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## **Is There Anybody Out There?**

Illegal Abortion, Social Work, Advocacy and Interventions in the Philippines

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## **Abstract**

Unsafe abortion is a worldwide reproductive health issue and a contributing factor of high numbers of maternal death in the developing world. Many international conferences and assemblies acknowledge the issue and urge governments to take action. Abortion is a phenomenon surrounded by strong opinions, many times regulated by restrictive laws as well as socio-ethical, religious and cultural norms. Factors often active in making abortion a clandestine procedure which take place under unsafe conditions.

The Philippines have one of the most restrictive laws on abortion in the world, but it does not diminish the occurrence of abortion in the country. There is unmet need for family planning that in turn makes way for unwanted pregnancies ending in unsafe abortion. Attempts in congress aiming at providing universal reproductive health service are being opposed and the issue of abortion is surrounded by its criminal ban and a great social stigma. The Roman Catholic Church is very present in the Philippine society and also offers a powerful voice against abortion and equally rejects modern contraception.

This study look into how the issue of abortion – under its criminal ban – is being dealt with and if there are any actors/groups/organisations of social work, within the reproductive health sector or women's organisations acting upon this, making abortion an issue and a part of their work. It asks if there is any advocacy for abortion in the Philippines and any interventions for the women concerned. If so, how is abortion spoken about and understood and how is that notion put into action? Groups are identified as either anti-abortion or pro-abortion, two discourses addressing abortion as a public health issue in fundamentally different ways.

There are groups that might not be public about their opinion being pro-abortion, as they do not wish to get on the wrong side of the general opinion or negatively affect their reputation. Some pro-abortion groups are found acting against the law by providing safe abortions for these women. Trough social constructivist glasses this study look at the structure surrounding abortion in the Philippines, analysing how these discourses are being reconstructed and transferred under different postulations as anti-abortion or pro-abortion.

**Keywords:** Abortion, unsafe abortion, anti-abortion, pro-abortion, maternal death, reproductive rights, family planning, social work, human rights, Catholic Church, social constructivism, discourse.

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## Definitions

Abortion	The deliberate termination of a human pregnancy. (Oxford Dictionary).
Abortifacient	Substance that induce abortion.
Advocacy	1. A conceptual and strategic framework that spells out goals and objectives, priority themes and key strategies to be addressed by relevant operatives at all levels. It defines, for example, an agreed vision within the context of humanitarian coordination and traces a road map of actions to be undertaken to realize this vision. 2. Support or argument for a cause, policy, etc. (WHO; Oxford Pocket Dictionary, 1992).
Family Planning	The process of controlling the number of children you have by using contraception. (Oxford advanced learner's dictionary).
Hilot	A traditional midwife in the Philippines. Perform abdominal massage to abort foetus by pounding the lower abdomen. (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2010, p. 6).
Induced abortion	A procedure done to end a pregnancy.
Medical abortion	Certain drugs/medications taken to end a pregnancy.
Natural Family Planning	1. Fertility awareness methods and periodic abstinence. 2. Method of birth control that involves abstention from sexual intercourse during the period of ovulation, which is determined through observation, and measurement of bodily signs (as cervical mucus and body temperature).
Reproductive Health	“A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, reproductive health addresses the reproductive processes, functions and system at all stages of life. Reproductive health, therefore, implies that people are able to have a responsible, satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so”.

Unsafe Abortion

A procedure for terminating an unintended pregnancy carried out either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment that does not conform to minimal medical standards, or both (WHO, 2011, p. 2).

### **Clarification**

When using the term abortion I will throughout this thesis refer to induced abortion if not otherwise indicated. When needed clarification I will precise whether referring to unsafe or safe abortion. I will define Reproductive Health by referring to the definition made by the WHO (1996).

## **Prologue**

To record a piece of reality through the words of a thesis is like painting. You have a palette of colours constituted by the interviews you have conducted, and the earlier research that you have managed to come across. You have collected material that in different ways shed light on the topic of your study. You now have the power to select which statements, what data and what material shall constitute your thesis. Whose voice will be heard and allowed to represent that chosen part of reality? What part of reality is being uplifted under the sun and how do I understand the answers I have received?

The complexity of the issue at hand is vast and to mediate the reality of abortion in the Philippines to you as a reader a quest. Abortion is per se an issue of ethical consideration and a politically charged issue. In the Philippines abortion is found and caught within a legal framework making it illegal. To delicately and with care let reality come across as it has presented itself in this study is important but difficult. Especially when personal opinions constantly want to react upon findings and certain statement's. This kind of research cannot be neutral of value, objective and simply descriptive in its presentation as it is dealing with an issue directly connected to certain normative values. This study does not seek to justify nor condemn abortion, but to present findings concerning illegal and unsafe abortion. Presenting a reality that in itself might argue that legal abortion should be a woman's human right.

### **An Issue That Present Itself Throughout Everyday Life**

My world in the Philippines is somewhat limited and my circle of friends not too big. Still stories of abortion are here, along with signs and public messages saying; "Abortion is murder". Speaking of the issue someone tells me of a friend that has found herself in the dilemma of an unwanted pregnancy. A college student knows of three young girls in his circle of friends that has done abortion by taking medications, with no one to turn to but perhaps a partner or a trustworthy friend. A friend's girlfriend found herself pregnant and turned to clandestine abortion. At a party another acquaintance got a text from a girl asking him if he knew how and where to get an abortion. A woman told me of a hilot living on her street when growing up. She was known for performing abortions and helped her cousin terminate a pregnancy. The worst case known to me was that of a nine-year old girl that came into a social workers hands at an NGO. She had been sexually abused by her father and was pregnant. My informant knew of a doctor performing abortion in Manila and would take the girl there. If she had not had that contact this nine-year old girl would have been forced to go

through with her pregnancy, as Philippine law does not allow abortion.

I want you too keep this in mind while reading, to understand the complexity of the issue. To understand how sometimes it has been difficult not to be emotionally provoked during the work of this study. And to understand the difficulties that any researcher comes across when looking into matters like these, searching for informants and data. But above all remember the women and children that suffer the consequences of illegal abortion. And with children I do not mean the foetus, but the child that is nine years old, impregnated, and by society expected to keep and give birth to a baby of her own. Because; society respect and protect the life of the unborn and the life of the mother equally.

## **Background**

Despite the criminal ban, in 2008 alone, an estimated 560,000 induced abortions took place in the Philippines; 90,000 women sought treatment for complications and 1,000 women died. These tragic and preventable deaths are a direct consequence of the nation's restrictive abortion law and an indirect consequence of the lack of adequate information about and access to effective modern contraceptives in the Philippines, especially in Manila City" (The Center for Reproductive Rights, 2010, p. 13).

Unsafe abortion accounts for 13% of all maternal death worldwide, making it a grave public health problem. In 2008 an estimated number of 47, 000 maternal deaths were the direct consequence of unsafe abortion. That means the preventable death of 47, 000 women that for a diversity of reasons had made the decision to end an unintended and/or unwanted pregnancy. (WHO, 2011, p.1, 27).

Abortion is per se a topic surrounded by taboo and social stigma. It is an issue of vast complexity and full of controversy. It brings about passionate discussions and people place themselves in different positions, either wanting to protect the life of the unborn or the life and the rights of women. In the Philippines abortion is legally prohibited under the Revised Penal Code of 1930 (Act 3815). It is considered one of the most restrictive laws on abortion in the world with prison sentences for both providers of abortion and women who undergo abortion. (The Center for Reproductive Rights, 2010, p. 77). Reports show that restrictive abortion laws are not associated with lower abortion rates. Hence there are no indications that the criminal ban of abortion in the Philippines results in a decreased number of abortions. Instead it pushes women to undergo clandestine, unsafe and risky procedures in order to terminate their pregnancies.

The most common reasons for women in the Philippines to seek abortion are the inability to financially care for another child, health risks, lack of access and information on family planning and contraception, and sexual violence such as rape and incest. Unintended and

unwanted pregnancies might leave a woman with no other choice but to seek abortion. (Sedgh et al., 2012, p. 2; Juarez, Cabigon, Singh & Hussain, 2005; Shah & Åhman, 2009; Grimes et al., 2006; The Center for Reproductive Rights, 2010, p. 42).

As part of an effort to provide responsive and comprehensive reproductive health services, an important question must be asked: Is there a problem of unsafe abortion? If there is, policy-makers, programme managers, and health-care professionals have an obligation to follow up with the question: What can be done to address this problem? Providing answers can lead to initiatives that reduce the incidence of unsafe abortion, while improving women's overall health, and promoting safe motherhood. (...) Countries with legal restrictions or limited access to safe reproductive health services must look beyond the cultural and/or religious debate associated with induced abortion to the public health issues associated with unsafe abortion. (WHO, 1996, p. 7).

Abortion is an existing reality and social issue of the Philippines despite its criminal ban. Due to the illegality unsafe abortion is the only option provided. I want to know if there is anyone out there for these concerned women in need of abortion.

