

Teenage Abortions on the Rise

Teenage abortions are on the rise in Kyrgyzstan, with young women from rural areas being particularly prone to unwanted pregnancies due to a lack of awareness about the risks of unprotected sex, combined with their traditional upbringing.

Although the number of abortions in the country declines as a whole over the past decade from 12.6 to 10.8 per 1,000 women of fertile age, a higher proportion is now performed on teenagers, according to Roza Amiraeva from the medical care and licensing department of the health ministry in the capital Bishkek. "The majority of them are teenagers from 12 to 19 years old," she said.

Janara's story is typical. "I became pregnant accidentally. I did not even think that I had to protect myself from pregnancy," the 14-year-old school student said. "I was afraid to tell my parents about it. I had an abortion in my third month and borrowed money from my friends [for it]."

According to health officials, the majority of Kyrgyz teenagers having abortions come from rural areas. The problem is fuelled by a lack of awareness on the part of young men and women fed by a traditional rural upbringing, analysts say. Often, when young women come to urban areas and are suddenly free from the constraints of their traditional communities, unwanted pregnancies follow.

"When it comes to sexual intercourse, a girl just cannot ask a guy to use a condom, often because of a psychological barrier," said Jaidar Kazakova, a gynaecologist at the youth health centre of the Meerim international charity fund.

Cholpon, 19, university student from a rural district, fell victim to her ignorance. "I got scared when I found out that I had been put in the family way [pregnant]. I had nobody to go to. I was afraid of my parents and relatives since I was raised in a traditional family where such things are considered shameful," she said.

She wanted to have a termination, but did not have the money. It took her eight months to save the amount needed. When her sisters found out about it, they took her to a doctor, but he refused to perform such a late abortion. In the end, she was persuaded to deliver the baby and give it up for adoption.

According to the Kyrgyz health ministry, teenage abortions in the country in 2003 reached more than 260, with the highest figures in the northern Chui and southern Osh provinces. In 2001, at least 124 girls aged between 15 and 17 had abortions, while in 2002, that figure stood at 113.

Another worrying aspect for health officials is that teenage abortions can be fraught with serious complications as they are often performed in unsafe circumstances. "Abortions can have far-reaching consequences, including inflammatory diseases, which result in menstrual irregularities, barrenness, perforation of the uterus and sepsis [blood poisoning]," warned Amiraeva, who is a gynaecologist by profession.

"Before performing abortions, we have interviews with girls. In addition, a psychiatrist and a gynaecologist participate in interviews. We do our best to persuade them not to have abortions. This is why many girls prefer to go to private clinics, when everything is done anonymously and no IDs are required," Kazakova maintained.

Criminal abortions are also on the rise, Amiraeva pointed out, citing a recent incident in the city of Osh. A girl went to a private clinic to have a "secret" abortion. Back at home, she felt unwell, but could not confess to her parents what she had done.

"She stayed in bed for 10 days with a high temperature until finally, her parents decided to take her to a hospital. Unfortunately, it was too late and she died from her infection."

A recent report by the health ministry said the rise in deaths caused by complications after abortions in the south was a concern. Deaths had increased 3.5 times in the southern Jalal-Abad province over the past year, and in 50 percent of the cases, the termination was illegal.

"We must promote education and preventive activities to increase awareness among young people, maybe on a higher level. We have to start from kindergartens, primary schools and colleges," Kazakova stressed.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Bishkek is working to raise awareness of reproductive health issues in an effort to reduce unwanted pregnancies.

TEENAGE ABORTION...
CONTINUED ON P. 9

Job Equality Elusive for Women

Although women are entering the workforce in unprecedented numbers, they still face higher unemployment rates, lower wages and barriers to entering high-level positions. According to "Global Employment Trends for Women 2004," an analysis of female employment, about 200 million women joined the work force in the past decade. However, equal pay, balanced benefits and true socio-economic empowerment for women have not been achieved.

The gap between the number of employed men and women has been decreasing across the globe, but at widely different rates. For example, only 40 women per 100 men are economically active in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. Women also make up a greater percentage of the working poor. Sixty percent of people earning less than one dollar a day are women. "Creating enough decent jobs for women is only possible if policy-makers place employment at the centre of social and economic policies, and recognize that women face more substantial challenges in the work place than men," said International Labour Organisation (ILO) Director General Juan Somavia. "Raising incomes and opportunities for women lifts whole families out of poverty and drives economic and social progress."

The second report, "Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management—Update 2004," reports that the number of women holding managerial positions increased by just 0.7 percent between 1996 and 1999, and between 2000 and 2002, while women's share of managerial positions in 60 countries studied ranged from 20 to 42 percent. Women tend to hold more professional jobs in North America, South America and Eastern Europe than in East Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. But regardless of region, it was universally more difficult for women to rise to the top. The report highlights one exception: a large percentage of women hold high-level jobs in legal systems in some countries, particularly in Eastern Europe.

Source: UN Wire, 5 March 2004, <http://www.unwire.org/News/328_426_13758.asp>

AMID TERRORISM FEARS... FROM P. 7

after work hours, on the basis of observing neutrality, was 21 years ago.

Yet another case that stirred Japan was the resignation in April last year of a former ambassador, Naoki Amaki, who publicly opposed Japan's sending SDF troops to Iraq.

In his immensely popular book *So Long, Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, released in October 2003, Amaki accuses the government of virtually firing him because he expressed an opinion against government policy.

Ishizuka suggests that terrorism is leading to a dangerous situation for political and human rights activism as the government beefs up its call not to show "weakness against terrorism."

He worries about the support this tension could bring to proposals by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to change Japan's Constitution, which prohibits military involvement overseas. Of particular focus is Article 9, under which the country renounces war.

Constitutional reform is planned for 2007. The conservative LDP is calling for new laws to legalise the dispatch of the SDF to support the US war on terrorism in the future.

"In the face of a terrorist attack, people would be more inclined to support a militarily active Japan. This would be disastrous for activists who face the danger of being arrested for simply demanding their rights," he says.

Source: Inter Press Service, <<http://www.ipsnews.net>>, 2 April 2004

TEENAGE ABORTIONS... FROM P. 8

"We explain to young people how to use contraceptives, how to avoid getting pregnant unnecessarily and how to manage family planning," said Gulnara Kadyrova, a project coordinator for UNFPA.

The National Red Crescent Society of Kyrgyzstan is also contributing to efforts to deal with the issue. "We recently opened an anonymous counselling centre where we will provide help for girls with abortion problems," said Natalya Bibikova, the Red Crescent Society's Bishkek coordinator.

Source: <http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=40421&SelectRegion=Central_Asia&SelectCountry=KYRGYZSTAN>, 5 April 2004