

نفس داخل خارج  
 انا ساكنة  
 كلام بلا صوت  
 صياح بلا صوت  
 الوقت وقف ...  
 والكلمة في فمي تدور  
 تدور تدور تدور  
 وتخرج  
 صياح في وذي  
 يتهز بذي  
 نقول لا  
 نقول لا  
 ونشوف وجوه و عينين جامدة  
 تحب تقول الي انا غالطة  
 ناقف  
 ناخذ نفس كبيير  
 مذايا نصيح  
 قدها مذايا نصيح  
 لين الصياح يستقلي صدري  
 ونلمو في يدي كالسلاح  
 ونقول  
 شاهية نحب روجي  
 ومن بذي نقص لوجي  
 ونصنع دار ولا فلوكة  
 ونطوف بيها على روجي  
 ونحبنى  
 ليليا بن رمضان

ندور ندور ندور  
 على روجي نعور  
 ولحمي نأكل  
 والبكاء في فمي ساكن  
 صوت بلا صوت  
 ربح تهز الموج لبلايص في بذي  
 جامدة  
 لبلايص في فمي شاردة  
 وندور على روجي ناكلها باردة  
 بين حيوط ساكنة  
 ندور ندور ندور  
 والحيوط على السقف عالقاع  
 تستوى  
 فارغة  
 ننفع الصوت على الصوت  
 فارغة  
 نعاود الحركة عالحركة  
 فارغة  
 نأكل من لحمي ونرجع  
 نأكل من فمي ونفرغ  
 والدنيا دايرة بيا فارغة  
 عقارب المنقالة تدور  
 تدور في وتكتب في الوقت  
 ودقات قلبي على دقاتها راكبة  
 الصوت منظم  
 الصوت يعلى و في وذي  
 ساكن  
 الصوت يدور على رقبتى

## FORWARD

In the Middle East and North African region, abortion is taboo and illegal in almost every country (except Tunisia and Turkey). However, despite the legal prohibition many women don't stop to seek abortion for a multitude of reasons. Consequently, accessing safe abortion is very difficult and women have to face a multitude of barriers. In other words, women have no choice but to put their lives at risk while using unsafe abortion methods.

*In this context, RAWSA MENA Network – Right and Access for Women to Safe Abortion in the MENA region – supported by international funds and organizations, was the first network which is the first network to break the silence around this taboo issue and aims to raise awareness and to advocate for safe abortion for women in the entire region.*

*RAWSA MENA Network brings together human rights organizations and feminist activists for a regional advocacy in support of the right to safe abortion. The Network was created in May 2019 and we share the belief that every woman has the right to decide on her body and have access to Sexual and Reproductive services without being prosecuted and/or imprisoned. The objective of the Network is to limit restrictive policies related to sexual and reproductive rights including those on abortion because they are in contradiction with the principles of Human Rights. We wish to remove discriminatory barriers to access to safe reproductive health service.*

*We develop this compilation of stories and testimonies to raise awareness on the issue of unsafe abortion in the MENA region: we are giving to women a voice, we let them speak so that they can testify of a cruel and risky experience and we hope these witnesses to enable change.*

### **Giving the speech to women**

This collection of stories and testimonies aims to shed light on the barriers for access to safe abortion and their negative and detrimental impact on women's lives in the region. Too often, women do not have the opportunity or possibility to talk and express themselves on this issue. This collection of stories is dedicated to raising and amplifying women's voices and allowing them to take space and to share what they are facing.

### **Witness to enable change**

This collection challenges the reader and raises his/her awareness of the practice of unsafe abortion in the MENA region by amplifying women's voices and sharing their lived experiences. It indirectly intends to combat unsafe abortion by expanding knowledge on this issue and its consequences on women's lives.

### **Target Audience:**

This compilation of stories and testimonies indirectly targets any individual interested in the subject matter and specifically addresses civil society organizations and public institutions working on SRHR and women's rights, as well as any women in the region who faces stigma for seeking an abortion.

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# INTRODUCTION

*Three out of ten of all pregnancies end in induced abortion. Nearly half of all abortions are unsafe, and almost all of these unsafe abortions take place in developing countries.*

**Abortion** is the termination of a pregnancy by removal or expulsion of an embryo or fetus.

When properly done, induced abortion is one of the safest procedures in medical practice and making safe abortion legal and accessible reduces maternal deaths.

When women with unwanted pregnancies do not have access to safe abortion, they often resort to **unsafe abortion**. An abortion is unsafe when it is carried out either by a person lacking the necessary skills or in an environment that does not conform to minimal medical standards, or both. Characteristics of an unsafe abortion touch upon inappropriate circumstances before, during or after an abortion.

Unsafe abortion can lead to immediate health risks – including death – as well as long-term complications, affecting women’s physical and mental health and well-being throughout her life-course. It also has financial implications for women and communities.

Unsafe abortion procedures may involve the insertion of an object or substance (root, twig, or catheter or traditional concoction) into the uterus; dilatation and curettage performed incorrectly by an unskilled provider; ingestion of harmful substances; and application of external force.