A study made by the Center for Reproductive Rights (2010) argue that the criminalization of abortion in the Philippines violate human rights. Issues that violate human rights are issues that concern the social work profession, no matter where it occurs. Considering illegal abortion as a human rights concern it is therefore subject to the social work profession.

The International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) is a global organisation that strives for social justice, human rights and social development. They define social work as a promoter for social change and say that principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. Their policy on human rights state: “The Social Work profession accepts its share of responsibility for working to oppose and eliminate all violations of Human Rights”. (IFSW, Standards in social work practice meeting human rights, p. 6).

With that background the issue of illegal and unsafe abortion in the Philippines automatically becomes an issue that concern me as a student and a future social worker. It is therefore the topic of the research as presented in this study.

## **Purpose Of The Study**

The main purpose of this study is to increase the knowledge of how the question of abortion – under its criminal ban – is being dealt with by those working with Social Work, Reproductive Health and Women’s Rights and Empowerment in the Philippines. Doing that this study looks into how prevailing structures and discourses in the Philippine society affect that work.

Focus is on actors/groups/organisations with the objective to be working for women’s right and/or reproductive health and whether they address this important topic as a part of their advocacy or not. And if so, how they practically work with the issue of abortion. I seek to highlight the unmet need of access to safe abortion in the Philippines and the difficulties surrounding even the discussion on the matter due to strong cultural and religious structures. The discussion on when life starts and what is fundamentally considered a life is too vast to get into and include within the frames of this study. Within this thesis I seek not to take a stand on any theological or philosophical arguments concerning these questions. I focus on the illegality of abortion as a subject for the social work profession and limit myself to behold the consequences of illegal abortion in the Philippines.

## **Questions**

- 1.** Are there any actors/groups/organisations that address the issue of abortion as a public social issue and health problem in the Philippine society?
- 2.** Exploring different social work interventions in the area of abortion in the Philippines I continue with asking:
  - a)** How does these actors/groups/organisations seek to decrease the number of unsafe abortions in the Philippines?
  - b)** In what way does the illegality of abortion affect and form these interventions?
  - c)** How is the discourse on abortion and what is publicly claimed by these actors/groups/organisations affected by the criminal ban and the social stigma of abortion?

## Methodology

Many find that when they adopt the traditional positivist approach to research, the problem that they were originally interested in mutates from an exciting idea that energized their imagination to a sterile question and hypothesis that includes precisely defined independent and dependent variables that must be accurately measured but are an anaemic depiction of the original focus of research. (Morris, 2006, p.195)

I have actively not wanted to transform the problem that interested me and sought my attention to a neutral, sterile and measurable research question. My commitment to the issue of abortion and how highly restrictive laws of abortion affects women negatively is the core of my research and something that I wish to keep alive throughout the process.

My research and my study is done with a constructivist approach while also sneaking at the critical theory (Morris, 2006, 194-199). With the constructivist approach comes the notion that this study in itself will be part of what construct the reality that I wish to study. As I have collected my data in the Philippines, which is not my general geographical or socio cultural context, I have sought the radical hermeneutic for guidance.

## Approach

Grounded theory places the core of research within the collected data material. It is an approach by which a theory develops from empirical and qualitative data rather than from prior hypothetical reasoning. It is referred to as the “constant comparative method” as it searches for similarities and differences in order to bring out nuances and variations (Dalen, 2007, p. 50). In accordance with grounded theory my forthcoming analysis shall find its core within my qualitative material. It is from my empirical data that I shall draw and develop my thesis.

Social constructivism does not agree with the idea that reality is an objective knowledgeable truth; instead it means that reality is but subjective and made of shared constructions. I have leaned towards social constructivism during the work of my thesis by focusing on what is called “the joint development of worldviews by groups of people”. (Morris, 2006, p.194). My problem statement is broad and it includes central issues but at the same time allow me to use it as a guide for the collection of my data. My questions are explicate (what and where), exploratory (how and why) and action questions addressing interventions with the issue at hand. In accordance with a subjectivist approach my goal with this study has not been to present findings that might be generalized to other settings, “but rather gather valid data about a problem and or issue in its context”. (Ibid p. 194-199).

It is generally argued that a good researcher does not reveal her/his opinion or view but instead best keep that outside the interview situation. (Dahlen, 2007). The critical theory on

the other hand, leans against the understanding of an objective world and assume that “we can never be free of our own values when observing the objective reality around us”. Whether I consider reality as objective or not, I do concur to the fact that a researcher might not be able to nor have to keep personal opinions completely at bay and under control, instead they are to be acknowledged and made part of the research. (Morris, 2006, p.131). Without sharing too much of my own opinion on the matter I have found it necessary to let my informants understand that I am critically questioning the illegality of abortion as well as the restrictive climate of discussions on the subject. By allowing myself this and acknowledge my own stand in a modest manner it has been easier to meet those that might have another opinion without being bias. I have actively sought different positions and key players concerned with the issue of abortion in search of all possible and present constructions and opinions and let all have an equal say on the matter.

Radical hermeneutics is another view that gives importance to the culture and background of the researcher herself. It means that we can't disengage ourselves from our own socio cultural background and context. We can't establish a mind that is completely cleansed and freed of conditional prejudices and stereotypes, to with a universally valid perspective as researchers penetrate new and unknown fields. Instead of thinking that true understanding of another culture (which to me can be defined as the context of another opinion fundamentally apart from mine) needs that we leave our context. There are universal, mutual and constant features that links cultures and different contexts. Looking at what is common the researcher may relate to the new context, instead of holding it completely foreign. The answers and solutions might differ between contexts and cultures but the problems are shared. (Gunneriusen, 1996, p. 200, 202).

## **Data Collection**

I have gathered my empirical data through semi-structured interviews with key agents that are part of and work within the field of reproductive health, groups that are involved in women's rights and advocacy and also representatives of the social work profession. In their line of work they should face abortion as an issue and meet the women concerned. Locating actors/groups/organisation within the field of my interest I have visited websites of numerous women's organisations, family planning centres and groups involved in reproductive health matters in the Philippines. In order not to reveal the identity of the groups I have interviewed I will not describe my work in locating them further. Those groups with an expressed position

against abortion have been easier to locate as that opinion carries no danger to have, hold and express, whilst I have needed to search more and trusted personal contacts to get in touch with possible advocates and providers of abortion.

Through personal contacts the snowball effect has been immense and led me from one informant to the other, each one referring me further and giving me vital contact information to other key agents. This might be a cause of questioning my range and variety of informants, though considering the susceptible character of my topic personal contact and referral has proved to give me access to agents that might not have participated in this study if approached only by me. It is mentioned that in cases when dealing with vulnerable groups there might be a problem with “putting together a range of variety with big enough scope of variety”. In such cases it might be needed to think and act a bit unconventional (Dalen, 2007, p. 64).

## Interviews

I started off with some initial meetings and more open interviews that was not taped but noted. This serving as example studies to orientate myself with the surroundings of the issue of abortion in the Philippines, and to get an understanding of the present discourse. It provided me with information and introduced agents that might have experience and opinions on the subject and as such be of further interest of to my study.

The interviews were based on few highlighted themes and questions. I sought to create an atmosphere within the interview situation that encouraged and let my informants open up and speak freely on the matter. Allowing them to share their opinions, experiences, perceptions, feelings, judgments, sentiments and knowledge on abortion. I have not lost focus on the fact that an interview is not an ordinary conversation, nor forgetting that it is the voice and experience of my informant that is of interest (Dalen, 2001, p. 39). Still I have sought to create an atmosphere to the likeness of having a discussion on the matter of abortion. I have not moralized or argued for any personal opinion, but problematized many answers and made my informants take a stand on certain cases and extremities of abortion in order to understand their point of view in a concrete situation. I have based my questions on the general data and information provided through earlier research and my conducted example studies.

## Interview-related difficulties

I have had an equal experience of good fortune and luck getting access to and interviewing key informants, as well as hitting my head hard against the wall when not getting replies to my letters and e-mails, failing getting interviews. As the time for conducting this study has

been somewhat limited I have been forced to “give up” my attempts to establish contact with some actors/groups/organisations of interest.

I have called one group/organisation repeatedly, that I in different occasions and interviews have been recommended to contact as they provide safe abortions. Upon calling them I was told that “we don’t have abortion in the Philippines” and when trying to explain my intentions and the purpose of my study I was told to call back. When doing so I was yet again told that “we don’t have abortion in the Philippines”. After a number of calls I had to realize I was denied access and again, the time limit made me give up any further attempts.

I was also interested in knowing if the educational system address abortion and if and how social work students are dealing with the topic in class. I had an interview with a teacher at one university, but was due to bureaucratic procedures and lack of time within the frames of this study unable to get more samples and a varied range of informants on the matter and therefore excluded that interview from this thesis.

