

Maternal deaths in Bangladesh⁽¹⁾

An article published on Dec. 13th 1976 in the **Bangladesh Times** by Mrs. Shahida Hassan contains an ardent plea for the abolition of an antiquated 1860 law making abortion illegal. "This law," she said, "has shielded private doctors rather than the cause of humanity or women."

A registered doctor can earn up to \$1,700 a month from giving abortions to women who can afford it. The law overlooks such practice, but a poor village woman, certain to be turned away at one of the few government hospitals if she wants a pregnancy terminated, submits to a dangerous form of abortion. She resorts to a village midwife who often causes severe internal injuries. In 1975, statistics

reported the death of 10% of women suffering from such injuries.

As long as distribution of contraceptives is irregular, women will continue to perform abortions, with or without government authorization. It would help much, especially from the economic point of view, if abortion was legalized. "Each hospital salvage operation for a patient injured by a village midwife costs \$100 per month in food and antibiotics. Bangladesh, of course, is desperately short of hospital beds, doctors and nurses."

(1) International Women's News, Vol 75, no. 2, June 1980, p. 28.