## Safe abortion methods

**Abortions are safe** when they are carried out with a method that is recommended by WHO (World Health Organization), that is appropriate to the pregnancy duration, and when the person carrying out the abortion has the necessary skills. Such abortions can be done by surgical procedure or by using tablets (medical abortion), with a simple outpatient procedure.

**Surgical abortion** is performed by a trained healthcare professional with a manual or electrical vacuum device. Depending on the gestational period, the entire procedure lasts from 5 to 30 minutes. This option cannot be self-managed at home.

**Medical abortion** is a process that uses pills to terminate a pregnancy usually within the first 12 weeks from last menstrual period (LMP) and may be self-managed in some cases. It consists of either:

- taking a combination of two types of medication called mifepristone and misoprostol (the most effective method) or
- taking one dose or repeated doses of misoprostol – in places where mifepristone is not available

Having a medical abortion may feel like a heavy and crampy period. Side effects might include vomiting, tiredness, headache, fever and chills that never lasts more than hours.

### **Abortion in the MENA region**

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, almost one in four pregnancies are unintended, thus, many women seek an abortion. However, nearly 80% of women in this region live in countries where abortion laws are restricted. Only in Tunisia (and Turkey), women are able to seek safe abortion on demand. Indeed, most abortion laws in the region are punitive and were promulgated during the colonial period, when French and British regimes supported patriarchal policies to increase the population. As colonial laws criminalizing abortion became entrenched in society, legal and medical services for women needing abortions have remained restricted and under strict government surveillance.

Moreover, in the MENA region, abortion is a highly controversial topic because of cultural and religious beliefs. Even in Tunisia, women who obtained an abortion are being judged by the medical staff and by society.

These restrictions oblige women to hide and to get clandestine abortions. They are obliged to use dangerous methods to terminate their unwanted pregnancies. According to the World Health Organization, 9700 women die every year due to unsafe abortion in the MENA region. Complications from those abortions performed in unsanitary settings and by unskilled providers accounted for 11 % of maternal deaths in the region.

Having an unsafe abortion has a high cost on women's physical but also psychological well-being. Not being supported by relatives and being isolated, having to deal with illegality, and facing dangerous situations can severely affect women's mental health.

In addition, women who seek abortion in countries where it is illegal, are often economically exploited by the medical staff or physicians that demand a large and exaggerated sum of money in exchange. Women are also subject to dealing with fraudsters who sell fake abortion pills at high costs and who turn abortions into a black market.

That being said, the impact of illegal abortion on women's health in the Middle East and North Africa is understudied. Reliable data are limited or non-existent because where abortion is illegal, data are not collected.

Women are not able to talk about their abortion and this issue is not sufficiently addressed by feminist organizations and civil society in the region because of the taboo and the legal restrictions. For example, according to the Lebanese penal code, “Propagating or facilitating the use of abortive practices, shall be punished by imprisonment from two months to two years”.

To address these difficulties, RAWSA MENA Network was established.

### **Collecting women testimonies in the MENA region: the methodology used**

The stories and testimonies you will read have been collected by RAWSA team around the region. Our focal points and close RAWSA members in the different countries entered in direct contact with women having abortions or with healthcare providers. Some stories were reported by activists, especially in regions not accessible by our focal points.

*Note: To protect the identities of the women, pseudonyms have been used and names have been altered.*

# TUNISIA

*In Tunisia, the right for safe abortion without conditions is defined by article 214 of the Penal Code, amended in 1973 :*

*“Artificial termination of pregnancy is authorized when it occurs in the first three months in a hospital or health establishment or in an authorized clinic, by a doctor legally practicing his profession [...]. After the three months, the termination of the pregnancy can also be practiced, when the health of the mother or her psychic balance prepares to be compromised by the continuation of the pregnancy or when the unborn child would be likely to suffer from. serious illness or infirmity [...].”*

*According to the ONFP, there would be 12,000 to 16,000 abortions performed in the family planning clinics each year in Tunisia, and probably the double in the private clinics.*

*However, barriers to safe abortion exist: moralizing speech, psychological pressure, misinformation from the medical staff, Lack of political will, weakness of the National Office for Family Planning which was traditionally the who was the flag bearer and paved the way for expanded access to contraception and abortion etc.... and were reinforced during the Covid-19 pandemic.*



## Hanine, 17

Hanine, 17, got pregnant after being raped. She asks for an abortion at the ONFP clinic in the South of Tunisia. Although she had her mother's authorization, the administrative staff asked for the judge's permission because the pregnancy exceeded the 8 weeks LMP's ONFP deadline. The judge refuses the abortion although the rape has been judged. Hanine is forced to continue her pregnancy. Today she lives locked up with her parents and her child. She benefits from Tunisian state 200 dinars help as a single mother.