## Literature Review

I have found my sources of earlier research much through Internet and recommendations on publications by my informants. I have searched the websites and catalogues of the UN and the WHO for reports, research, studies and publications on matters concerning abortion, unsafe abortion, maternal death, reproductive health and family planning. They are a main source of information and also a trustworthy authority as provider of studies and reports on these matters. One search has lead me to the next, making it hard to backtrack every step of the way. Looking for programmes and summaries of international conferences and the likes I have turned to the website of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

The Alan Guttmacher Institute and The Center For Reproductive Rights have also provided me with much data and literature through their research and publication on the field of abortion and reproductive health matters. They are engaged in research, education, advocacy and development of reproductive health worldwide and the Allan Guttmache Institute are at present a WHO collaborating centre for reproductive health. As such these organisations have proven to be a good resource for materials and references to other conducted studies on abortion and also organisations working with reproductive health and women's rights.

In the research that I hereby have come across I have looked at the references for further literature and desirable and up to date publications.

## Ethical Considerations

The starting point for the ethical considerations made in this study has been the general main requirements on research expressed by Vetenskapsrådet. Four essential areas of requirements are identified in order to protect individuals participating in research. These are requirements of information, consent, confidentiality and usage. (Vetenskapsrådet, p. 6).

In accordance with *the requirement of information* all participants entering my research as information providers all will receive the purpose of my study and also be aware of the terms for participating. (Vetenskapsrådet, p. 7). In order to fulfil *the requirement of consent* I have prior the interview's let all participants agree to a form of consent, explaining my purpose of the study and informing that all participation is voluntarily and may at any time be terminated. (Vetenskapsrådet, p. 9). Considering *the requirement of confidentiality* all participants in my study are kept anonymous or are given allonym's. All recorded and transcribed interviews have been deleted in accordance with my form of consent. (Vetenskapsrådet, p. 12). In terms of *the requirement of usage* none of the information that I have received about individual participants will be used or spread for any other cause or purpose than answering the questions of this thesis. (Vetenskapsrådet, p. 14).

My focus is on professionals and their view on abortion in the Philippines. To receive answers to my questions I have considered how to create an atmosphere of tolerance and frankness wherein abortion can be discussed. I must be gentle and respectful toward all opinions during interviews, but must not avoid asking challenging questions of interest and importance for my study in order to do so. As abortion is illegal in the Philippines I might not always get the full story. Interviews might fail against the present stigma and the criminal ban that surround the question. I have dedicated myself to gain the trust and confidence of my informants and with that effort, throughout my work, respected the integrity of my informants and made sure that I in no way harm those individuals that openly and confidentially answer my questions. As I am to address a topic of quite the emotional and politically charged character it is my responsibility as a researcher to keep the ethical aspect of this study alive. Abortion is a highly sensitive topic in the Philippines and as such needs constant ethical consideration. As expressed and stated by Codex (last updated 2011) about rules and guidelines for research the researcher is responsible for the ethical presence in hers or his research throughout the process, "it could be said that *the researcher's own ethical responsibility* forms the basis for all research ethics". (<http://www.codex.vr.se/en/forskarensetik.shtml>).

The requirement of confidentiality is of major importance as I during my research have

located service providers of abortion. As such they are committing a criminal act and their identities are under no circumstances to be revealed. Dealing with such confidential information, which is the most interesting and charged part of my empirical data, demands care and consideration not to in any way reveal which person/group/organisation is referred to. The protection of my informants is of great need and ethical consideration must be constantly present and need much attention. These are all issues that might have a negative impact on my thesis' reliability, validity and transparency. Still I need to give way to let the information that I have withheld be forwarded within this study and have taken caution to present statements of my informants in such a way that they are sharing their stories but shall not be identified.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Informed by a constructionist sensitivity, we are challenged to step out of the realities we have created, and to ask significant questions – what are the repercussions of these ways of talking, who gains, who is hurt, who is silenced, what traditions are sustained, which are undermined, and how do I judge the future we are creating? (Gergen, 1999, p. 62).

I will apply social constructivism when analyzing my empirical data through a discourse analysis; looking into how and in what different ways I have been told about abortion during my interviews and looking what interventions are provided. What structures are existing, maintained, created and kept within today's discourse of abortion in the Philippines?

Social constructivism is a post-modern theory; it studies people and institutions in order to understand action. (Payne, 2005, p. 98). My analysis focus on the answers to my questions of how abortion is addressed when spoken about as a phenomenon, and how it is being addressed through different identified actions and interventions. I will use this theory to look at my empirical material and see how the different discourses that I have identified – anti-abortion or pro-abortion – are expressed and put into action, and how it is differently affected by the criminal ban of abortion.

### **Social Constructivism**

Postmodernism stands critical to all claims of truth. It questions cultural belief and tradition claiming to carry truth and objective knowledge. It looks at the relationship between world and word, seeking to deconstruct it and confront and challenge authority on knowledge.

Social constructivism deals with how our knowledge and sense of meaning is created in relationships and affected by our social context. Since we receive our knowledge through

language and interaction it is socially constructed. The knowledge we have is affected by the spirit of the time (*Zeitgeist*) prevailing in a society. How one understands reality is bound to certain perspectives and terms. Social constructivism ask not whether knowledge is true or valid, it seeks how the knowledge has been produced and how knowledge is constructed and determined under social influence. (Wenneberg, 2010, p. 30, 65, 69).

Berger & Luckman say that society is a product made by men and women. We transfer and externalise our knowledge and habits trough social interaction. In that process we are socialized into and equally creating “plausibility structures”; conventions and shared knowledge becomes institutionalized. We develop a “natural attitude” that makes us understand the world as an ordered and natural reality. These perceptions then become legitimized, given meaning and made into objective facts and part of a bigger system that seems organized and “real”. (Gergen, 1999, Payne 2005, Wenneberg, 2010).

### Poetic Activists & Identity Politics

“As we describe, explain or otherwise represent, so do we fashion our future”.

Social order is something by man created, as such it is under current reinvention and herein lies the possibilities of change; social constructivism wish to deconstruct in order to reconstruct. (Gergen, 1999, p. 29). Our actions and our language are bound to institutions such as tradition and culture, what we know as our way of living in everyday life. Within that structure language represent these institutions, and what they stand for. As such they are not constant but changeable, as is our way of speaking about things. Kenneth Gergen (1999) says that in order to sustain tradition – definition of truth and morality for example – “depend on a continuous process of generating meaning together”. If we seek to keep our traditions and understanding of the world we must see to it that they are still making sense, we must keep them alive by reconstructing them. He gives an example of how Christianity has been “rewritten or reconstructed” to be “vital” and fit into today’s world. (Ibid, p. 48).

“As we speak and write at this moment we participate in creating the future – for good or ill”. Speaking of change and the transformation of society and culture Gergen sees a lot of possibilities in constructivism and critical reflection. He says that we do not need laws or public policy to make change; instead we shall act with our individual power. Refusing or rejecting meanings that is given us and instead create new patterns and new meanings. He speaks of the *generative discourses*, that is, ways of talking and writing (and otherwise representing) that simultaneously challenge existing traditions of understanding, and offer new possibilities for action” (ibid, p. 48-49).

Along with transforming knowledge and habits through actions and daily relations, our acts are being publicly interpreted and shared further by others as reputations. *Identity politics* point to how groups (and individuals) attain a certain reputation maintained through “descriptions, explanations, criticism or congratulations” by other people and groups. How a group is represented constitutes its reputation and is another example of the process where perceptions are shared and transferred, becoming “taken-for-granted-realities”. “And it is these realities that inform public policies, educational practices, police actions, and so on. Further, these same public portrayals inform those depicted”. (Gergen, 1999, p. 42).

## Discourse

It is hard to find a clear-cut definition of what a discourse is. It is not simply our language and what is being verbally expressed in discussions. It is also what you do and how you act. Payne describes discourse as “language and practice through which people exert power in cultural and social relations - it is something you can understand and react upon”. Discourse, language and stories are systems of concepts and ideas that have become institutionalised in society. “Opinions, behaviour and theory all affect and support each other”. It is the constant interchange between the inner and outer world where we seek meaning and “try to develop our totalitarian concepts and notions about the world”. (Payne, 2005, p. 327, 347, 292).

A discourse is structured, meaning that it equally offers and is made of conventions and habits, creating a stable and re-occurring world. It is rhetoric and found within language, where convention and habit is being verbally expressed to structure and further organize the world. It is also as a process of action and “social interchange”. Through thinking, discussion, conversations, negotiations, arguments and other processes we are part of a process that creates outer and inner structures. (Gergen, 1999, p. 64).

Foucault speaks of discourse as power and certain “disciplinary regimes”. He seeks to deconstruct this power/knowledge/discourse that he finds in the shape of groups (religions, disciplines, professions), claiming to hold the truth and knowledge of certain phenomena. These discourses spread in everyday life and become real as we adopt them. Without realising people accept and live under this discourse, subjugated. To him discourse is about power that practices cultural discipline by repressing society’s members. (Ibid, p. 38-40, 208).

## Ideological Critique

Jürgen Habermas is quoted in his demonstration of how certain interests and values steer all sort of knowledge seeking, making all - especially those in power - subject of ideological

critique. (Gergen, 1999, p. 23). All and any discourse carry use of its advocacies and abuse its suppressions, and the interpretations of a certain discourse function in a society are multiple. Consequently postmodernism should be subject to its own critique. On its liberating quest, post-modern critique of ideology uses the same method as the phenomenon of its critique. They are now the ones claiming to hold the truth in the same manner as those they criticize, their analysis is equally a social construction. “As many traditionalists have now learned, the best defence against ideological critique is to locate the self-interested and oppressive character of the criticism”. (Ibid, p. 62).

