

ABORTION HOTLINE REPORT

A cross-sectional analysis of data July 2019 to June 2020: Increasing awareness of, and access to, safe abortion services in Malaysia.

Up to **18000** teenage pregnancies are reported annually in Malaysia.

Baby dumping cases have continued for the past 10 years at a rate of **1** in **3** every 3 days.

42% of Hotline Clients in the one year period showed a preference for medical methods of termination compared to surgical options.

This paper aims to report on trends observed by the RRAAM Hotline in a one-year period, from July 2019 to June 2020. The objectives of the report include, to a) providing insight into the **background of hotline clients** who have requested for access to safe, affordable and women-friendly services throughout Malaysia, b) highlighting women's reasons for seeking a Termination of Pregnancy (TOP) and c) highlight **barriers of access** that arose as a consequence of the Movement Control Order (MCO) instituted by the Malaysian government in response to COVID-19.

The RRAAM Hotline was established in 2015 as a direct response to the rise in reports of baby dumping cases in Malaysia. Reports indicate an average of over 100 babies dumped annually. The Hotline is operated everyday by a team of 6 paracounsellors.

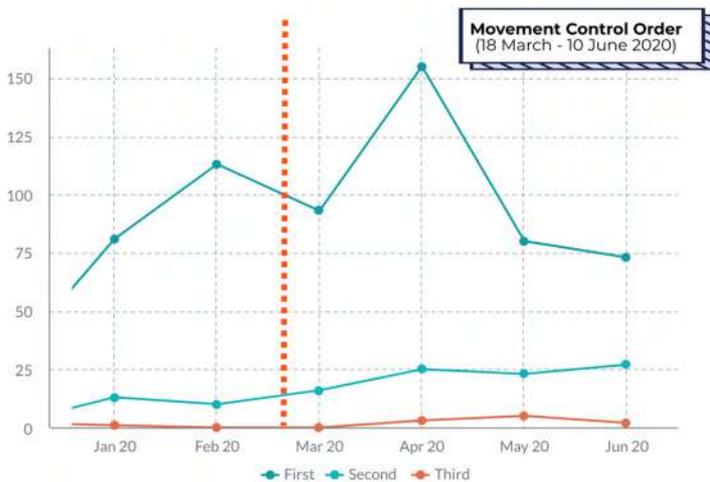


Figure 1. The need for access to abortion services through the Hotline increased during the MCO months.

During the period June 2019 to July 2020, 1232 people contacted the Hotline, of which 983 (79.8%) were in the first trimester, 163 (13.2%) in the second trimester and 18 (1.5%) in the third trimester. The months of April, May and June (MCO) further observed a spike in second and third trimester requests (Fig. 1), which shows that **limiting factors are worsened in a pandemic** environment, including financial constraints, stigma, and geographical inaccessibility.

There was an observable increase in Hotline calls (Fig. 2) during the months of September-October 2019, when

RRAAM held the Abort The Stigma (ATS) Campaign, suggesting a direct correlation between heightened social presence (both online and offline) and increased access to the RRAAM Hotline. The Movement Control Order (between March and June 2020) also saw **the callers increase in line with reported increased unemployment and reduced mobility and household incomes.**

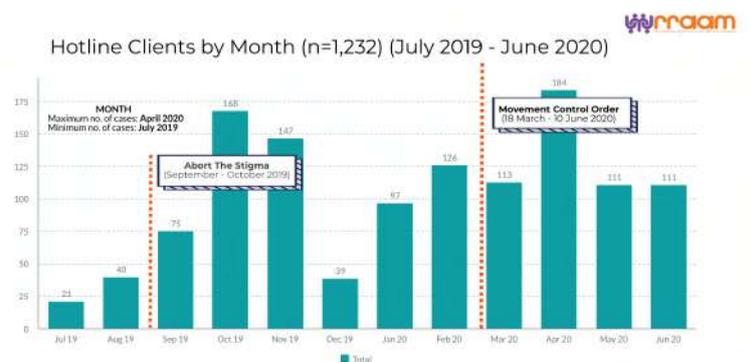


Figure 2. During the MCO, the Hotline observed a 48% increase in calls from the monthly average in a six month period.

As **abortions are allowed legally up to 22 weeks in Malaysia**, pregnancies above the legal limit are referred to OrphanCare, a local NGO, and Talian Kasih, the government helpline for assisting in unintended pregnancy. Maintaining **an annual dialogue with the Ministry of Health** has allowed RRAAM to engage in policy discourse towards improving healthcare for women in Malaysia.

A general misconception is that only young, single, unmarried women ask for abortion services. However from our data, on average 1 in 2 (48%) of hotline clients identified as being married. The majority of clients to the Hotline are women contacting for themselves. Data presented only 12 relatives and partners inquiring on behalf of pregnant women. Some hotline clients voluntarily cite their reason(s) for wanting a TOP, which include: having an unintended pregnancy, being underage, close spacing between children, loss of job, retrenchment and financial constraints. **The one-year period also recorded 2 cases of pregnancy through sexual assault.**

Lack of sexual and reproductive health services, including access to contraception and counselling leads

to unintended pregnancies and baby dumping, especially among the younger generation. Additionally, data recorded also show married women needed safe abortion services, citing the financial burden of having large families. Many women disclosed having delivered a child less than a year ago.

Factors which further limit women's access (especially in low income families) to primary sexual reproductive health services in Malaysia, despite the legal status of abortion include stigma, cultural norms as well as lack of information and awareness around sex and reproductive health. **Contraceptive counselling enables women to make informed choices, including the freedom to decide if, when and how many children they desire.**

IN MALAYSIA,

without legal access, persons seeking medical abortions are vulnerable to:

- Purchasing fake pills from "black market" vendors and online scamming
- Unsuccessful terminations causing advanced pregnancies and health risks
- Unsafe abortions, without proper medical guidance from a registered medical practitioners

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS AND ADVOCATES

- **Advocate for and increase awareness on the importance of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)**
CSE delays sexual initiation among young people, increases contraceptive use, prevents unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and encourages greater discourse around consent and bodily rights. It is important to continue advocating for the implementation of CSE for young people in our country, which currently practises an abstinence-based approach in the education system.
- **Youth-Centred and Youth-Friendly Sexual and Reproductive Health Services in Malaysia**
When we strive to reduce the barriers, such as prejudice, stigma and discrimination for young people to avail themselves to SRH services, we can ensure that their SRH is protected.
- **Training of Public and Private Primary Health Care Providers**
Implement a structured programme that adopts a standard of practice for health care workers to uphold sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the clinic setting. Training health care workers to provide SRHR counselling, even in the absence of a registered medical practitioner is also imperative.
- **To continue advocacy efforts towards the legalisation of medical abortions in Malaysia**
A list of essential drugs recognised by the World Health Organization (WHO) includes mifepristone and misoprostol. Use of medication by a registered medical practitioner for the purposes of terminating a pregnancy would curb rampant online sales and fake pills taken without proper administration.

Perlukan bantuan?

+6018 368 7950

WhatsApp hotline RRAAM untuk pilihan tentang kehamilan tak dirancang dan pengguguran selamat

Ikuti kami di FB / Twitter / IG @RRAAMalaysia

rraam
reproductive rights advocacy alliance malaysia
PERSATUAN HAK KESIHATAN WANITA

Prepared by: Amanda Tiew Jia Ern
Aminah Rawther
Juliana Ooi

For more information:



www.rraam.org
@rraamalaysia
+60183687950