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## **Rym, 19**

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Rym is 19 years old. On April 21, 2020, during the lockdown, she requested a voluntary termination of pregnancy in a clinic in South Tunisia. Although Rym is older than 18, no gynecologist agrees to make an abortion without the consent of a parent. Because of the lockdown, Rym is not able to travel to Tunis. Desperated, Rym has to inform her mother. Yet she still cannot have an abortion. With the deconfinement she finally manages to come to Tunis. She is examined by a gynecologist who agrees for a surgical abortion in a private establishment. She will remain hospitalized for 48 hours and had to pay a large amount of money that had to be collected.

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## **Noha, 23**

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Noha, 23, is a young woman with a serious mental handicap. She got pregnant after being raped. She went to the ONFP clinic with her sister and asks for an abortion. No doctor accepts the abortion in both the public and the private sector. Noha is unable to take care of her pregnancy due to her disability. She is sent to the mental health department in Tunis and receive a medical certification recommending the abortion. She is finally hospitalized and benefits from the abortion.

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## **Islem, 40**

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Islem, 40, is married with two children. She went to the family planning of a town in Southern Tunisia. She asks for a voluntary termination of pregnancy. The staff tells her that abortion is prohibited in Tunisia. She manages to find the contact of a midwife who directs her to another city. However, this clinic no longer has the drugs to perform a medical abortion. Islem has to wait two more weeks for the clinic to be restocked.

# MOROCCO

*In Morocco, abortion is punishable by law with a prison sentence ranging from six to five years. The penal code dedicates 10 articles to prohibit abortion (Articles 449-458). Abortion is only allowed if the life of the pregnant woman is in danger and if the abortion is practiced by a surgeon with the permission of the spouse. Yet between 600 to 800 terminations of pregnancy are practiced illegally every day, according to the Moroccan Association against Clandestine Abortion (AMLAC). In 2019, demonstrations of activists were held in order to demand legal reforms. Abortion in Morocco is a public debate, but until now, no legal changes have occurred.*



## Nisreen, 25

My name is Nisreen, after moving away from my parent place to study at university, I had to work to finance myself. I ended up in an office in service delivery. My boss supported me a lot and even in my studies he was very understanding. One day, I don't know how it happened, he raped me. I was very scared, but he promised me that he would never give up on me and that he would marry me.

Unfortunately, this rape resulted in an unexpected pregnancy. I had a harsh experience. I was afraid of losing my studies. My partner/raeper/boss offered me to have an abortion, but I was afraid of its consequences. I read a lot about the arrest of women who performed abortion. Because of that, I kept my fetus.

My partner asked me to stay in his office until I gave birth. One month after giving birth to my child, I found out that I was pregnant again.

I felt into depression, especially as I was passing the end-of-year exams at university.

At this stage, I thought about abortion a lot, but I was still afraid of prison.

My message to the legislator is to ensure the decriminalization of abortion because unwanted pregnancy changed lives of many girls and women.

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## Souad, 38

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My name is Souad, 38 and I am married for 9 years. At the beginning of our relation, we made an agreement with my husband: we would have a maximum of 2 children due to our difficult financial situation. It happened that we got 3 children. After the third one, I asked my husband to let me take contraceptives. He refused, and he threatened me every time I tried to get contraception. We had 5 kids.

After I got pregnant with my sixth child, I went to the doctor for an abortion, but he refused and asked for either my husband's presence or his written consent. I went to see other doctors and their response were the same. I find myself lost. My husband was totally against abortion and he refused that I take contraceptives.

My health deteriorated, my uterus was no longer supporting getting pregnant and our financial conditions were terrible. However, the law is not making justice for me, but rather grants the decision to dispose of my body to my husband!

# IRAQ

*According to the Iraqi Penal Code of 1969 - article 417, "Any woman who deliberately aborts herself [...] shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year and a fine not exceeding 100 Iraqi dinars. The same penalty shall apply to whoever deliberately aborted her [...]. The only mitigating circumstance occurs if the woman abort herself in order to avoid shame after becoming pregnant in incest context.*

*In Iraq, many women seek abortion because they do not have the economic possibility to buy contraceptives. However, having an unsafe abortion cost more than 1000 USD with all the risks led by this procedure.*



## Sarah, 19

Sarah is a young unmarried girl. She got pregnant from her high school teacher (who is already married and has 2 kids). She realized she was pregnant at the beginning of the second month of pregnancy. She could not tell her family because being pregnant without marriage is a shame and shame.

She tried to reach out to the teacher, but he did not response. She told her female manager as she was kind and always helpful for her students. The manager confronted the high school teacher. He tried to deny but then he admits that he had sexual relation with Sarah. He insisted that he will not marry her because he is already married and because of his image in the community.

However, he offered his help to get an abortion. As safe abortion is illegal in Iraq, the only doctor who could help her gave her medications. Unfortunately, these medications did not cause abortion.

When Sarah's family knew about her pregnancy, they abuse her, thrilled her and even tried to kill her. She run away and went to a place where the government protects the women that are escaped from violence.

Than her brother abused her, and Sarah lost her pregnancy. This caused a lot of complications until she got better.

