we must consider the risks of user data breaches by third parties for surveillance or retributive purposes

Objective

To share insights on the cybersecurity and safeguarding considerations for **Aya Contigo**, a digital medical abortion and contraception tool developed in Venezuela and later expanded to the United States

Methods

- Evaluate the landscape of digital innovations focused on sexual and reproductive health, and their policies and practices related to cybersecurity
- Utilize **Aya Contigo** as a case example to discuss the development, implementation, and maintenance of a digital application for abortion and contraception care through the lens of digital privacy and security

Commentary

To maximize user privacy and security, Aya Contigo was developed with a user-centered design approach and input from cybersecurity experts. The digital tool approaches security through three primary principles:

- **Transparency:** App users must understand the potential risks of engaging with digital tools around sexual and reproductive health
 - Users should be adequately informed around the risk of data breaches and their implications
- **Data Security and Minimization:** The amount of user data collected should be minimized & secured to reduce risks of breach
 - Personally-identifiable user data should not be collected
 - Users should be informed on how to securitize and delete SRH data stored on their personal devices
 - Aggregate back-end data should be encrypted and adaptable to local security considerations
- **Centring User Interests:** Digital tools must prioritize the safety and wellbeing of users over financial or political interests

Conclusions

In a global digital space where regulation is often sparse, SRH-focused resources must include a robust and adaptable cybersecurity strategy to best protect users.

Adolescent Engagement with Sexual and Reproductive Health in Venezuela

A Participatory Mixed-Methods Analysis

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Background

- The protracted humanitarian crisis in Venezuela has impacted the lives of adolescents
- Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) rights are restricted and legally-repressed in this setting:
 - The penal code states that abortion is illegal except to save the life of a pregnant person and youth can be held criminally responsible at the early age of 12
- Adolescents face significant barriers to accessing SRH information and resources, which pose significant risks to overall health and wellbeing

Objective

To better understand the sexual and reproductive preferences, needs, and concerns of Venezuelan adolescents and explore their digital engagement with SRH content

Methods

- Study conducted between August 2022 and January 2023 among Venezuelan adolescents aged 10-19 years old
- Mixed-methods design: quantitative survey and photovoice process
 - Photovoice participants were asked to take photos around prompts related to SRH, which were then discussed in qualitative interviews and focus groups
- Survey data was reported descriptively and qualitative data was analyzed thematically

Conclusions

- Venezuelan adolescents demonstrated resourcefulness in seeking out digital SRH information amidst a humanitarian context where reliable health resources are restricted
- This study's participatory photovoice approach led to the development of an online youth forum that offers SRH information to Venezuelan adolescents

Results

207 adolescents completed the SRH survey:

- **Over 93% (193) turned to digital media** to learn more about SRH
- Fewer than 6% (12) regularly engaged with these topics in school
- **Sexual relations, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections** were the topics that adolescents were most interested in learning more about

Twelve adolescents participated in photovoice, which created three major themes:

- Digital tools increase access to SRH education for adolescents** in Venezuela
- Youth must navigate misinformation and harmful conceptions of SRH online
- The **photovoice process offered an important space for youth self-expression**



A photovoice participant submitted this photo to describe finding and sharing SRH information with friends via WhatsApp and Instagram



Another participant took this photo to express herself "stretching" towards reproductive freedom as an adolescent living in Venezuela



Aya Contigo

Lessons learned from mixed-methods monitoring and evaluation of a digital platform for accompaniment and harm-reduction for self-managed medical abortion

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Background

- Digital tools have become important means of supporting access to quality abortion and contraception care. **Aya Contigo** is a **digital abortion companion available in Venezuela and the United States** which helps users exercise bodily autonomy and practice self-care in their sexual and reproductive health
- Since its launch in Venezuela in 2022 and the US in 2023, **Aya Contigo** has reached over **9,000 app users, 1,900 people via chat support**, and more than **1,800 people via advocacy, capacity-building and reflection-based activities**
- **Robust monitoring and evaluation of these digital strategies is crucial** to refine services, gauge impact, and better meet user needs
- Analyzing data can be challenging due to the importance of maintaining privacy and confidentiality. **Employing innovative and creative methods is necessary to construct an evidence-based narrative** while safeguarding users



Selected key data sources used for triangulation

- .Holistic care
 - Conversation log filled by chat counselors with **voluntary, self-reported demographic data and anonymized details about conversation outcome and impact**
 - Standardized **quality of care evaluation** using OPTions minimum quality abortion standards tool¹
 - **Open coding of deidentified chat transcripts** to identify themes
- Secure digital companion
 - App usage data in Google Analytics 4 analyzed via **pathway analysis and Looker Studio dashboards**^{2,3}
 - New user traffic from **partner referrals and “internal referrals” from chat and movement-building activities**
- Movement-building
 - Pre/post tests from educational trainings and VCAT workshops to measure **impact on knowledge and beliefs**
 - New user traffic to **youth forum and blog**

Lessons learned and next steps

- **Redesign and launch of Aya 2.0 app** in 2025, informed by analysis of historical trends in user acquisition and engagement
- Natural language processing, other **AI-based methods to support analysis**
- M&E data from **Aya Contigo** have also been used to conduct more complex analyses, for example to **fit autoregressive integrated moving average (ARIMA) models to forecast user volume**
- The creation of **internal dashboards for M&E** can be an effective way of promoting data accessibility and encouraging self-service exploration of trends that can feed into data-driven decision-making
- **Triangulation across diverse types and sources of data can help cover gaps** where data about some aspects of a program may not be feasible or safe to collect, and improves the validity and reliability of results

References

- 1 OPTions Initiative. <https://optionsinitiative.org/>; 2019 (accessed June 2024).
- 2 Google. Google Analytics (Version 4) [Software], 2024. <https://analytics.google.com/>.
- 3 Google. Looker Studio (Version 24.14) [Software], 2024. <https://lookerstudio.google.com/>.
- 4 Wix. Wix Analytics (Version 5.0.1) [Software], 2024. <https://manage.wix.com/dashboard/>.

Objective

Highlight lessons learned through data triangulation for mixed-methods monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of **Aya Contigo**.

Aya Contigo theory of change pillars

- **Holistic care:** chat-based support for users who have questions before, during or after an abortion, or questions about contraception and other general sexual and reproductive health (SRH) topics
- **Secure digital companion:** app that allows users to self-direct their learning journey through scientifically valid information about medication abortion, including interactive tools designed to support decision-making and self-care before, during and after an abortion
- **Movement-building:** educational trainings, outreach and advocacy events, and values clarification for action and transformation (VCAT) workshops with partner organizations to support the creation of an enabling environment that improves access to key SRH services