Still Gergen believe in and emphasize the importance of critical reflection upon “discursive convention”. To provoke, question and get dialogues started on what is considered and accepted as natural and true. He stand firm that in the action of deconstructing discourses lay the possibility of reconstructing society through new world structures. It is a way of changing discourses that uphold oppression and injustice. “Discerning reflection is the first step to emancipation – the opening of new visions and alternative futures”. (Ibid, p. 63-64).

### Critique in the Form of Action – Legal Resistance

In an article written by Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey (2003) the authors talk about resistance to the law and institutionalized power. They write about individual citizen’s resistance to legal authority and how these acts may turn into and spread as stories of resistance. Stories showing how structure and power can be challenged. How institutionalized restrictions in everyday life has it limits. These stories of resistance are spread and transferred trough social interaction. As such they are growing, enabling the creation of more stories of resistance, opening up the possibility for action. The stories and narratives of these actions then become events that affect structure. They suggest that “resistance is enabled and collectivized, in part, by the circulation of stories narrating moments when taken for granted social structure is exposed and the usual direction of constraint upended, if only for a moment”. (Ewick & Silbey, 2003, p. 1328-1330).

## **Part 1 - Earlier Research**

Part 1 of this study wishes to acquaint the reader with the latest research on abortion but moreover provide an understanding for the complexity of the issue. This literature review will deal with the worldwide state of abortion through statistical data and the presentation of different factors that support and create the surrounding stigma of abortion, making it into a question of such a delicate character. The studies mentioned below will serve as an introduction to the matter of abortion worldwide, and thereafter present the setting of abortion in the Philippines, for an understanding of that national and local context. The material deals with incidences of abortion, discuss the influence of the legal framework and the continuing stigma of abortion and cite how international treaties and commitments aim to address unsafe abortion in a global perspective and how international debates deal with the issue of abortion.

### **Unsafe Abortion Globally**

Unsafe abortion presents one of the most critical global public health and human rights challenges of the present times. Each day 192 women die because of complications arising from unsafe abortion; that is one woman every eight minutes, nearly all of them in developing countries. (Sedgh et al., 2012, p. 5)

An estimated 43,8 million women had an abortion in 2008, 49% of these were unsafe. 86% of the worldwide abortions occur in the developing world where the legal framework on abortion often is more restrictive than in the developed world. (Ibid). No matter the legal status, abortion is usually carrying a stigma in society and is a censured topic in public debate. When under a criminal ban and legally restricted, abortion is often unsafe. Traditional and non-medical procedures are often dangerous and range from drinking herbal potions and receive violent massage of the abdomen to inserting foreign objects into the vagina or cervix, drinking alcohol and engage in physical activity. “Women are often desperate enough to try different strategies”. (Singh, Wulf, Hussain, Bankole, Sedgh, 2009, p. 26).

Women seek abortion for various reasons: socioeconomic problems, need of spacing between children, contraceptive failure, relationship problems, health issues, rape or incest. It is strongly connected with gender inequalities and unmet need and access to family planning methods and services. Legal restrictions and societal, cultural and religious norms force women to face the risks involved with unsafe abortion. If pregnant outside of marriage, being ostracized from family and society is a possible consequence. Various reports and studies show that unintended pregnancy is the main reason for having an abortion. (International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2006; Singh, Sedgh and Hussein, 2010; Singh et al., 2006; Shah & Warriner, 2006; p. 2, Raymundo et al., 2001, p. 41).

## Illegal Abortion Equals Lesser Abortions?

There is no indication that a more restrictive abortion law leads to lesser abortions. In countries where abortion is available, legal and safe, the rate of unsafe abortion decline. In countries with restrictive abortion laws morbidity and mortality as a result of abortion is high. Earlier research has shown that there is a higher number of maternal deaths due to unsafe abortion in countries with legal restrictions, and lower in countries with a more liberal legal setting. Analyzing the connection between national legal status of abortion, unsafe abortion and related mortality in 2000 show that death due to unsafe abortion is clearly affected by the legal status and context. Allowing abortion on a broader ground is associated with improvement in the field of sexual and reproductive health. So, in conclusion, removing legal restrictions would reduce both the numbers of unsafe abortion and maternal death. (Sedgh et al. 2012, p. 1, 2; ARROW, *Reclaiming & Redefining Rights*, p. 71; Shah and Åhman, 2009; Shah & Warriner 2006; Marge Berer, 2004, p. 2, 4).

## Problematic Statistics

No records are available on women who had unsafe abortion complications but who did not seek post-abortion care in public facilities. Only the “tip of the iceberg” is, therefore, visible in the number of deaths and the number of women who seek medical care following complications. (WHO, 2011, p.15).

To derive accurate information and reliable data of the incidence of abortion and statistically show the level of abortion is difficult, especially in a country where abortion is surrounded by legal restrictions. Underreporting in surveys and hospital records are common and women who suffered complications due to unsafe abortion but did not seek medical care is not shown in statistics. (WHO, 2011; Åhman, Dolea, Shah, 2006). No matter the legal framework, induced abortion is a frequently stigmatized issue and the available data of numbers of performed abortions are limited. When illegal the chance of a woman to report having had an abortion is very slim. (Shah & Åhman, WHO, 2009; Åhman, Dolea, Shah, 2006).

Under reporting of abortions is common, but - maybe not surprisingly - greater in countries with restrictive abortion laws. Statistics on abortion incidence may be misreporting due to many factors. Besides under-reporting, spontaneous abortion might be accounted for as an induced abortion, medical abortions are under counted, abortions performed by the private sector might be concealed and hospital records might classify complications due to an abortion as something else. (Sedgh et al., 2012, p. 1, 3, 6).

The legal and socio-cultural context in the Philippines puts abortion within a very complex and restrictive environment; this creates inadequacies concerning the data and measurements

of abortions occurring each year and also fails to address abortion in debates, policies and interventions. The illegality makes studies of the actual situation and related issues and concerns problematic, but still much research and evidence point to the fact that abortion is very much present and cause harmful impact on the Filipino women. (Raymundo et al., 2001).

It is therefore of crucial importance to measure the level of abortions worldwide, in order to see if there has been any improvement considering maternal health and any development towards the UN Millennium Development Goal 5 (MDG5), aiming to reduce maternal mortality and achieve universal access to reproductive health. Two major critical steps of action to achieve that goal would be to actively seek to decrease the occurrence of unintended pregnancy and unsafe abortion through family planning services and safe abortion care. (Sedgh et al. 2012, p. 1).

### **Abortion as an Issue on the International Stage**

The discourse on abortion and what is said and done on international conferences is interesting. Consensus is on acting on unsafe abortion and its negative consequences for women of the world. The Philippines have taken part of these conferences and signed agreements in order to reach joint goals on RH matters, abortion included.

#### **International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)**

At the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 was agreed on a programme of action for the next 20 years, making empowerment and equality of women a global top priority. Goals were set to reduce maternal mortality and guarantee universal access to family planning and reproductive health. 179 countries, the Philippines included, signed this programme of action (UNFPA 4). It was agreed that abortion is not family planning (FP), but must be dealt with as a major health concern and issue. Through preventive measures of extended and improved FP-services, unwanted pregnancies and abortion would decrease. Abortion is internationally considered a serious issue and ICPD urge that countries deal with the public health aspects of it but emphasize that it is up to every country and government to decide their own abortion policy, depending on national law. (article 8.25). Fifteen years after Cairo the goals were equally relevant. UNFPA highlight with urgency that action must be taken to prevent unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortion by providing universal access to Family Planning (FP) and modern contraceptives. To reduce maternal death comprehensive FP-services with counselling and supplies and safe abortion (where legal) needs to and should be provided. (UNFPA, 2009).

## The Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW)

Other international conferences also put abortion on the agenda as an issue of great importance and stress that action is needed, and that abortion should be provided safe and beyond risk for the woman when legally permitted. (Shah & Warriner, 2006, p. 3).

The Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) in Beijing 1995 called on governments to act upon the health impact of unsafe abortion as a major public health concern as agreed in paragraph 8.25 at the ICPD, but further add that countries should “consider reviewing laws containing punitive measures against women who have undergone illegal abortions” (paragraph 106 j & k). Hereby shifting the framing of abortion from a public health perspective to a more progressive human rights perspective” (Thanenthiran & Racherla, p.70).

In 2010 the Commission on the status of women undertook a follow up meeting of the FWCW (Beijing+15) to review the progress made and the challenges met to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for action. Across all regions improvement in the lives of women and girls had been made. But little progress was noted in developing countries in regard to maternal mortality and improving women’s reproductive health. (Commission on the Status of Women, 2010).

## Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

In 2000 world leaders met and 189 countries agreed on the United Nations Millennium Declaration. This brought forward eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015. Goal five (MDG5) is to reduce maternal death, reflecting the ICPD agreements and the FWCW plan of action. In 2005 governments also committed themselves to achieve universal access to reproductive health, making that the MDG5B. (UNFPA, 2009, p. 9). Unsafe abortion account as already stated for 13% of the maternal deaths worldwide. Connecting these numbers to the MDG5A and MDG5B makes the achievements of the MDGs and programs of action ever so important. Abortion should as such be addressed as a highly relevant health and social issue to be dealt with in accordance with states strives towards reaching the signed and agreed Millennium Development Goal’s. With all these international agreements and the promoting of empowerment of women, women’s reproductive rights are considered human rights worth fighting for and abortion is considered to be one of these rights. With the reaffirmation and signing of The Millennium Development Goals, the Philippine government have agreed on these goals as well as the implementation of programs and platforms of action of the ICPD and FWCW.

## Reviewing Philippine Commitment to the ICPD & MDGs

Statements by Philippine government officials show that efforts have been made towards reaching agreed goals but that there is still a long way to go concerning universal access to reproductive health. The implementation of agreed actions is still a concern. Maternal death can be prevented through adequate services and interventions, but access to reproductive health services and family planning is lacking. To achieve goals and agreements, efforts must be made towards maternal mortality and the unmet need of family planning, unwanted and unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortion. (Cabral, 2010; Osias, 2011).

Efforts are made in the form of programs and awareness raising education concerning sex and reproductive health, aiming to make access to RH-services universal. Discussions are in motion, but there is something that makes interventions and improvements in regard to these agreed goals slow and scarce. Interventions mainly seek to address and decrease the issue of unintended pregnancies as a reason for having an abortion. Talking about legal and safe abortion as a woman's human right in the Philippines is still far away.

It is important, at the +15 ICPD to recognize abortion both as a public health issue and a human right issue. It is important to view access to abortion in as humane and just a way possible: women have abortions for only one reason – because they cannot cope with a particular pregnancy at a particular time. This can never be said enough. They may regret the reasons, but this does not alter the fact that abortion is the correct decision for them and necessary in the circumstances of their lives”. And it is important to create policies, laws and procedures which enable and empower women to enact these choices. (Thanenthiran & Racherla, p. 71).

In a review looking into the implementation of the ICPD commitments, it is argued that making abortion provided upon request in countries with restrictive laws is a massive challenge. In a study made by the WHO in 2003 it is shown that complications of abortion is the second largest reason for maternal death in the region, this putting improved access to safe abortion services as the solution of these preventable deaths. (ibid, p. 60).

One deficiency of the ICPD is that it does not recognize access to legal and safe abortion as part of reproductive health and rights. With the absence of an international standard, guarding the universal right to abortion, national laws will be even harder to affect. Advocating and challenging a legal structure that internationally is respected will be difficult. Abortion should be considered a human right and as such be legally accessible by all women. (ibid). The Asia-Pacific Regional MDG Report 2011/2012 show that the progress on reducing maternal mortality in the Philippines is slow. Statistics on how the region is achieving the MDG5 is “disturbing” as they show that maternal death is still a widespread problem in the whole region. (Asia-Pacific regional MDG Report 2011/2012, p.15-19).

## **A Voice of Criticism – WHO on an Abortion Agenda?**

WHO should get out of the business of using statistics to create “demand” that does not exist, and return to its mandate of addressing pressing global health issues. In its search for “verifiable” data in order to support its reinforcing pro-abortion/pro-contraception policies, WHO has become involved in controversial activities which hurts its legitimacy. (Essig, 2010, , p. 47).

During the research for data on abortion and consequences of unsafe abortion most reports stand in agreement that unsafe abortion is a health risk for a large number of women worldwide and that it is an issue that needs attention and interventions. I have found one report that diverge from that consensus and stand critical to what is understood as “The World Health Organization’s Abortion Agenda” (Essig, 2010). The Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute ask in their paper how WHO became “one of the world’s top abortion research and advocacy institutions”. They claim that WHO is supporting abortion services and through its research generates evidence supporting this agenda, advocating and interfering with national affairs of its member states. (Ibid, p.19).

They are critical to how the WHO and conferences like the ICPD call to deal with the issue of abortion, not only for the eliminating of unsafe abortion but also promoting safe and accessible abortion services. (Ibid, p. 26). Through its rights based approach the WHO have, according to them, become a radical human rights activist organization looking at abortion as part of women’s human rights. In this report is claimed that “access to legal abortion is nowhere to be found a fundamental right of women under the UN human rights treaties”. (Ibid, p. 30). It is questioned how the WHO-reports and research can present so much unverifiable data and still stand with such authority. The inaccurate records on abortion, and numbers of maternal death because of unsafe abortion, raise questions on the reliability of their statistics. The data and information used by WHO maintain so much flaws but still is being used to form and justify different health policies, many times violating the religious beliefs, traditions, and national sovereignty of member states. "This flawed data is also recycled throughout the pro- abortion, pro-family planning agencies to promote their agendas, and in return flows back into WHO by way of money and published reports, thus creating an echo chamber". (ibid, p. 20, 21, 46).

It is emphasized how WHO fight religion and tradition in order to promote their family planning and reproductive right agenda, where access to services such as abortion and contraception is urged. Also, WHO publish evidence within their research that confirm their radical view trying to confirm the necessity of Family Planning and Reproductive Health. “WHO’s efforts to eliminate “unsafe” abortion are nothing more than a guise for promoting its abortion agenda”. (Ibid, p. 33, p. 28).

The rhetoric and source of this report marks an agenda that stand fundamentally in opposition to the general consensus found in other reports. While questioning the WHO the study leans on the pro-life discourse, which is anti abortion and critical to the way other instances argue that abortion should be reconsidered and provided. Written at a Catholic institute that is equally anti-abortion and also provider of a powerful discourse against abortion, this study represents the other side of the debate. A debate which internationally urge for less restrictive abortion laws and universal access to reproductive health services, this study on the other hand question that agenda and urge the opposite.

## **Abortion in the Philippines**

The almost half a million induced abortions occurring each year in the Philippines cannot be understood in isolation from the generally restrictive social and political climate surrounding the delivery of modern contraceptive services. In addition, decentralization of health service provision must most likely contributes to Filipino women's difficulties in obtaining contraceptive information, services and supplies. (Juarez, Cabigon, Singh, Hussain, 2005, p. 146).

Dealing with the issue of abortion in the Philippine context is a somewhat difficult issue. It is a question caught in a tight web of socio-cultural and illegal status, where politics and religion helps forming opinions and framework that does not take lightly on abortion nor seem to welcome an enlightened debate. The dominating religion is the Roman Catholic (85% of the population), which affect the perspectives and opinions on abortion found within the Philippine society. The Catholic Church position itself in a very hard and strong stand against abortion, where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and women groups are trying to bring another perspective to the table and seek a more liberal view on abortion. (Raymundo et al., 2001, p. 3).

### **The Law Surrounding Abortion in the Philippines**

The law on abortion in the Philippines is highly restrictive, but despite that abortion is a common occurrence. Both the woman undergoing abortion and the provider risk imprisonment under the law. The constitution recognizes life from the moment of conception and abortion is a criminal act except to save the mother's life. "The state shall equally protect the life of the mother and the life of the unborn from conception". Although, the law is unclear on when abortion might be legally performed in order to save the life of the mother. And consultation and authorization from a panel of professionals is needed in such a case.

The Revised Penal Code of The Philippines defines abortion as "The wilful killing of the foetus in the uterus, or the violent expulsion of the foetus from the maternal womb, which

results in the death of the foetus”.

- **Article 256** – Intentional abortion - a person who intentionally perform and cause an abortion, with the consent of the pregnant woman, risk imprisonment for six months to six years.
- **Article 258** – Abortion practiced by the woman herself or by her parents - state that a woman who self-induce an abortion may be imprisoned for two to six years. Any other person causing the abortion is liable under article 256. If the purpose of the woman’s parents to cause the abortion is to conceal her dishonour the case fall under article 256.
- **Article 259** – Abortion practiced by a physician or midwife and dispensing of abortive  
- If the person performing the abortion did so with the consent of the women she may risk six years in prison. If using violence to cause the abortion he or she may be imprisoned for 20 years.

Because of this very restrictive law, abortion is surrounded by a great stigma in the Philippines. Medical providers fail in providing legal abortion in order to save a woman’s life, because of unclear protocol for when and how abortion can be provided in such a case and due to personal religious convictions. It is also repeatedly reported that women seeking post abortion care in hospitals are often very badly treated and abused by the medical staff (The Center for Reproductive Rights, 2010, Raymundo et al., 2001).

### Who Seeks Abortion in the Philippines?

Along with being an issue of complexity abortion is surrounded by myths. It is a common belief that those undergoing abortion are a certain type of women. Women who are loose in morals, incapable of making plans, poor and socio-economically disadvantaged, prostitutes or engaged in “clandestine sexual relationships”. Primarily abortion is sought due to the stigma that is brought to a woman and her family if she is pregnant when single and not married. (Raymundo et al., 2001, p. 4).