Now she lost her family, she can never get back to her home. She will get this stigma for the rest of her life due to the lack of safe abortion services.

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## **Bahar, 38**

Bahar is a married woman. She has two daughters and four sons.

The financial situation of her family is complicated: only her husband is working.

She had an unwanted pregnancy as she was not taking contraception's. She seeks for a safe abortion because she could not handle another baby expense. She went to many places to ask for safe abortion, but no one offered it.

Her sibling guides her to a woman who does abortion in a hidden clinic. She went there with her husband, but the health provider required too much money from her.

So, she did not have the choice and tried to get rid of the pregnancy with different ways like jumping from the stairs or holding heavy things.

She heard from a friend that a woman is doing abortion at home and do not take much money for it. Bahar went to this woman to get an abortion. Unfortunately, she got an infection as the room was not sterilized. Few days later she died.

If abortion was legal and available as private or semi-private clinics women would be able to afford the money for abortion with much more safety.

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## **Sanaa, 27**

Sanaa is now married. But when she was still engaged with her fiancé she got pregnant as they did not know that there is a chance to get pregnant even when the man ejaculates externally. In the Iraqi community is very shameful and stigmatized to be pregnant or having sex before marriage even with your fiancé.

When she got pregnant she wanted to have an abortion. She was afraid that her family will be ashamed of her. She knew also that her mother and father in law will refuse her pregnancy and will perhaps even not allow the marriage.

She went to many hospitals to help her, but she couldn't find anyone to do abortion as it is illegal. Then she went to a gynecologist who helps women who seek medical abortion.

Fortunately, the abortion happened without problems, and Sanaa get married. However, she will never forget about the fear she felt while discovering she needs to have an abortion, and no one can help her easily.

# EGYPT

*Abortion in Egypt is prohibited by Articles 260–264 of the Penal Code of 1937. However, under Article 61 of the Penal Code, exceptions may be granted in cases of necessity. This article has been typically interpreted to permit an abortion if it is necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman. In 1998, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, issued a fatwa calling for access to abortion for unmarried women who had been raped. In 2004, he approved a draft bill that would permit abortion in the case of rape; but the bill was unsuccessful.*

*Despite legal restrictions, abortions are common but carried out by “indigenous” methods, at clandestine clinics, or at great expense by private gynecologists. A 1998 study found that about 20% of obstetric hospital admissions were for post-abortion treatment.*



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## Zahra, 22

Zahra is a woman from marginalized area in Cairo. She contacted a physician Dr. N and informed her that one of her relatives raped her. The 22 years old woman was in severe shock. She stated that her family knew, and they blamed her for this brutal act of her family member. Zahra asked the Dr.N to provide her with some pills to get an abortion because she was pregnant following the rape. Although it is illegal, but due to this critical situation, Dr. N provided Zahra with Misoprostol, which she had through one of her trips for emergency. Dr. N stated that if abortion is a core right and if it is ensured right for women, there would be no fear to address such cases and there will be no impacts on women.

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## Marwa, 17

Marwa is an adolescent girl. She visited a clinic in Cairo- in a rich area, suffering from weakness, fatigue and signs of dizziness. The doctor at the hospital checked her and clarified that she was pregnant. Marwa asked for assistance to terminate her pregnancy as she was raped, and she cannot bear a child at this moment. Dr. N knew about this issue and asked a colleague to give her some tablets. However, the doctor said her family has to know and he cannot help in illegal termination although it is raping event. The lack of measures to help women and young girls is really shameful, Dr. N stated. She is sad that she was not able to help.

# PALESTINE

*In Palestine, the legal situation of abortion is complex as there is three types of laws that could be applied depending on where the woman resides: West-Bank, Israel (occupied territories) and Gaza.*

*In the West Bank, the Jordanian Penal Code applies and criminalizes abortion as a "crime against public morality". The woman can benefit from a "mitigating excuse" of punishment if the abortion is in order to preserve "honor" (or asked by a male relative in order to preserve honor). The 2004 Palestinian health law is also enforced in the West Bank: it criminalizes abortion and the only exception is to save woman's life in case the pregnancy is a threat to her health.*

*In Gaza, the Egyptian law of 1936 applies. Women who have an abortion as well as any person who helps women induce an abortion are criminally prosecuted.*

*In contrast, in the occupied territories where the Israeli law is enforced, abortion is legally permitted.*

*Due to the restrictive laws in the West Bank and Gaza, some Palestinian women travel to the occupied territories in Israel to have a safe abortion.*



## Sonya, 40

Sonya is a mother of two daughters and a son, when she knew that she was pregnant with her second daughter, she decided to have an abortion because she was psychologically and physically unprepared for the second pregnancy. Indeed, she was suffering from physical symptoms of a disease that doctors could not quickly diagnose at that time and it was later found that she had "wheat germ". In addition, the pregnancy occurred in an unplanned time for her surrounded with unsuitable financial situation for the family.

