

Summary

Through the RRAAM hotline:

PERSPECTIVES ON ABORTION IN MALAYSIA

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This report seeks to provide insight into experiences of women seeking access to abortion services in Malaysia through interviews with RRAAM hotline advisors and an analysis of data provided by women on the hotline chat, between July 2019 and June 2020.

Key Facts

Awareness on legality of abortion

- 100,000 abortions are estimated to take place annually.
- Abortion in Malaysia is regulated under Section 312-316 of the Penal Code.
- Abortion is allowed within 22 weeks of pregnancy.
- Knowledge on legal status of abortion remains low, even among doctors who provide the service.
- Currently, abortion services can be obtained at private healthcare facilities and is seen as an uncommon procedure at public hospitals and clinics.

Women's reasons for seeking safe access to abortion

- **Economic factors** - financially unable to support child, unemployment, lack of job stability.
- **Career** - line of work that does not accommodate pregnancy
- **Health factors** - mental and physical illness.
- **Existing children** - disabled children, child below 1 years old, large number of children.
- **Relationship issues** - sexual assault and abuse, separation, divorce.
- **Childbirth** - multiple previous Cesarean sections, complicated delivery.

Financial struggle

- Cost of abortion services at private clinics vary greatly depending on pregnancy size and this makes it accessible only to those who can afford it.
- Logistical costs - women have to account for cost of travel and lodging when clinic is not in their hometown.

Stigma is a cause for concern

- More than half of the initial number of women who contact the hotline disappear when asked to provide basic information regarding themselves and the pregnancy.
- Stigmatisation by both public and private healthcare providers occur commonly.

Medical abortion pills through unverified online sources

- After the misoprostol license was withdrawn in 2016, reports of online sales of illegal abortion pills have continued to rise despite government efforts to crack down on them.
- 42% of clients who reach out to the RRAAM hotline seeking termination of pregnancy reveal preference for medical abortion.
- Making medical abortion available and accessible to all women under legal doctor supervision will reduce both the danger to the mother's health and the influence of online syndicates selling adulterated medication.

Recommendations

- Abortion services are needed due to failure of contraception and the significant unmet contraceptive needs of women.
- Postpartum contraceptive use and counselling is not practised as a routine. There is an urgent need for Malaysia to implement a postpartum contraceptive program in all government and private healthcare facilities.
- Effective contraceptive counselling and services are essential to reduce the number of future unplanned pregnancies and its consequences.

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