A study, based on data from women hospitalized due to abortion complication, dismiss these myths. Represented in the data of those having had an induced abortion are women from more regular demographic and socioeconomic categories. A majority (54%) of the women are 20-29 years old and most of them in a relationship. In comparison with the national population of women those undergoing abortion are more educated but mostly unemployed. More than 90% of women undergoing abortion are currently married and Roman Catholics

and come from large households with an average size of 6.1 persons (ibid, p. 23-29).

Of importance is also to highlight surrounding conditions relevant to abortion in the Philippines. It is a recurring fact that there is an unmet need for family planning services in the country and fertility rates are high. As a result many women have unwanted and unplanned pregnancies and hence turn to unsafe abortion, in lack of other options. “Six in 10 Filipino women aged 15-49 say they have experienced an unintended pregnancy”. One fourth of these women, experiencing an unwanted pregnancy, say that they have had an abortion. (Singh S., et al., 2006, p. 4, 12, 13).

Due to abortions criminal ban, women are forced to seek alternative, often risky and ineffective methods to end their pregnancy. Hilots are traditional midwives performing abdominal massage that in combination with traditional herbal drinks aim to abort the foetus. Often women undergo multiple attempts to succeed with the abortion and they try many, often unsafe procedures, putting the woman’s health and life at risk through physical trauma and exertion. These unsafe methods provide the greatest risks for complications. As abortion is illegal safe procedures are expensive, thus poor women have riskier abortions than non-poor women. (ibid, 2006, p.19).

### **Abortion Providers**

To obtain an abortion in the Philippines is not easy. Those who have decided to terminate their pregnancy must try several times obtaining an abortion and not always succeeding with ending their pregnancy. Self-induced abortions are common as well as seeking the help of friends, partners, hilots, pharmacists, as well as doctors, nurses and midwives. Some of these abortions might be performed under safe conditions, but the vast majority of them are unsafe and complications are common. (Singh, et al., 2006, p. 29).

The study “Unsafe Abortion In the Philippines – A threat to public health (Raymundo et al., 2001) discuss the difficulties with locating and generation information on those that provide abortion. (ibid, p. 65). Through key informants and the women participating in their study, they had face-to-face interviews with providers of abortion. Out of 40 providers 75% were traditional midwives (hilots), 15% midwives, and 10% doctors. The study reveal that providers of abortion are often long time residents in the community where they serve and act on the belief that they are helping these women and serving a pressing need that they cannot refuse. Hilots are the most popular service providers and a big majority of them (84%) use abdominal massage to abort the foetus, although they admit a significant failure rate with the technique. Midwives and doctors perform vaginal catheterization and prescribe abortifacients

such as Cyotek and insertion of Misoprosotol. It is shown that a majority of the providers do not use modern and safe procedures but rely on unsafe traditional methods with known complications and risk. The women in the study say they do not feel safe or comfortable seeking the service, but have no choice of method or service provider.

### The Reproductive Health Bill – the RH-Bill

Efforts are also made in Congress to introduce legislation on reproductive health programs, though not without resistance. The Reproductive Health Bill (the RH-bill) is a disputed attempt trying to provide a legal approach to reproductive health.

”The Responsible Parenthood, Reproductive Health and Population and Development Act of 2011 - HB 4244” is a policy proposal and attempt to address the countries need of universal access to reproductive health services trough national-level legislation. The bill proposes programs and interventions that would improve universal access to family planning services and information as well as maternal heath services “from the national level down to local governments and communities”. It means to act preventive on abortion and acknowledge the fact that abortion is illegal but stress women’s need of post-abortion care. “While this act recognize that abortion is illegal and punishable by law, the government shall assure that all women needing care for post abortion complications shall be treated and counselled in a humane, non-judgemental and compassionate manner”. (PLCPD).

It is a controversial bill under harsh and vivid debate in the Philippines, between those that wishes to pass it and those rejecting it. The Catholic Church constitutes one of its most ardent and strong opponents. The movement against the RH-bill is ever present and noted in the Philippines. The joint voices that wish to pass the bill are somewhat less vast and loud. Many public spaces hold messages from the opposition, rather than advocate the passing of the bill. Posters saying; “Life and death belong to God alone, save RP (The Republic) from idiots who play Gods. Junc the Satanic RH Bill” is common.

### Surrounding Structures – the Catholic Church

Even though the Philippine state is secular the power of the Catholic Church is vast and influence policies of reproductive health and women's access to such services immensely. “In the Philippines 83% of the population is Roman Catholic and religious fundamentalism backed by political power has become a formidable barrier to women’s access to family planning” (Center for Reproductive Rights & ARROW, 2005, p. 13). In the Catechism, which constitutes a summary of the principles of the Catholic religion is written about abortion:

Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law:

- You shall not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish.
- God, the Lord of Life, has entrusted to men the noble mission of safeguarding life, and men must carry it out in a manner worthy of themselves. Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2271).

The Catechism further states that “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception (2270). From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person - among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being of life”. It calls upon civil society and political authorities to legally protect the life of the unborn and its fundamental rights to life from conception (2273).

“Although it recognizes the principle of “double effect”, the Catechism prohibits direct abortion without recognizing any exceptions. There is no recognition of abortion in situations such as when the pregnancy poses a risk to the women’s health, is a consequence of a crime such as rape or incest, or when there is a risk of foetal malformation.” (The Center for Reproductive Rights, 2006, p. 86).

## **Part 2 – Empirical Material & Findings**

### **Dispositon**

With background to the purpose of this study, which is to increase the knowledge of how the question of abortion – under its criminal ban – is being dealt with by those working with Social Work, Reproductive Health and Women’s Rights and Empowerment in the Philippines I present the empirical material as follows:

Part 2 will start with findings from more initial meetings and interviews with actors/groups/organisations in the fields of Social Work, Reproductive Health and Women’s Rights. It presents their opinions and experience of abortion in their line of work (pp. 31-36). This is to familiarise you as a reader to the Philippine context and the surroundings of the abortion discourse, in order to grasp the complexity of the issue and get a notion of how charged the issue is.

Thereafter is presented interviews with groups that in different ways do address the issue of abortion as a public social issue and health problem in the Philippines, hence answering the question if there are any actors/groups/organisations that address the issue of abortion as a public social issue and health problem in the Philippine society affirmative. (pp. 37-56). These four groups have been identified as either anti-abortion or pro-abortion, creating two opposite positions with two groups in each theme. Answering the questions of this study, the empirical data from these groups present as follows:

- a)** How these groups seek to decrease the number of unsafe abortions in the Philippines
- b)** In what way the illegality of abortion affect and form these interventions
- c)** How the discourse on abortion, and what is publicly claimed by these groups, is affected by the criminal ban and the social stigma of abortion

Focus is on the interventions provided by these different groups, how they are able to act within prevalent structure and how they are affected by the criminal ban on abortion. All are addressing abortion in their line of work but from opposite sides and with fundamentally different understandings and conditions for their work. The analysis looks into findings of the empirical data – what is said and done - and shows how prevailing structures and discourses in the Philippine society affect that work. By using social constructivism and conducting a discourse analysis I will discuss the different circumstances that these discourses live by in the Philippine society.

## **Familiarising with the Philippine Context – Initializing Meetings and Interviews**

To further introduce and give examples of the present discourse on abortion in the Philippines is below presented information received in more impartially meetings and interviews. These are conducted with representatives of one women's organisation, one political party, staff at a reproductive health centre and clinic, one social worker at a governmental agency, one social worker at an NGO for women's rights and empowerment and a nun of the Catholic Church working at a women's and children centre. The material aims to present you as a reader to general opinions, statements, discussions, circumstances and ideas about abortion and how these actors - under the criminal ban, are dealing with abortion. The material has surfaced and presented itself during initial meetings and interviews in which I have sought to understand and put myself in the context and existing circumstances and discourses of abortion in the Philippines.

### **Women's Organisation**

We are not saying that abortion is good, we are not in favour of pre marital sex and unwanted pregnancies but we consider the reality. Abortion is a fact and the healthcare is lacking. You got to see to the reality and the health of the women. Legalization of abortion, protect the health of the women through legalization of abortion. Then the women would be treated well, being given the assistance they need. Instead of becoming a criminal they would be taken care of.

This organisation is not campaigning for abortion, but my informants say that they see the reality of unsafe abortion and therefore want to legalize it. They told me repeatedly that they do not support abortion nor are pro-abortion, but they are pro-choice and pro-health services. They are into the campaign of the RH-bill and emphasize the importance of information about reproductive health and family planning. They see how a passing of the RH-bill would decrease the level of unwanted pregnancies and abortion but how a pro-RH statement is considered equal to being pro-abortion and taking steps towards legal abortion by the Church. They refer to the church as "The fundamentalist Roman Catholic Church" and see a great problem with what they consider closed-minded people, only considering the words and sayings of the bishop, sayings that people dare not oppose.

### **The Gabriela Women's Party**

We will not and do not campaign for abortion. There are more pressing issues to be dealt with. Economic issues, laws that will respond to poverty and inequalities. We emphasise the needs of the poor population of the Philippines. If we campaign for it (abortion), would it help women? But it could be an option, a choice. Women do it, no matter what. There is access and availability to backstreet abortion. Women choose to have it, despite the law, it is a reality.