She went to her doctor and asked him to have an abortion, but he did not agree, and he said that her pregnancy is in good health and does not pose a threat to her or the fetus. He adds that abortion is "forbidden according to the Islamic rules" and he refused to do an abortion despite the fact that it was in the first weeks of pregnancy. When she headed home, upon her arrival, she attempted an abortion by carrying heavy things such as a gas tube, and straining herself with housework, and she continued to do this for days in addition to climbing and descending repeatedly on the stairs, of her home, which led to her bleeding. She was rushed to the hospital and the bleeding was under control and did not have an abortion, but she had to spend most of the months of her pregnancy in bed until delivery. She did not mention to doctors about her doing this as an attempt to have an abortion, fearing imprisonment because Palestinian law criminalizes abortion, and her daughter is now 14 years old.

# JORDAN

*In Jordan abortion is only legal if the pregnancy poses a threat to the life of the mother. The penalty for performing an abortion is one to three years' imprisonment, while the punishment for a woman caught aborting her own fetus ranges from six months to three years in prison. Article 324 of the Penal Code offers leniency for women who perform abortion or if a close relative performs the abortion to protect their honor and reputation.*



## Amal, 45

Amal is the mother of four sons and two daughters. After her fifth child she decided to stop pregnancy but, after years she was accidentally pregnant and decided to have an abortion. She was in forties and in addition that the pregnancy happened accidentally she had fears that it will threat her health and the baby as well. Also, she was satisfied of having 5 sons and daughters. Although she was using contraceptive the pregnancy happened and as a result she was depressed. She went to the doctor and asked him to do the abortion. She explained to him that it wasn't easy for her to take the decision of doing the abortion in a clinic even though she knew that it's possible, but she was afraid of this illegal way , from danger surround it and the high cost of it which estimated between 400 and 600 Jordanian dinars.

But he refused, so she kept the baby although she was in a bad physically and psychological situation.



# ALGERIA

*In Algeria, abortion is criminalized. According to Article 304 of the Penal Code, "Anyone who, through food, drink, medication, maneuver, violence or any other means, has procured or attempted to procure the abortion of a pregnant woman or supposedly pregnant, whether she has consented to it or not, is punished with an imprisonment from one year to five years and a fine of five hundred to ten thousand Algerian dinars".*

*Abortions following rape are not authorized, except in the specific case of rape committed as part of a terrorist act, a measure which was adopted following the cataclysms of the black decade (Algerian civil war).*

*According to article 308, abortion is not punished when it constitutes an essential measure to save the life of the mother in danger and when it is openly practiced by a doctor after advice given by him to the administrative authority.*

*In 2018, the law on protection and promotion of health was amended, and, according to article 72, "abortion for therapeutic purposes is considered an essential measure to save the mother's life from danger, or to preserve her seriously threatened physiological and mental equilibrium" but only in the public hospitals.*

*The Algerian Association for Family Planning (AAPF) identified 8,000 abortions per year, including 500 illegal abortions recorded by the police. This last number is in reality much higher.*



## Lina, 22

Lina is at university in Algiers. She is in a relationship with a man of her age. They often have unprotected sex and Lina discovered her pregnancy three weeks after a menstruation absence. Despite the fact that their relationship seemed serious, her boyfriend reacted very badly when she told him that she was pregnant. He behaved as if he was not concerned at all. He said to her: "Why do you want me to panic? After all, he's inside of you not inside of me."

She had heard about an old woman who performed abortions in a garage where people had to knock on the door and give a code before being able to enter, but she was afraid to go there.

Eventually, her boyfriend managed to get her abortion pills in the black market through an underground network. She took two pills under her tongue and one that she inserted into her vagina to trigger contractions.

She did it in her apartment, with no medical assistance and she was not really sure how to take the pills.

A few hours after taking the pills, severe pain started. She screamed. Her friends wanted to take her to the hospital, but she refused for fear of the consequences. She said she would rather die in that apartment.

The pain was followed by hemorrhage. She went to the bathroom and a reddish lump came out. Her boyfriend broke up with her few days after this story, after he made sure she was no longer pregnant.

She suffered from depression which lasted for about eight months. The image of the mass flushed down the toilet haunted her constantly. The conditions in which the abortion took place and the lack of support weighed heavily on her psychological state. Abnormal bleeding as well as a disruption in her menstrual cycle occurred several months after the abortion

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## Mouna, 24

*Mouna's story was reported by Nassera, 27 years old.*

Mouna is a student at the Bab-Ezzouar university. One morning we hear her screaming in the women's toilets. I found her sitting on the floor in the washroom punching her stomach and screaming. I managed to understand that she was pregnant but didn't know from whom. She had sex with different men and neither of them wanted to take the brunt of it. She had failed to obtain the abortion pills and was threatening to kill herself in the toilet.

I heard from girls a few days later that she had finally managed to get the abortion pills. She had ingested them in the sanitary facilities of the faculty. Because she didn't know how to ingest the pills, she had suffered a severe hemorrhage which forced her to be absent for a few days. The toilet where she had hemorrhaged in was stained with blood on the wall.

