

## Abortion in Egypt <sup>(1)</sup>

Attitudes towards abortion have fluctuated all through history, from support and even encouragement to absolute prohibition and condemnation, starting with the Egyptians through the Assyrians, Babylonians, Hindus, Greeks, and Romans to our days.

The present Egyptian law has made no provision for exempting therapeutic abortion from its prohibition and has not distinguished it from abortion performed for other reasons. The law prescribes that he who perpetrates the abortion of a pregnant woman shall be imprisoned. In other articles of the law, if the perpetrator is a doctor he shall receive a life sentence of hard labor. Abortion is viewed in one article as a misdemeanor, and by another as a crime.

Available sources point to the fact that abortion has become one of the most widely used birth control methods in all countries, regardless of their culture, ideology or religion.

### Abortion in Egypt

The article dealing with this topic is based on previous studies, and on the findings of the field research undertaken by the Population and Family Planning Board in the area of industrialization and population.

The following facts were highlighted by this article:

1. Forty one % of the sample used in the field study have undergone at least one abortion (spontaneous or induced).
2. Twenty five percent of abortions are induced, to which must be added the unknown percentage of induced abortion reported as spontaneous.
3. The highest percentage of induced, compared to spontaneous abortion, occurs in industrial centres (16%), followed respectively by urban and rural areas.
4. Induced abortion is progressively correlated to the increase in level of income of the individual.
5. Induced abortion is progressively correlated to the increase in the level of urbanism of the wife.

(1) Condensed from an article on this topic, published in Arabic and summarized in English, in "Population Studies", a quarterly published in both languages by the Supreme Council for Population and Family Planning, Cairo, Egypt, no. 49, April-June 1979. The author of the article is Nadia Halim Suliman, senior expert at the National Social and Criminological Center for Research.

6. Induced abortion is progressively correlated to the number of children, the number of pregnancies and the age of the wife, which all point to the fact that abortion is used as a method of birth control.

### Additional Remarks

- a. In spite of the fact that planners and policy makers tend to overlook abortion in their programs, this activity is nevertheless related to the family-planning movement all over the world. This presupposes the possibility of helpful guidance provided by family-planning programs for the purpose of preventing the spread of induced abortion.
- b. The high percentage of illiteracy in Egypt makes it difficult for social planners to provide adequate information and service to the population. Since the responsibility should be carried out by society as a whole, it becomes the duty of individuals to provide the necessary help. We may mention as an example the case of the Shatibi Hospital in Egypt, where the doctors in charge have pledged to perform the abortion operation on a woman who has become pregnant in spite of the IUD practice that they had advised her to use.
- c. It is not right to conclude that contraceptive methods are an adequate substitute for abortion or vice versa. The proper solution is to use the usual birth control methods and, if they fail, to resort to abortion. It is evident that the use of methods that do not produce side-effects is preferable to abortion, which is not always a safe procedure.
- d. In Egyptian society where children are highly prized, parents who practice abortion must be moved by serious factors justifying their practice. In 1971, the IPPF published a report which said that governments that forbid abortion create a problem for women who use it without the possibility of obtaining medical care. In this case the report recommended private associations to help these women.

In conclusion, it is the duty of the Egyptian government to handle the problem of abortion in a realistic way and reconsider the law which forbids its practice. This law, according to Egyptian gynecologists, has only contributed to extend the practice of abortion and create problems that must not be overlooked.