

# Abortion is a fact of life... if you're rich

By HARRIET KIDECKEL

Reprinted from the Varsity

She sits before you, slightly smiling — half-embarrassed, half-shy. You know she won't cry because her life has taught her to be strong. She has come to the Birth Control Centre for help in obtaining an abortion.

"Were you using birth control?" you ask.

"No," she says.

You know why she didn't, but you ask anyway. And for women like this the answer is always the same: "I couldn't take the pill and the hospital clinic wouldn't give me anything else" or "I can't afford a doctor".

This woman is pregnant because she is human; she wants an abortion because she is poor. And though you don't counsel many poor women at the centre, you know there are hundreds like this one that you don't see. These poor and welfare women, often separated from repressive husbands in bad marriages, are always kept ignorant about their bodies. (Sex education in school is scant and more prevalent in suburban than urban schools.)

Yet these are the women for whom an abortion is most difficult to get.

## Options for the rich

Most of the women who come into the comfortable, carpeted surroundings at 631 Spadina Ave. for abortion information can afford a \$300 abortion in Buffalo or can fly to New York city for a day. Or, if there is time, have little difficulty going through the Toronto hospitals under the year-old abortion law.

But it is a very different story for poor, and especially, welfare women. For them, the first two options are automatically out — no money.

The third, supposedly open to all women, is in reality, much easier for nicely-dressed, well-paying, middle-class women; it has always been a simple matter for upper class women willing to pay the price for a neat "D and C" (a simple operation that cleans out the uterus and, if a woman is pregnant, aborts the pregnancy).

Poor women, on the other hand, usually have problems.

According to the Canadian abortion law, a woman can obtain an abortion if she is less than twenty weeks (five months) pregnant and receives the approval of "three medical practitioners" at an "accredited hospital", who certify that the pregnancy is harmful or is "likely to be" harmful to the mother's health.

In practice, this usually means the woman must see a doctor and one, possibly two, psychiatrists. The doctors then submit their reports to a hospital "abortion board" of "three medical practitioners" (they can be oculists or ear-nose-and-throat specialists but are rarely gynecologists) who judge whether the woman's case is acceptable. They do not see the woman. It is usually hospital policy that the doctor who examines the woman not be on the board. Most abortions are approved on the grounds of possible damage to mental health.

## Humiliating tests

Though the board is usually a rubber stamp committee, the process a woman must go through to get her case presented is both humiliating and degrading.

Women have been required to go into details about their family and childhood; some have had to do ink-blot identification tests. Must a woman who does not want a child be crazy? If she cannot afford a child and cannot obtain reliable birth control, is she insane to request abortion?

Yet, for many poor women the problem is not the strength to undergo this trial by ordeal; most of these women undergo humiliation and degradation from society many days of their lives. Rather the problem is getting a doctor to take their case at all, a doctor to present their case to the board.

Repeatedly, when the woman is poor, the abortion is more difficult to obtain. After all, a doctor can receive more money from people who can afford to pay. Ontario Health Insurance only pays a certain amount of the doctor's bill and the patient is required to pay the rest.

Private doctors can charge what the traffic will allow, above the OHSIP rate, and going through a private doctor is always more efficient. But you pay for the service. And if you can't pay, you don't get that "efficiency".

## Pay for efficiency

But wait... aren't we talking about the medical profession, saving lives, preservation of human life? What is this about efficiency and higher profits?

Abortion is symptomatic of the ills that plague capitalist medicine — a cure for a profit. For many doctors the Hippocratic Oath has become the hypocritical oath: preservation of human life — for a price.

Even the "liberal" medics to the south have quickly learned to capitalize on abortion on request in New York state. One group of six doctors from Michigan has moved into the state, opened a clinic, and hired a business manager to arrange abortions for Canadian women — at \$300.

And it is not as if an abortion is a difficult operation. It takes about twenty minutes and can be done on an out-patient basis — that is, enter the clinic, have the operation and go home in less than an hour. Not bad, doc, at \$300 an hour.

The demand of "abortion on request" has often been prefaced with the word "free", as have many demands for proper medical treatment. The right to control one's body is integrally related to the right to proper care for the body.

Medicine has become a business — and a highly profitable one. Those who cannot afford to pay will not wait much longer for the right to be healthy.

And how does all this relate to students? No doubt, by the time exams finish next spring, at least one hundred York women will have become pregnant, without intending to. And many will have abortions.

Some will have no problem getting an abortion — even without their parents' knowledge. They will be able to raise \$300 and spend a day south of the border.

Others will not be so lucky. Their student loans will not stretch that far; for many, summer earnings are non-existent. They will be handed the old adage about "an ounce of prevention".

But the "advisor" will not know that sometimes that "ounce" is so very difficult to come by.

Students and poor people have a lot in common that way: they are treated like second class citizens. They cannot afford the expensive care of private doctors and, like the poor, the free medical care they are offered is low-calibre, as many health service patients will verify.

Proper health care should be a right. It should be a demand of all people who don't and can't get it.

Birth control information is available at the drop in centre in Vanier residence.



**The Villager**  
shoe shoppes



**Just Men**

**HIGH AND MIGHTY**

AVIATOR BOOT  
BURGUNDY - ANTIQUE  
KID LEATHER

ONLY \$47.00

Open Thursday and Friday nites. C.O.D. orders accepted. Credit and Charge cards honored.

126 Bloor Street West  
262 Yonge Street

1475 Yonge Street near St. Clair  
Fairview Mall Shopping Centre

\*Design and Word Trade Marks in Canada of The Villagers Shoe Shoppes Ltd.\*

BE Protection Rich — NOT Insurance Poor

**OWN TERM INSURANCE**

**\$50,000**

20 YR. REDUCING TERM INSURANCE  
(DURING LAST FOUR YRS. NO  
DECREASE IN PROTECTION)

**ANNUAL PREMIUMS**

AGE 20 \$ 90.55  
AGE 25 \$100.75  
AGE 30 \$121.95

**OPTIONS** WITHOUT FURTHER MEDICAL  
EXAMINATION

1. To renew your policy at the end of 5 years for a new 20-year period.
2. To change to level term insurance between 5th and 11th policy year.
3. To convert remaining amount up to age 65.

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS AVAILABLE

**OCCIDENTAL LIFE**

Steve Vankeulen  
Bus. 622-2211

TERM-AND NON-CANCELLABLE DISABILITY INSURANCE

IT IS BETTER TO HAVE PROTECTION FOR A LIFETIME AND NOT NEED IT  
THAN TO NEED IT FOR 1 DAY AND NOT HAVE IT.