# SYRIA

*The Syrian Constitution prohibits abortion. Under the Penal Code, abortion is generally illegal, including cases of rape. An abortion can only be performed to save the life of the woman. A person who performs an illegal abortion with the woman's consent is sentenced to three years imprisonment. A woman who undergoes an abortion by herself or consents to it is sentenced to six months to three years. Stricter penalties apply if the person who is performing the illegal abortion is a medical professional. Penalties are mitigated if a woman undergoes an abortion in order to preserve her honor or if someone else performs the abortion in order to preserve the honor of a relative (up to twice removed relatives). In that case, the following conditions apply: Abortion must be performed by a specialist doctor and supervised by another doctor ; A draft report of the need for abortion must be provided before the operation ; Four or more (as deemed necessary) copies of the draft report shall be written up, one copy for the family, and one copy for each of the performing doctors/medical staff, to be signed by the doctors, the patient, and the woman's husband or guardian.*

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## Maha, 37

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Maha is 37 years old women who is "secretly married" to a married man who already has children. They had an agreement from the beginning: to abandon the idea of having children together. She got pregnant and she decided to do abortion in order to save her marriage. As abortion is illegal in the country, she was unable to find a specialist doctor to perform the operation. Maha explains "This situation left me for weeks in the stress on my own. My husband did not understand I had difficulties to find someone accepting to do the abortion. His attitude deeply hurt me, especially since he moved away from me and said that he would end our marriage if I kept the baby."

A friend helped her to find a midwife accepting to provide the abortion. However, the midwife requested a large amount of money. Maha's husband did not help her to afford that money, because in his opinion it's her fault that she got pregnant.

At the end she had the abortion, but with a huge mental pain.

# LEBANON

*The Lebanese Penal Code in Articles 539–546 prohibits abortion under all circumstances. The penalty is an imprisonment of six months to three years for the principal (the woman inducing abortion) and the aider or instigator (physician). The mitigating circumstance or excuse for the woman to have a legal abortion is to “save her honor”.*

*Moreover, article 539 punishes “all propaganda carried out for the purposes of propagating or facilitating the use of abortive practices”.*

*In Lebanon, the price of a clandestine abortion is very high. It varies between US\$150 and US\$2,400.*



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## Noor, 17

Noor was 17 when she became pregnant. After her boyfriend blamed her for the pregnancy, and she felt she couldn't turn to her conservative Maronite family for support, she decided to get an abortion. “When I told my boyfriend [that I was pregnant], he actually just said it was disgusting that I was not in control of my body,” Noor told *The Daily Star*. Her name and the names of some other individuals in this piece have been changed to preserve their anonymity. Since abortion is illegal in Lebanon, Noor decided to seek help from a doctor in Burj Hammoud whose name had been given to her by a friend. “It was in his back room and very dirty,” Noor said, describing her experience. “The doctor told me to rest for a week, but he didn't give me a sick leave. I was bleeding for a whole week. I felt very weak and collapsed. I was afraid I might die.” Noor paid \$500 for the procedure. Despite her frailty and continued bleeding, she kept going to school and work, afraid someone might realize what she had done. “I thought it was obvious what was wrong with me and I was so afraid somebody might notice and report me to the police, so I did not dare go to another doctor,” she said.

Three years after her abortion, Noor still has not told her parents about it. Her physical complications stopped, but she said she is still suffering from the experience psychologically and emotionally. Last summer, Noor was temporarily in the psychiatric ward of a Beirut facility after an attempted suicide.

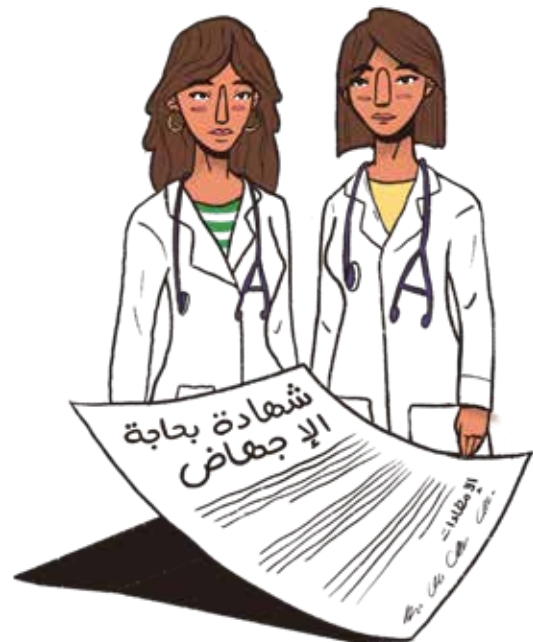
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## Hiba, 21

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*Hiba's story has been reported by her friend, 26 years old.*

My friend Hiba was a university student and sexually active with her boyfriend when she accidentally got pregnant. She got a pregnancy test secretly and lied about the reasons of why she wanted a pregnancy test to the pharmacist. She never told any of her family members, she went to an underground clinic in Beirut that gave her a pill that is not approved by doctors and that caused her to hemorrhage for weeks, bleeding secretly in the bathroom. This experience greatly affected her mental health and physical wellbeing and her boyfriend was not concerned at all and not part of this experience with her. He nonchalantly told her to go abort the baby and blamed her for the experience. She was more than ready to go through physical pain and a traumatizing experience to avoid social shame and her social and even her own family's reputation from being ruined.



