

Portuguese nurse who ran abortion clinic jailed

LEVEL TWO - INTERMEDIATE

Pre-reading activities

A Discussion points

Abortion is a controversial topic for many people. Which of the following statements do you agree or disagree with?

1. Abortion is a crime.
2. Abortion should remain illegal in all cases and under all circumstances.
3. Abortion should only be used when the mother's life is in danger.
4. Women should be free to decide what happens to their own bodies.
5. Abortion is the murder of the unborn child.
6. Abortion is a matter of choice for women.
7. Abortion should only be used to prevent the birth of severely handicapped babies.
8. If abortion is illegal, it will be driven underground to unofficial backstreet "clinics".

B These sentences all contain statements about the text that are incorrect.

Read the text and correct the sentences:

1. The nurse who ran the abortion clinic was sentenced to three years in prison.
2. The nurse stole morphine and other dangerous drugs from a chemist's shop.
3. The trial was held at the law courts.
4. The women were told about the clinic by their doctors.
5. They had to pay £450 for the operation.
6. Most of the women in the case were quite wealthy.
7. They were arrested because of the money they gave to the nurse.
8. More than 40,000 women a year visit illegal clinics in Portugal.

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The trial of 17 women accused of having abortions at an illegal clinic in a northern Portuguese town ended last week with a prison sentence for the nurse who ran the clinic, but only one of the women found guilty. Sandra Cardoso, 21, who said that extreme poverty, the violence of her partner and the sickness of her daughter had made her go to the illegal clinic in Maia three years ago, was ordered to pay a small fine or spend four months in prison. The judges could have sentenced her to up to three years in prison.

They were much stricter with Maria do Ceu, the nurse who ran the clinic. She was sentenced to eight-and-a-half years in prison. Three of those years were for breaking the very strict abortion laws in this strongly Roman Catholic country. The rest were for stealing morphine and other dangerous drugs from a hospital. Six other people who worked with her were given the option of paying fines or serving up to six months in jail. The panel of three judges said: "We understand the political, social and scientific debates surrounding this matter, but we must follow the law." The trial was held in a large tent at Maia's tennis club, because the town's law courts were not big enough.

Supporters of the accused women had mixed reactions to the judgment. "We are glad for these women, because none of them will go to jail now," said Silvestrina Silva, of the Right to Choice group. "But that does not stop it being shameful that they have been put through this painful trial. The trial shows that illegal abortions in this country are a fact, and that people are still punished for aborting in this country," she said. Dina Nunes, a psychologist, said: "The court could have put thousands of women on trial because there are many, many more who have illegal abortions. This is the 21st century, but women in Portugal still do not have the right to decide what they do with their own bodies and lives."

The court heard that women who became pregnant in Maia or nearby Oporto and did not have the money to travel to abortion clinics in Spain were told about the secret clinic by hospital personnel, chemists, taxi drivers or their own friends or relatives. The pregnant women had to pay \$450 for the operation but none of them had enough money. They all left items of jewellery - wedding rings, necklaces or earrings - as surety while they tried to find the rest of the money.

The case divided Portuguese opinion and brought humiliation and trauma to the 17 accused. Most of the women come from the working-class districts of Maia, from backward villages in the Trás-os-Montes region in the north, or the slums of Oporto. All of them were arrested because of the jewellery they gave the nurse who ran the clinic. "They are all poor, otherwise they would have gone to Spain or somewhere else," said Ms Silva, whose group helped to organise international support for the Maia women.

Supporters say the women are martyrs. "Women are scared of sex, scared of being punished and scared of dying in the clinics. There is evidence that pregnancy is a significant factor in suicides in young people," said Milice Ribeiro, a psychologist.

Campaigners demanded a new abortion law for Portuguese women last week, saying that the current law put lives at risk, and was ignored by up to 40,000 women who visited illegal clinics every year. Duarte Vilar, the director of Portugal's Family Planning Association, said: "Illegal abortions have caused a number of deaths and thousands of hospital admissions. It is time this was treated as a matter of public health."

The Guardian Weekly 24-1-2002, page 4

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C Vocabulary 1

Complete the table (all the missing words are in the text):

NOUN	ADJECTIVE
_____	poor
_____	violent
shame	_____
pain	_____
guilt	_____
danger	_____
science	_____
_____	humiliating
_____	healthy
_____	traumatic

D Vocabulary 2

Complete the sentences using verbs from the text:

- 17 women were _____ of having abortions at an illegal clinic.
- The nurse was _____ to eight and a half years in prison.
- The nurse also _____ dangerous drugs from a hospital.
- The trial was _____ in a large tent.
- People are still being _____ for having abortions in Portugal.
- The women _____ \$450 for the operation.
- Portuguese public opinion was _____ by the case.
- A number of deaths have been _____ by illegal abortions.

E Grammar in context – Modals.

'Modal' operators such as *can*, *could*, *might*, *will* and *may* are used to express a large range and variety of meanings. There are some examples in the text above:

- *The judges could have sentenced her to*
- *The court could have put thousands of women*
- *Otherwise they would have gone to Spain*

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- 1 Find and underline uses of *could*, *would*, and *must*. There are four in the text.
- 2 Which description (a –e) of meaning is closest to the meaning for each of the 4 examples from the text?
 - a) You did not need to do it.
 - b) If it had been possible for them to do it they would have done it
 - c) It is possible that we did it.
 - d) We were obliged to do it. We had to do it.
 - e) It was possible to do it but he/she/they did not do it
- 3 Complete each sentence so that it contains each of the words give.
 - a) You have learned very little this week. **must / harder**
You must try harder
 - b) You were free yesterday and you didn't come to our party. **could / if / free**
You _____
 - c) You are really careless. You crossed the road without looking. **could / accident**
You _____
 - d) You should have come to the party. We had a good time. **would / too**
You _____
 - e) Smoking is really bad for you. **must / stop**
You _____

F Discussion

Do you think abortion should be legal or not?