

Portuguese nurse who ran abortion clinic jailed

LEVEL THREE - ADVANCED

Pre-reading activities

A Discussion point

Abortion is a controversial subject for many people. Make a list of the points for and against abortion.

B Find the Answers

Read the text and find the answers to these questions:

1. How long was the prison sentence given to the nurse who ran the abortion clinic?
2. What other offence, apart from breaking the abortion laws, was she charged with?
3. What was the unusual setting for the trial?
4. How did the women find out about the illegal clinic?
5. What items did the women leave as surety while they tried to find the money to pay for the operation?
6. Where did most of the women involved in the case come from?
7. Why do the supporters of the accused women regard politicians and bishops as hypocrites?
8. How many Portuguese women visit illegal clinics each year?

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The trial of 17 women accused of having abortions at a backstreet 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 had pleaded that extreme poverty, the violence of her partner and sickness of her daughter had driven her to seek out the clandestine 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 not so lenient 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 notoriously 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 are aware of the political, social and scientific debates surrounding this matter, but must stick to the law." The mass trial was held in a packed marquee at Maia's tennis club, because the town's ordinary 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 trial with all the pain that involves." The trial shows that clandestine abortions in this country are a fact, and that people are

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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 clandestine clinic by hospital personnel, chemists, taxi drivers or their own friends or relatives - many of whom were also on trial last week. At the clinic set up in the nurse's home, in exchange for the equivalent of \$450, the pregnant women were given an injection that knocked them out for the duration of the operation. However, none of the women had enough money to pay the nurse the full fee. All left items of jewellery - wedding rings, necklaces or earrings - as surety while they tried to scrape together the remaining cost.

The case split Portuguese opinion and brought humiliation and the trauma of reliving painful moments 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 Oporto's slums. All were caught 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 to the hypocrisy of politicians and bishops who know that, as long as abortion remains illegal, Portuguese women will turn to backstreet clinics in their thousands every year. "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 adolescent suicides," said Milice Ribeiro, a psychologist. The church's position was summed up 16 years ago by the then president of the Portuguese bishops' conference, after a 15-year-old raped by her father had the country's first legal abortion. "She ought to have been helped to accept her pregnancy as a form of martyrdom," he said.

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: "Clandestine abortions have caused a number of deaths and thousands of hospital admissions. It is time this was treated as a matter of public health."

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C Vocabulary 1

Find the following words in the text:

1. an adjective meaning "secret"
2. a noun meaning "a financial penalty"
3. an adjective meaning the opposite of "strict"
4. an adjective meaning "very crowded"
5. a noun meaning "a large tent"
6. a noun meaning "the money you pay for a service"
7. a verb meaning "to collect something with difficulty"
8. a noun meaning "severe shock"
9. a noun meaning "areas with sub-standard conditions"
10. a noun meaning "a person who suffers because of a cause they believe in"

D Vocabulary 2 – Verb collocations

Match the verbs in the first column with the nouns they go with in the second column.

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. to pay | a. on trial |
| 2. to break | b. an injection |
| 3. to hold | c. a fine |
| 4. to put someone | d. a business |
| 5. to sentence someone | e. a trial |
| 6. to give someone | f. to prison |
| 7. to run | g. death |
| 8. to cause | h. the law |

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E Complex verb patterns.

1) There are 10 verb structures in the three sentences below. Verb (3) is the main verb structure in the first sentence. Which verb structures are the main verbs in sentence 2 and 3? (There may be more than one in each sentence)

The trial of 17 women (1) **accused** of (2) **having** abortions at a backstreet clinic in a northern Portuguese town (3) **ended** last week with a prison sentence for the nurse who (4) **ran** the clinic, but only one of the women (5) **found** guilty. Sandra Cardoso, 21, who (6) **had pleaded** that extreme poverty, the violence of her partner and sickness of her daughter (7) **had driven** her (8) **to seek out** the clandestine clinic in Maia three years ago, (9) **was ordered** to pay a small fine or (10) **spend** four months in prison. The judges (11) **could have sentenced** her to up to three years in prison.

2) Verb structures (6), (7) and (8) are all part of a relative clause. Journalists often use these clauses to give us information about people or things following this pattern:

The person, who does this and looks like this and did this, is important.

Why in the second sentence does the writer use the past perfect (*had pleaded + had driven*)?

3) Complete the paragraphs below by inserting the correct verb patterns and tenses.

Fence (be)_____ a true story of three Aboriginal girls who (be)_____ forcibly (take) _____ from their family during a government programme in the first half of the 20th century (be + train) _____ as domestic workers and integrated into white society.

The now discredited policy, which (begin)_____ in 1918, (displace)_____ thousands of Aborigines who (become + know)_____ as the Stolen Generation.

F Discussion

Do you think abortion should be legal or not?