The Gabriela Women's Party are pro-choice and think that the choice of abortion should be given on a case-to-case basis. But they see a risk with legalizing abortion and a possibility that boyfriends and partners might be forcing women to undergo abortion if it was legal.

According to them a statement of being pro-abortion would kill the party in terms of taboo and stigma in society, making such a statement more or less impossible. They stress that to be talking about a legislation of abortion they need to know whether it would be beneficial for women or not. As well, they see more pressing social issues at hand, issues happening on a larger scale to which they have to respond and that the Philippines is not ready to discuss a legalization of abortion.

### Family Planning and Reproductive Health Organisation

How they wish that it could be provided, to people who seek the service. But then, we are an organisation, we have our board members and we have the staff. And if the board, because the policy says no, then we can't do anything. But on our private capacity, as workers we can say; you go to this person. But we can't tell everybody, everybody seeking the service I mean, we cannot tell everybody to go to that, because there are reasons. As for me, when I was younger, I can refer.

This is an organisation that advocate and provides reproductive health services. Their policy is no to abortion, but in their everyday work meeting women in the concern of abortion they have sometimes acted against that policy and do wish the service could be provided. They work preventive and stress that family planning is not abortion - but prevention of pregnancy. They identify one factor to reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancy and abortion by strengthening the use of contraceptives.

Many years ago they had a doctor at the clinic that performed abortions, even though the policy was the same as today; anti-abortion. Women were referred under very strict and careful circumstances. When the doctor left the organisation she continued her work and my informant says how she used to refer clients there. As of today my informant is not as up to date with where or to whom she could refer women wanting an abortion. But she still has an idea of where other organisations have clinics providing the service.

### Clinic nurse

Talking with one of the nurses at the clinic of the organisation mentioned above I ask how she deals with the women coming to them wanting abortion; "Concerning the cases of abortion we have to stick with the Pro-Life. Because it's our policy and our orientation". She says that they address abortion as a social issue and a public health problem through preventive measures and work and that they are pro the RH-bill.

According to her they had 3-4 cases of women walking in wanting an abortion last year (2011), they don't offer the service at the clinic but do counselling. During counselling they try to convince the woman to keep the baby. They talk about the risk and disadvantage with abortion. Though, my informant admits these risks of abortion would not exist if safe, medical abortion was a service legally provided. Depending on the circumstances she can be more understanding of abortion. "But if we fully legalized abortion everyone will go for abortion and the numbers of abortion will increase".

Clinic staff was asked to participate in a training on how to perform safe medical and surgical abortion by a contact in their network. This person asked for midwives and medical people wanting to learn how to perform safe abortion, so that abortion could be provided in safe ways despite its illegality. In accordance with the policy of the organisation that offer was declined by the clinic staff as they are pro-life. Still they refer women wanting abortion to the group that offered them the abortion training and the nurse know of two more clinics performing abortions in nearby cities.

**Social Worker at Women's Section at CSWDO (City Social & Development Office)**

"Abortion is not good, it is against moral values, our culture, a taboo. There is future punishment if doing an abortion. God will get angry. You will never get pregnant again".

As a government agency the CSWD approach is strictly no to abortion as it is a law offence and my informant said that women would definitely not come to them wanting abortion. Still she recalled two cases of women wanting abortion and very secretively asking her for help. As a governmental agency their plan of action in the matter is adoption.

My informant thinks a woman wanting an abortion acts out of confusion and that working towards empowering the woman is the best thing to do in order to decrease the numbers of unsafe abortion. She say that the CSWDO is there, ready to help and be of support. They can give financial aid, food and shelter, practical skills development, and livelihood for a business. "We tell them what to do. Counselling will lead to empowerment. After that they will not think of that anymore, no more abortion".

My informant does not consider any circumstances or reasons for having an abortion nor should abortion be legal no matter what.. She have never heard of, nor come across any organisation directly saying they are pro-abortion; "They might be out there, but no one would say that they are pro-abortion. They will get ostracised, the people would get angry with them, they would be killed. (laughter)".

## Social Worker at an NGO

We always advise them and we still entertain it as long as it is before the first trimester. We don't say anything because we want them to turn to us. We'd rather see them; we'd rather hear them speak out their minds rather than keeping it inside and doing it to themselves. Because it is more dangerous.

My informant have been working as a social worker with different NGOs for many years as well as being a teacher at a university educating social workers. She told me that many times when working, women have been coming to her saying they want to have an abortion. According to her it is different working at an NGO compared with the government, as NGOs stress personal decision and choice. Almost all organisations she has been working with are not really pro-abortion, but they don't stop women from getting abortion. There is an existing environment and structure that is very reluctant to publicly being pro-abortion. "(Name of organisation) is pro-abortion, but they would not call it pro-abortion, they will call it informed choice". She claims that if an organisation or group would address themselves as pro-abortion they would get alienated.

At the NGO they always advice the women wanting abortion to make sure that they do it properly, and that it may not be advisable after the first trimester. They don't immediately advise them to have abortion. They undergo some counselling to really understand the woman's situation and make sure she understand the implications of a possible abortion. They inform the women about the safe abortion and about the risks if they do it on their own, just to make sure the women receive the proper care and services. "Right now we have a doctor in Manila, and if somebody comes and want to have an abortion, she will assist them. I will call her and send them there". She says that through networks of people being at the same side and working for the same cause word gets around and contacts to providers of safe abortion are spread. "But of course this doctor does not speak aloud about what she is doing, but she knows me, she knows my position, so fortunately she told me; no problem just call me and bring them here and I'll take care of them". Still a majority of women are not that lucky and do it the unsafe way.

## Interview with a Sister of the Catholic Church

"Because the moment a woman commits abortion, it is the spirit that is being devastated"  
The Catholic Church consider abortion a sin, preach abstinence are anti the RH-bill and advocate Natural Family Planning instead of artificial/modern contraceptives. To get an understanding of the Catholic Church position on abortion I met with a sister of the Catholic Church, working at a Women and Children Center by a city Cathedral.

According to my informant and the Catholic Church abortion is considered a grave sin, as abortion is the killing of a human being and the committing of a crime. They believe that life starts at the moment of conception; therefore any determination of development is considered abortion. But, my informant makes a distinction between abortion depending on the motivation and reason to performing it. In medical cases to save a mother's life, abortion is allowed and cannot be judged a sin, as it saves one life rather than losing two. But if the decision to have an abortion is not due to a medical case but the woman's decision alone, she considers the intention of the abortion a selfish act of pure killing and a grave sin.

### "Because God Can Make Crooked Line Straight"

Talking about cases of rape and incest, when actions that are forced upon a woman lead to the consequence of a pregnancy Mary says that no matter the circumstances we have no right to terminate life and we have no right to kill. My informant speaks of a centre where she used to work in Manila. They addressed cases of incest, rape and unwanted pregnancies. She was working with the women and their emotional states through counselling. Sensitive counselling is about having no judgement or blaming attitude towards the women. "Some of them hate, some of them want to get an abortion, some of them plan to have their baby adopted. So my work there is the healing".

Looking into her records she had five young women, 16-26 years old that came visiting her in 2011, contemplating of having committed abortion and looking for counsel. In those cases she has a general approach called the psycho-spiritual approach, a crisis intervention and stress reduction and she also offers non-judgemental and non-blaming sensitive counselling. If the women are Catholic my informant will ask if they have considered confession.

### Anti the Reproductive Health Bill

The Catholic Church is strongly against the RH-bill and considers modern contraceptives as abortifacient. They preach and advocate abstinence and using the condom to prevent conception is considered promiscuity. Instead they teach Natural Family Planning (NFP). Pre-marital sex is considered a sin and Sister Mary visits High Schools to conduct seminars with the students in something she calls "Awareness raising activity focusing on Christian view on Human Sexuality". She mentions the danger with unwanted pregnancies as that includes abandonment, rejection and not being accepted by the mother when still in the womb. "I think most of the people who are going astray now, are a product of unwanted pregnancy."

## **Findings**

The material show that none of these actors *directly* address the issue of abortion as part of their work, but consider it a public social issue and health problem in the Philippine society and have different means to face that. A difficulty to openly express the opinion to be pro-abortion is highlighted throughout talks and meetings. There is an issue to publically be pro-abortion and many statements show that such an opinion will have negative consequences for any group or organisation. The discourse and what is and can be publicly claimed by these actors/groups/organisations is clearly affected by the criminal ban and the social stigma of abortion. There is also the point that the Philippines have other more pressing matters to deal with, before the question of abortion can be properly addressed.

Some groups are eager to emphasize they are anti-abortion, but that they acknowledge abortion as a serious issue and that concerned women should be provided choices and services and not be considered criminals. Other groups view abortion as a violation of God, the Philippine culture and of life and cannot consider abortion under any circumstances.

