

Forced abortions highlight abuses in China policy

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In this Jan. 4, 2014 photo, Wu Yongyuan, right, shows medicines his wife Gong Qifeng, left, takes to control her schizophrenia symptoms, in a room they rent in Beijing for stay as Wu keeps petitioning to China's central government for help. When Gong's mind is clear, she can recall how she begged for mercy. Several people pinned her head, arms, knees and ankles to a hospital bed before driving a syringe of labor-inducing drugs into her stomach. She was seven months pregnant with what would have been her second boy. The drugs caused her to have a stillborn baby after 35 hours of excruciating pain. Since the abortion more than two years ago, Gong has been diagnosed with schizophrenia. (AP Photo/Alexander F. Yuan)

When her mind is clear, Gong Qifeng can recall how she begged for mercy. Several people pinned her head, arms, knees and ankles to a hospital bed before driving a syringe of labor-inducing drugs into her stomach.

She was seven months pregnant with what would have been her second boy. The drugs caused her to have a stillborn baby after 35 hours of excruciating pain. She was forced to have the abortion by [officials](#) in China's southern province of Hunan in the name of complying with national limits on [family size](#).

"It was the pain of my lifetime, worse than the pain of delivering a child. You cannot describe it," Gong, 25, said in a recent interview in Beijing. "And it has become a mental pain. I feel like a walking corpse."

Since the abortion more than two years ago, Gong has been diagnosed with schizophrenia. She traveled with her husband to the capital to demand help paying for her treatment, but she ended up being hauled away in her pajamas by police, a detention recorded on video by The Associated Press.

Forced abortions are considered an acceptable way of enforcing China's population limits, but they are banned when the woman is more than five months pregnant. Yet no one has been held accountable for Gong's late-term abortion, and other women in similar cases also struggle to get justice and compensation.

Observers believe forced late-term abortions are on the decline, though reports continue to surface. A British broadcaster reported one in the eastern province of Shandong in September.

Although China in November announced an easing of its "one-child" policy to allow more couples to have a second child, the overall system

remains in place and local governments are still required to keep to population quotas. The new policy would not have applied to Gong because it allows couples to have a second child only if both the mother and father have no siblings.

"The system has not changed at all," said Liang Zhongtang, a demographer at Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. "It still forbids you from having more children than permitted by the government, so the game—and forced later-term abortions—are unavoidable if you want to have children the government does not allow."

China's government bans abuses by local enforcers, but nevertheless requires them to successfully carry out family-planning policies. A pregnancy could be several months along by the time they hear about it, or it could become late-term while officials attempt to negotiate a settlement—probably a hefty fine—with the parents.

"The problem arises when the enforcers are serious about implementing the policy. If the enforcers are not brutal, the policy cannot be enforced," Liang said. "So, who in the government can be the arbiter of justice in such cases?"

Beijing introduced measures around 1980 to restrict family sizes, limiting most urban couples to one child and rural families to two if the first-born is a girl. Forced abortions and sterilizations became prevalent.

An outcry over forced late-term abortions peaked in June 2012 when family of Feng Jianmei in the northwestern province of Shaanxi revealed her forcibly aborted 7-month fetus on the Internet, drawing widespread fury, attracting international media and prompting the top family planning official to reiterate the state stance against such misconduct.

Several officials in Feng's township were fired or admonished, and the

local government paid her family more than 70,000 yuan (\$11,400). Yet even in this rare victory, no one was criminally prosecuted and the payout was called assistance, not compensation.

Beijing-based artist Wang Peng collected what he said were four late-term fetuses clandestinely recovered from forced abortions in Beijing in 2013 and used them for a graphic art installation in the capital. The exhibit is closed to the public and Wang keeps its location secret; he said about 100 people have viewed his work by private invitation.

"It has violated a woman's birthright, bestowed to her by the nature," Wang said of the policy-driven abortions. "And it does not respect life."

Any reliable tally of such cases is impossible. Victims can be silenced by local authorities with threats or money, and may be unaware that such conduct is forbidden.

"They won't say anything unless they cannot endure the pains anymore and must seek assistance," said Yang Zhizhu, a Beijing professor and advocate for birthing rights.

Gong's husband, Wu Yongyuan, said he did not worry too much when he first learned she was pregnant for a second time. Some families in his village have two or even three children. But when local family planning officials caught wind of her pregnancy, she was taken away.

Wu said his wife was different after the abortion. She easily burst into tears, picked fights with him, punched at him and their son and refused contact with others. In May 2013, about 18 months after the abortion, a doctor diagnosed her with schizophrenia, he said.

Believing the abortion triggered his wife's mental disorder, Wu sought compensation from [local authorities](#) to pay for his wife's treatment. But

family planning officials in their home city of Lianyuan produced a medical report that said her physiological traits could be responsible for her illness rather than the abortion.

Last month, Wu brought his wife to Beijing to petition higher officials.

"We demand those involved in the case be punished, and we want an open apology and justice," he wrote in a copy of the petition. "And we demand compensation for the losses inflicted upon us physically and mentally."

On Monday afternoon, Wu and Gong—clad in a padded pink pajama set—were chased out of a tiny rental room by their landlord into Beijing's wintry coldness after a reporter showed up. Soon, policemen arrived and took the couple away in a van.

A few hours later, Wu sent a text to a reporter. "We probably will be sent home," he wrote, "The party chief of our township called us, asking us to go home for negotiations."

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