

Too many women still die from unsafe abortions

According to a prominent Australian researcher unsafe abortions continue to be a leading cause of death for pregnant women worldwide and too many women still die from unsafe abortions.

Dr. Suzanne Belton from Charles Darwin University says the safety of abortions needs to be improved.

In a study carried out in East Timor where the maternal death and fertility rate continues to be very high, a number of key findings in relation to induced abortion were uncovered.

Dr. Belton's study is the first to examine unwanted pregnancy in the East Timor region and was presented as a part of East Timor's Institute of Health Sciences' first Congress on Health Sciences in early December 2008 in Dili.

The proportion of maternal mortality due to unsafe abortion in the area was unknown and the study set out to investigate this and came up with recommended strategies to deal with the situation.

According to Dr. Belton the laws regarding the termination of pregnancies in East Timor are highly restrictive and women are unable to request an elective abortion for any reason, even when their health or life is endangered.

Dr. Belton says the problem is that no research has been conducted on unsafe abortion since East Timor's independence from Indonesia in 2002 and the study describes the context of unplanned and unwanted pregnancy and fertility management, as well as investigating and canvassing a way forward.

The researchers looked at data included a maternal death audit, monitoring service provisions, reproductive health indicators, and carried out face-to-face interviews with doctors, midwives and women recovering from early pregnancy losses and Dr. Belton says a number of key findings in relation to induced abortion were uncovered.

Reluctant to speak

The key findings included that induced abortion continued to be performed in secret, 40% of all emergency obstetric care was managing and treating complications from early pregnancy losses, and doctors and midwives continued to be reluctant to speak with women about induced abortion.

Dr. Belton says the legal situation is complex and confusing for health professionals given views on abortion are influenced by the Catholic Church and access to family planning information, education and supplies is limited.

Dr Belton says it was also revealed in three of the four health facilities investigated, that evidence-based protocols in the

provision of post-abortion care were not used.

The research was funded and commissioned by The United Nations Population Fund and managed in collaboration with Alola Foundation and conducted with the support of the Ministry of Health.

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