

ABORTION AND BIRTH CONTROL IN SINGAPORE

Under the present law of Singapore, abortions, unless carried out for the purpose of saving human life, are criminal offences. Sections 312 to 314 of the Penal Code of Singapore relate to abortions, and state as follows:

Section 312: Whoever voluntarily causes a woman with child to miscarry, shall, if such miscarriage be not caused in good faith for the purpose of saving the life of the woman, be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both; and if the woman be quick with child, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to seven years, and shall also be liable to fine. (A woman who causes herself to miscarry is within the meaning of this section)

Section 313: Whoever commits the offence defined in Section 312, without the consent of the woman, whether the woman is quick with child or not, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.

Section 314: Whoever, with intent to cause the miscarriage of a woman with child, does any act which causes the death of such woman, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine; and if the act is done without the consent of the woman, shall be punished either with imprisonment for life, or with the punishment above mentioned. (It is not essential to this offence that the offender should know that the act is likely to cause death) ^{1/}

The Government of Singapore is now reported as giving consideration to a reform of the law on abortions. It is thought that many of the criteria for abortions that have been incorporated

^{1/}
Laws of the Colony of Singapore, 1955, Vol. III,
Chapter 119, p. 141.

in the abortion laws of many other countries will probably be acceptable in Singapore also, such as rape, incest, transmission of hereditary disease, and danger of abnormalities in the foetus.^{2/}

Singapore has a population of over 1.84 million and a population density of nearly 9,000 persons per square mile. In 1965 it had a crude birth rate of 29.9 per thousand, with a death rate of 5.5 per thousand, resulting in a net growth rate of 2.6 percent, a far less explosive situation than in 1958, when the crude birth rate was 41.3 per thousand and the crude death rate 7.0, giving a crude rate of natural increase of 3.4 percent.^{3/}

Family planning activities were started in 1949 by the Singapore Family Planning Association.^{4/} This voluntary effort went on until the end of 1965. The Association had, in 1964 and again in January 1965, requested that the Ministry of Health take over all activities of this nature being conducted by it in Government institutions. A Review Committee was set up in March 1965, the terms of reference being to

^{2/} Studies in Family Planning, New York, Population Council, No. 28 (April, 1968), p. 6.

^{3/} Ibid., No. 14 (September, 1966), p. 2.

^{4/} The following account of the history of family planning in Singapore is mainly based on K. Kanagaratnam's "Singapore: The National Family Planning Program," in Studies in Family Planning, No. 28, April 1968.

determine exactly which of the family planning activities were to be transferred from the SFPA to the Ministry of Health, and other consequential matters. The Committee presented its report in June 1965, recommending that the Government, with effect from October 1, 1965, should assume full responsibilities for all family planning in Singapore. It recommended a reduction of the Government grant to the SFPA from \$100,000 to \$10,000 annually because of the proportionate reduction in the work of the Association, and recommended sympathetic consideration by the Government for employment of SFPA staff who would thus become redundant. These recommendations were all accepted. The Government issued a White Paper on Family Planning (Command 22 of 1965) on September 27, 1965, announcing the National Five-Year Family Planning Program and outlining the method of its implementation. The national target is described as being to obtain the participation of 180,000 eligible women in the National Family Planning Program within the period 1966-1970. The Program aims at reducing the birth rate in Singapore from 32 per thousand in 1964 to below 20 per thousand by 1970, or a reduction of not less than 10 per thousand in the five-year period.

The Singapore Family Planning and Population Board Act (No. 32 of 1965) was passed in December, 1965, to create a national family planning agency. The object of this Act was stated as being to "create a statutory authority for

promoting and disseminating information pertaining to Family Planning in Singapore and for matters incidental thereto." ^{5/}

The functions of the Board were defined as being: (a) to act as the sole agency for the promotion and dissemination of information pertaining to family planning in Singapore; (b) to initiate and undertake a population control program; (c) to stimulate interest in demography in Singapore; and (d) to advise the Government on all matters relating to family planning and population control. In introducing the Bill in Parliament on December 31, 1965, the Minister of Health is quoted as having said:

The chief purpose of this Bill is to provide the legal means whereby the Five-Year Plan for Family Planning could be given effective direction and execution. If this Family Planning program succeeds, and we are determined that it should, besides increasing welfare and happiness for hundreds of thousands of people, Singapore's future annual net increase of population in the 1970's can be brought down to one half of its present rate, and thus be brought in line with the prevailing rates of population increase now found in the prosperous and advanced countries of the world. ^{6/}

The Act also vests the Board with the necessary powers to act as a body corporate and to regulate its activities. It confers overall powers to co-ordinate all activities in family planning in Singapore. The membership of the Board is broadly

^{5/}
Ibid.

^{6/}
Ibid.

representative, including members of Government Ministries, the University of Singapore, and public-spirited citizens. Thus, at the end of 1965, all family planning activities of the SPPA in Government institutions ceased, to be carried out from then on by the new national agency. The Family Planning and Population Board was allocated \$200,000 per annum or \$1 million for five years (1966-1970). At the end of two years the National Program had exceeded its numerical target of new acceptors by 11 percent. The birth rate fell from 29.9 per thousand in 1965 to 28.6 per thousand in 1966 and 25.5 per thousand in 1967, the drop in 1967 being over 3 per thousand compared with the preceding year. Dr. K. Kanagaratnam, Deputy Director of Medical Services and Chairman of the Family Planning and Population Board, Singapore, says:

If we can maintain the tempo and results of the program for the next three years, we will achieve the twin objectives of the plan to preserve and improve our socio-economic situation and at the same time liberate the women of Singapore from the burden of bearing and raising an unnecessarily large number of children. As a consequence of these measures, we will increase human happiness for all in our island Republic. //

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Ibid., p. 11.

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Washington, D. C. 20540
August 1969