

## CASE IN PERNAMBUCO IS A QUESTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The case of the 9-year-old girl from Alagoinha (PE) pregnant with twins due to sexual violence is shocking in many ways: the facts that the girl is still a child, that her step-father also abuses his other step-daughter and that everything happens inside the family home ... But yet more revolting are the restrictions imposed by some Pernambuco local authorities showing their resistance in assuming a laic position that in the circumstance is unquestionable and assured by law. Disregarding religious or political points of view, the Penal Code is clear and includes two premises for the performance of legal abortions: life risk to the pregnant woman and pregnancy in consequence of sexual abuse. Even so, many obstacles were created and several bureaucratic details postponed as much as possible the interruption of this pregnancy, that was only carried out after the mobilization of feminist groups and coordinated actions among institutions in defense of women's rights.

The episode represented total ignorance and disrespect to human, children and adolescent rights. A little girl that already suffered with poverty, malnutrition and lack of social structure, a common situation to a great part of Brazilian people, and that at the age of 9 wouldn't possibly grasp the dimension of such disrespect, had her law assured rights stolen by people that grab every possible opportunity to create polemic and "go under campaign".

Once the service moved from *IMIP – Instituto Materno Infantil de Pernambuco*, "Maternal Infantile Institute of Pernambuco" to *CISAM - Centro Integrado de Saúde Amaury de Medeiros*, "Amaury de Medeiros Integrate Health Centre", the abortion was finally performed after an agile and coordinated action of feminist groups and other key actors that support women's reproductive rights in every life phase. As soon as abortion was effected, Dom José Cardoso Sobrinho- archbishop of Olinda and Recife and member of the Catholic Church's conservative wing- banned everyone involved in the process.

This event has been closely followed by the press, and unfortunately some vehicles still bring tendentious approaches to the fact. The case should be regarded as a matter of human rights and not another polemical discussion about abortion that stimulates moralism, religious and even politically interested manifestations. Sadly, some newspapers report tendencies on the episode - on top of detailing the abortion process, they thoroughly describe

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the fetus development and its characteristics in determined stages of pregnancy. This was out-of-place, perverse and absolutely unnecessary.

What should be published was the urgent need for a change in the Penal Code regarding decriminalization of abortion. The current law dated 1940 is obsolete, inefficient and, on top of it all, was disrespected on the two only exceptions when pregnancy interruption was legal.

On the other hand, such publicity on the case represents an opportunity to mention positive consequences that abortion legalization can bring about to the public health system, as currently happens in Mexico.

National health authorities pointed out benefits of the law that, in 2007, decriminalized abortion in cases of pregnancies up to the twelfth week. The number of abandoned new-born cases dropped 50% and, as it was published at the *Le Monde*, “there are no more cases of patients arriving at the hospital with a perforated uterus due to dangerous abortion attempts.” Neediest women were also the most favored by the change.

Here in Brazil, by following an episode like the one in Pernambuco, it makes us ponder over the practice of sexual and reproductive rights and women’s rights, and realize how urgently patients and health professionals need more realistic support and more coherent positions from authorities in regard to human rights.