

Philippines Tears of Illegal Abortions

In the next 30 years the population of the Philippines is set to double to 170 million. Contraceptives are frowned on and abortion is illegal every year more than half a million Filipina women are so desperate they undergo harrowing illegal abortions, despite the fact that at least 80,000 end up seriously ill in hospital.

Metro Manila, where 35% of its 12 million inhabitants live in slums. Not many of them have jobs and many women are desperate to avoid large families which they cant support.

The Filipino Catholic church holds rallies against abortion and it is backed by wealthy American pro-life groups such as Operation Outcry. The Christian Right in the US is pushing the Bush government into stopping foreign aid to clinics giving contraception advice.

Remy whose two previous attempts at abortion ended in failure. Pregnant with a third child, she was so desperate she took bitter herbs, threw herself out of a window then massaged her abdomen until she started bleeding.

The team talks to a Helot a traditional midwife who provides induced abortions to poor women. Concealing her identity as shes very scared of reprisals, the Helot explains how she charges £7 to carry out the procedure, without any anaesthetic. Many patients end up in hospital, and some of them on the verge of death.

For those women who can afford it, the alternative to a Helot is an illegal clinic charging £60 a session. one clinic where a terrified 17-year-old about to undergo an abortion tells Obaid Chinay that having given birth just three months before and already pregnant she has now other choice.

the Mayor of Manila, Lito Atienza. Vehemently against abortions, he says that contraceptives are a poison against a womans body. He tells the programme that the number of abortions is being controlled, that the number of illegal clinics is diminishing, that the authorities are clearing up the stalls selling illegal herbs and drugs and overall, women are careful not to indulge in abortions.

Obaid Chinay visits one such area of stalls which the Mayor claimed to have cleared up. She is able to easily buy the herbs and drugs needed to induce abortion. Ironically situated next to a church, the location sums up the terrible dilemma facing so many women in the Philippines.