

## **There must be a limit.**

*\*Paula Vianna*

The case of the 9 year old girl from Alagoinha, Pernambuco, who had an abortion after being raped by her stepfather and impregnated with twins, reveals a huge vulnerable social situation that exposes girls and adolescents in Brazil. The numbers of sexual violence against this age group are startling; just in the state of Pernambuco today there are 270 girls threatened by violence, generally by a family members, living above the protection of the state. This episode also reveals the vulnerability of public institutions in front of the power of the fundamentalist Catholic Church, a dogma that isn't followed by everyone, but is worth more than the life of a girl. We are talking about a church that wants to have power over the state, and at the same time take away rights already achieved. This has to be reminded in National Congress all the time, across proposed laws of the constraint and criminalization of women that opt to not take a pregnancy to term. The case of almost ten thousand women indicted in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, illustrates well, that parliamentary members of the religious bench were once again behind this process.

When trying to obtain an abortion, the other aggravating factor is the precariousness of public health network. In Pernambuco, there is no hospital network in the interior of the state that grants this service. A woman that needs this kind of medical attention has to go to the capital. In Petrolina, the second major city of the state, normal abortion protocol and attendment does not exist and religious visits to hospital units are routine. The precariousness of the health system is not limited to the Northeast of the country. Many women in Mato Grosso do Sul looked for clandestine services due to the non-existent abortion services in the network of health for cases under the law. How many women have had to go outside of Brazil for this?

Cases like the one of this girl happen everyday. In Pernambuco, 10, 860 girls have been at public hospitals in between 2000 and 2006. How many of them were impregnated from sexual violence and tried to interrupt the pregnancy but didn't have access to this service? A grand repercussion of this case was due to the fact that the situation of the girl had called attention to an employee of the Legal Medical Institute (Instituto Médico Legal), to treat a girl only 9 years old, and therefore arrived at the attention of the press.

Even above the intent eyes of the media and the population, the church still didn't feel intimidated and intervened together with the Superintendent of the Maternal-Infant Institute of Pernambuco (Imip), registered service in the Ministry of Health to obtain legal interruption of the pregnancy. As a result of the Archbishop's visit to the hospital, the service was denied with the argument that the girl's mother and father had disagreed. Therefore, the procedure was obtained with the Centro Integral de Saúde Amaury de Medeiros (CISAM) that paid adequate attention when the health and life of the girl were compromised.

The problem is that the vulnerable sector of the health system against the Church puts women's lives at risk. Health professionals cannot feel constrained like the ones at IMIP

felt. If it wasn't for the press, the girl could've been at risk. She was in the 15<sup>th</sup> week, but the size of her uterus was equivalent to the 20<sup>th</sup> week— and she is 1.33 meters tall and weighs 36k. With this physical structure, the pregnancy couldn't have been brought to term. There would've been the risk of uterine rupture.

The church speaks their banter but doesn't interfere with public policies that are already so precarious. This episode caused a social commotion; but many times the women's movement is alone in the fight, even though the mobilized medical community doesn't permit this religious interference to advance and grant the human rights of women.

Just this week three law proposals against the practice of abortion arrived at the Commission of Social Security and the Federal Camara of the Family (Comissão de Seguridade Social e Família da Câmara Federal). PL 831/07, Deputy Odair Cunha (PT/MG), author, requires municipal, state and federal hospitals to implement a pregnancy orientation program about the effects and methods utilized in abortion, even when it has been judicially authorized. In this case, the intention is to constrain the women that want to obtain a legal abortion. The other proposed law (PL 2504/07), Deputy Brito Neto, author, proposes an obligatory registration of the pregnant woman at the notice of pregnancy. The third proposed law removes from the Penal Code the two areas abortion is permitted – in case of rape and when the pregnancy puts the woman's life at risk.

On one more March 8 (International Women's Day), we should remember that we have a lot to do to reach a more equal and just society—this episode reveals that the life of the girl was nothing compared to the power of the church. Treat this as an emblematic case of misogyny that exists in society perpetuated by the Church. We don't have the motives to commemorate this International Women's Day, but this case brought attention to the entire world that there is a clear threat to democracy and secularism. In this case, the people clearly perceived this threat. It's necessary to limit the power of the Church. There must be a limit.

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