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## Leila, 19

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Leila was 19 when she had her first abortion. At the time, it was impossible for her to keep the baby, because she wasn't married. In Lebanon all personal status laws that regulate marriage, divorce and relationships between family members are religious. As a result, a child born outside marriage is deprived of many rights.

Now 27, Leila says she got pregnant because she was young and not mature enough to realize she could get pregnant. She also thinks that the lack of sexual education in Lebanese schools is one of the reasons why young women get pregnant.

Under these circumstances, Leila felt she had no choice but to get an abortion.

"The abortion costs \$500 (. I didn't have the money so I borrowed it from my friends. The clinic was located in a poor neighborhood of Beirut. The only way you could tell it was a clinic was by the paper sign on the door. The doctor was not professional at all. The nurse was his wife. She wore slippers. My friend, who stayed with me while I was unconscious, told me the doctor collected the fetus in a Chivas bottle and threw it in the sink," she recalls. "After the operation, he started calling me to hit on me," she adds.

# TURKEY

Abortion was legalized in Turkey in 1983 as per the Population Planning Law No 2827.<sup>1</sup> The law first lays down the principles of population planning and states that pregnancy terminations can only be done under the supervision and control of the state; legislature thus pregnancy declares itself the main voice in termination processes. The law allows abortion by request (without a maternal or fetal medical indication) to be performed until the end of the tenth week of gestation. Termination of pregnancy is regulated in the Regulation on Inspection of Uterine Evacuation and Sterilization Services<sup>2</sup>, which was enacted based on Article 5 of the Law on Population Planning No. 2827. However, it requires spousal consent if a pregnant woman is married, or parental consent if a pregnant woman is under the age of 18 along with her own consent.

According to a research conducted in 2016, only 7.8% of the 431 public hospitals with gynecology department across Turkey offers induced abortion services and there are no public hospitals that provide induced abortion services in 53 of 81 provinces<sup>3</sup>. According to the results of the research conducted by the same institution in 2020 for the same purpose, only 3% of 295 public hospitals stated that induced abortion was performed, while 54% stated that induced abortion was not performed<sup>4</sup>. As revealed in this report is a de facto ban on abortions in Turkey.



## Gul, 24

This is how Gul describes the place she went to in Istanbul, thinking it would be safe, but it turned out that she had an illegal abortion known as “backstreet”. One of the reasons for the existence of “backstreet” abortion places that Gul came across is the limited abortion service although it is legal...

“I thought it would be like a clinic, but it was on the second floor of a three-story house. A man with a cigarette opened the door. A house with a living room and a kitchen... They made the master bathroom an abortion room. There was an ultrasound. The stretcher was dirty and bloody.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Population Planning Law No. 2827: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4c4476752.html>

<sup>2</sup> Regulation on Inspection of Uterine Evacuation and Sterilization Services No. 83/7395: <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/2.5.837395.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Cinsiyet, K. H. Ü. T., Merkezi, K. Ç. A., Kılınc, F. R., Quirant Quiles, R. M., Aldanmaz, B., & O’Neil, M. L. (2016). Yasal Ancak Ulaşılabilir Değil: Türkiye’deki Devlet Hastanelerinde Kürtaj Hizmetleri.

<sup>4</sup> Neil, M. L. O., Altuntaş, D., & Keskin, A. Ş. Türkiye deki Kamu Hastanelerinde Eğitim ve Araştırma Hastaneleri Devlet Hastaneleri İlçe Hastaneleri ve Şehir Hastaneleri Kürtaj Hizmetleri Araştırması Raporu, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Burcu Karakaş, “Türkiye’de Kürtaj Hizmeti: Fiilen Yasak”, Deutsche Welle Türkçe (18/01/2019), <https://www.dw.com/tr/türkiyede-kürtaj-hizmeti-fiilen-yasak/a-47130847>

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## Meltem, 29

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“I took a pregnancy test and I'm pregnant. I started looking for a hospital to have an abortion. I called 3 public, 4 private hospitals and 3 private clinics. I also looked for a place “backstreet” after I learned the prices. They already said that we do not do public hospitals directly. 3 of them in private said that we do not do. One of them said that if you are married, if you have a health risk, then it can be done. Then clinics... one of them said 6700 Turkish Lira, another said 3400 Turkish Lira. Afterwards, the place I called “backstreet” said, “We'll do it right in the afternoon, it's a two-hour job anyway, we can get it done for 1000 Turkish Lira.” I felt pretty helpless. Then a friend of mine recommended a feminist doctor. I found the hospital where that feminist doctor works. There the price was also quite affordable.”<sup>6</sup>

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## Mehmet, 70

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Mehmet is a male retired obstetrician who started his career in the years when abortion was prohibited and worked until recently. Mehmet stated that during the periods when abortion was prohibited, abortion practices that led to the death and disability of women were common, and that poor women suffered the most. He stated that the abortion initiated by women with skewers, chicken feathers, soap or various herbs caused infection and its complications often caused the death of women.

