

Survey: 38 out of every 1,000 go for abortion

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KUALA LUMPUR: Thirty-eight out of every 1,000 women aged between 15 and 49 years old go for abortion in Malaysia and the rate of illegal abortions is 0.1% or 500 per 500,000 live births yearly.

These were among some of the findings of recent surveys released by International Planned Parenthood Federation regional director Datuk Dr Raj Karim.

She said a Malaysian Fertility and Family Survey in the 70s revealed that abortions were highest for rape and incest cases followed by for unmarried women, health reasons, and for economic and social reasons.

Dr Karim said Malaysia had a comprehensive health system that provided quality services to those who chose abortions in special circumstances, such as to save the woman's life or to preserve physical and mental health.

She was speaking to reporters after the launch of the "Safe

Motherhood Conference: Saving Mother's Lives: The Health Impact of Unsafe Abortion" here yesterday.

"We have good-quality services for women such as family planning, prenatal care while contraceptive services through maternal and child health clinics and hospitals are also provided," she said, adding that over 70,000 women die of abortion-related causes each year - half of them in Asia.

World Bank's lead health specialist for the African region Dr Khamma Rogo said most unsafe abortions in developing countries were due to unplanned and unwanted pregnancies by women who felt confined and lacked access to a better recourse.

He said they resorted to abortion due to reasons like difficulties accessing family planning services, failure of contraceptive methods, rape, and lack of support.

Dr Rogo said 210 million pregnancies occurred worldwide yearly including 182 million in developing countries.

"Up to one-third of pregnancies do not end in the birth of a baby, resulting in a worldwide annual abortion rate of 35 per 1,000 women," he said.

Dr Rogo said almost all illegal abortions were done in developing countries: 10 million in Asia, five million in Africa and four million in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Earlier, in opening the conference, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, the wife of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said: "The best way to prevent unsafe abortions is to prevent unintended or unwanted pregnancies. We have to address family planning, provide education on dangers of unsafe abortion and post-abortion counselling."

Dr Siti Hasmah said there should also be referrals for comprehensive health services for women who had abortions, to avoid repeated abortions.

She also called on governments in Asia to review their policy and laws to remove discriminatory or criminal provisions against women and girls.