Mehmet emphasized that after abortion legalization, spousal permission was put into practice in state hospitals. With the AKP (Justice and Development Part) period, spouse permission became a strict requirement again. Mehmet stated that with the AKP era, the number of state hospitals performing abortions has gradually decreased, and there are still two large public hospitals performing abortions in Istanbul, and this rate has decreased in private hospitals either because it was not done out of fear or because it was recorded in another way.

Mehmet stressed that in addition to this decline in service, the state does not offer family planning methods. As a result of the reduction of family planning services, abortion is the only option of family planning for women. While Mehmet consider the restriction of access to contraceptive methods as an extension of their population policy, he believes that it was not offered because it would mean sexual freedom. Mehmet stated that he observed that the perception that abortion is a sin during the AKP period affected especially conservative men and they insisted on the continuation of unwanted pregnancies.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Burcu Karakaş, “Türkiye’de Kadın Sağlığı Yasal Kürtaj Hakkında Engellemeler” , +90 (20/11/2020), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuB\\_yj1bc-A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuB_yj1bc-A)

<sup>7</sup> Sedef Erkmen, Türkiye’de Kürtaj: AKP ve Biyopolitika



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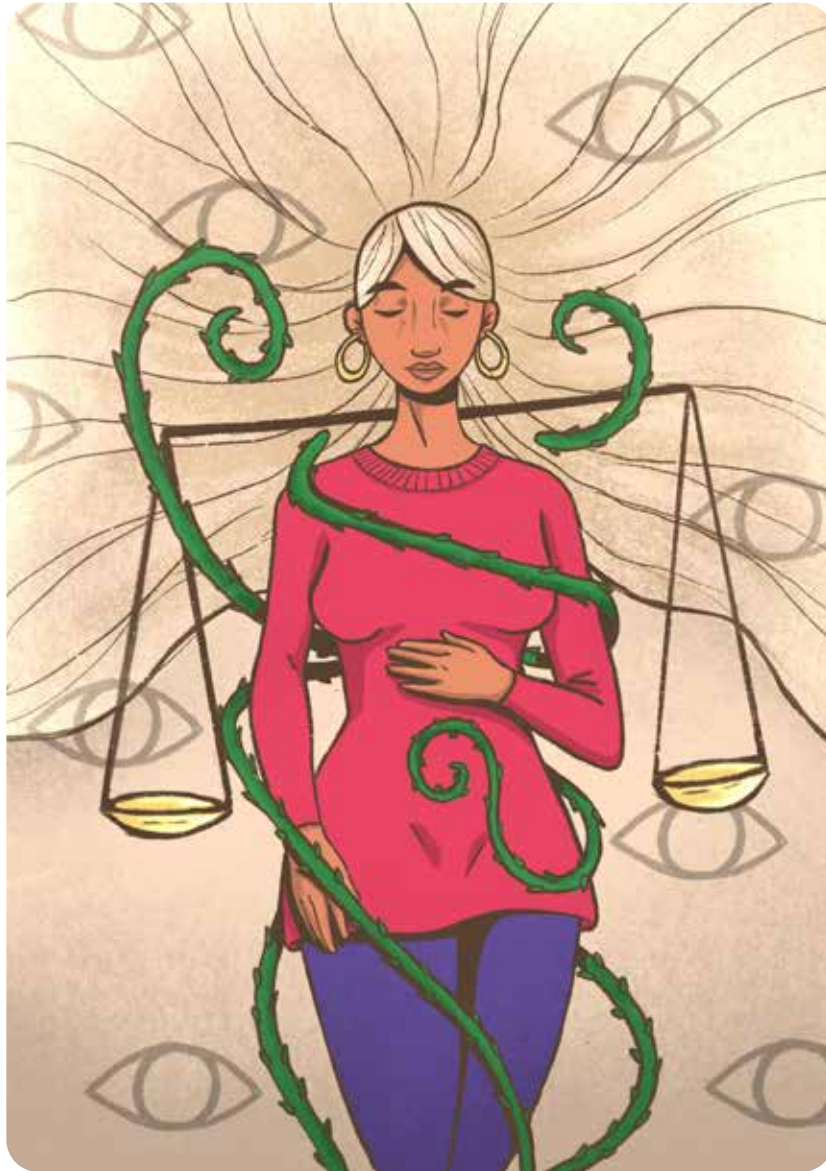
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***These testimonies illustrate the violent and bloody gender oppression and the great solitude of women facing clandestine abortion***

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## CALL TO Action

All abortions should be safe and performed medically.

Every woman has the right to decide on her body and to have access to sexual and reproductive health services without being prosecuted and / or imprisoned.