Exploring interventions in the area of abortion these actors/groups/organisations seek to decrease the number of abortions in the Philippines mainly by either being pro-RH and promoting access to contraception and RH, or by being anti-RH and promoting abstinence and natural family planning. Either way focus is on preventive measures seeking to decrease the numbers of unwanted pregnancies leading to abortion. Adoption is another intervention mentioned for women wanting abortion. Some have a clear policy against abortion, but do at times act against that policy by referring women to a clinic performing safe abortion. Many NGOs have networks and contacts of abortionists where they can refer women. The illegality of abortion clearly affect and form these interventions as they need to be clandestine and this secret information only spread by word of mouth. To be lucky to have a safe abortion you need the right contacts, making these interventions reach only a handful of women and becoming a matter of who you know.

## **Pro-Abortion or Anti-Abortion – Thematic Interviews**

Below is introduced the thematic interviews with groups identified as pro- or anti-abortion. This to go deeper into the matter of abortion in the Philippines and how these groups deal with abortion under its criminal ban and the existing social stigma. The following interviews are divided into groups that position themselves at either side in the abortion debate, opinions manifested in two groups being pro-abortion and two groups being anti-abortion.

## **PRO-ABORTION**

The two groups that are pro-abortion are incapable of carrying and expressing that opinion publically. Instead they provide safe abortion in spite of the criminal ban. They are working actively with empowerment of women and reproductive rights. Both groups are pro-RH and therefore reluctant to publicly announce being pro-abortion as that could have a harmful impact on their advocacy related to the RH-bill. Their mutual focus is on providing safe abortion as an alternative for women. They identify the Catholic Church as a big block for any change in the discourse of abortion and reproductive health matters and wish the legal structures surrounding abortion to change.

### **Group 1**

Our public statement, our position on abortion, we say that “too many abortions could have been prevented in the Philippines, contraception could have helped”. When a woman has abortion, she should have compassionate, non-judgemental and competent care. And the third one is there should be reforms, in the Philippines. So, it’s like a spectrum. So we cannot, we cannot just... if media interviews get only a snapshot and you would say for example; we are for abortion. If that’s the only thing that comes out, without the full...then it’s...then it is dangerous for us.

This group address unsafe abortion as part of their advocacy work in regard to reproductive health, post-abortion care, and advocacy for the RH-bill. But does not address itself as pro-abortion publicly. They are seriously problematizing the very restrictive abortion law in the Philippines and think that needs to be changed. They refer to the Philippines as a Catholic State and can’t imagine anyone working with reproductive health that is not supportive of abortion. and the illegality of abortion affect and form interventions provided by the group.

### **The Inability to Publicly claim to be Pro-abortion**

We have to be very careful that we raise the issue of abortion, but in a way that we are not isolated from the people that should get the message. That they get the message. All this violation of contraception are also the same violations to abortion. It is like a spectrum of violations. The conditions of unsafe abortion has been successfully presented through the years as cause of maternal death, therefore we need the RH-law. That’s why, for me, I don’t want to jeopardize any discussion that will push us away from that focus.

They claim and the findings show that what is publicly expressed by this group is highly affected by the criminal ban and the social stigma of abortion. Looking at the evolution of the RH-bill they have experienced a change in the climate of discussions. Advocating for the RH-bill makes discussions and advocacy for abortion even more difficult. According to my informants a public statement saying that they as an organisation are pro-abortion would do more damage to their cause than good, especially as they are working for the passing of the RH-bill. They fear that such a public opinion will endanger the RH-bill in itself. If a group

working for the RH-bill claim to be pro-abortion, the opponents will consider the RH-bill to be a pure abortion bill and make it even harder to pass. “So, anyone of us who would want to discuss abortion, cannot do so because we are not as publicly as we use to....because we might...that might impact the RH-advocacy now”.

With that said they are very cautious not to push people to say they are *against* abortion just to protect the RH-bill. They keep on stressing the importance of not becoming isolated from the debate and losing their voice and influence concerning reproductive health matters, as they fear would be the case if the publically expressed being pro-abortion.

### A Kiss of Death

Earlier they were more focused on the question of abortion in itself and at one stage pondered venturing into abortion advocacy and openly be pro-abortion publicly. Talking among their likes and trustees, also disagreeing with the harsh law on abortion in the Philippines, they were still advised not to publicly say they were pro-abortion. They were discouraged with advices that doing so would be equal to a kiss of death for them.

This group does a lot of community work addressing reproductive health issues. If advocating for abortion that word – abortion - would become the only thing people would see and know them for. People would fail to consider the importance of other parts of their work and only see “abortion”. Bringing all other efforts, visions and missions of the group down the drain. My informants emphasize the importance of addressing the question of abortion, to have a opinion and start a debate beyond their inner circle, but also kept on talking about how to do so slowly, step by step and address the issue in a more subtle way.

Yes, it is very important but we need to carefully distraight (sic) our message in such a way that you do no isolate...that is always the point; that we do not get isolated. Because isolated it is so easy to you know, neutralize you if they feel that you are just one. And that is why eventually it was very important for us that they saw us as helping in maternal care, they see us help with community women, they know we have a very strong foundation in the community. So it is...now even if they say -hey you are abortionist’s etcetera, people see that we do a lot more things, it is just not abortion. And I think...that’s why it is a little difficult to attack us on abortion alone. So I think that was good, that was good advice.

at abortion is illegal makes it an even more difficult matter to have an opposite public opinion about. The public would react on supporting illegality, that the mere opinion being pro-abortion would be equal to being a criminal, it would be regarded like supporting killing. And also, as an organisation in need of funding, many funders explicitly do not want to support an organisation that claim to be pro-abortion as that would be close to supporting illegal activity.

## The RH-bill: Putting Abortion on the Agenda?

On the other hand, while claiming the climate and discourse around abortion having changed negatively, my informants also see how the RH-bill in a sense has created and equally become a platform to talk about abortion. The group keep on emphasising that the RH-bill is not equal to being pro-abortion. They experience that there is a campaign against people and organisations pushing for the RH-bill. Opponents seem to think their advocacy violating and pro-abortion, as such the RH-bill has become like a magnet to anti-abortionists but at the same time something of a platform to talk about and discuss abortion:

Because...because of the RH-bill we are also talking about abortion. Not, not really saying that abortion should be legal, but saying that abortion is an issue. And it is very related even to the issue of maternal mortality, it is related to contraception. So there, there has to be a way of framing the discussion.

Because of the RH-bill abortion is presenting itself in the debate, people are naming it for the first time and making it an issue to be dealt with. They say how abortion have been surrounded by silence but now see a positive change where those advocating for the RH-bill are forced to see abortion as an issue that needs attention. “You can’t just have family planning cause (...) the reality...women are already having abortions, whether we accept that or not”. Also, the message is being communicated and received by the public; that the RH-bill will actually prevent abortion, it will prevent unsafe abortion and it will prevent maternal death, not the opposite.

Claiming the RH-bill to be a good platform for talking about abortion openly, my informants talk about the difficulties that still arise having that discussion. Especially as the opposition get very defensive when the RH-bill is interpreted as an abortion bill. They say how every public discussion on abortion must be well calibrated so that it does not get into a philosophical/theological discussion on where life begins. At the moment that risk is imminent, especially as the opposition interpret the RH-bill as an abortion bill itself. “Because if you push the discussion towards that you will be defensive...and you will just be debating on where life begins, and then sacrifice the many women who needs RH. Who needs better services, so they will not be pushed to be doing unsafe abortions”

## Providing the Service of Safe Abortion

But we are very careful about the people that come here. If you look at the clinic you have several doors there, it’s structured like many abortion clinics in the US where you have layers and layers of screening before you get to...Unless we know the woman. We prefer that she is personally referred. Someone we know and then we can trust. Walk in patients could be a trap, so we have had one NGO that we were referring to, before we had our own services. They had been raided twice already.

The group might have a difficulty to verbally and publicly claim to be pro-abortion, but still,

practically they address the issue in a very clear way; they have a clinic where they provide the service of safe medical and surgical abortion. That is how they seek to decrease the number of unsafe abortions in the Philippines.

In that sense they have a very clear stand in the matter even though they cannot express that publicly; providing abortion and hence breaking the law is their intervention and practical way to address the issue. And that intervention is most definitely affected and formed by the illegality of abortion. The service is a hidden fact; women get the knowledge of this group and their abortion-service through word of mouth. It cannot be provided or spoken of outside their circle of friends and trustees. If someone calls or simply walk in asking for an abortion, without anyone in the group/organisation having referred the woman, they will deny providing abortion.

They had a hard time deciding upon if they should do this or not, because they as a group are strong advocates for reproductive rights and they did not want to risk that work by providing abortion services. My informants say it was easier just advocating for policies to change, because then they would just refer women to other groups providing abortion. But when they heard how these women could not afford the services and how they were badly treated prevailing it, they decided to be providers themselves.

Oh yes, women have been shouted at. My sister availed of the services, and she... After convincing her that this is safe, this is all right, etcetera. There is a first level counselling on my part. After the procedure she went to me crying, because the person who were doing the procedure they were talking about; "Oh God, I will need to go to church again, and pray over this, I have sinned again today, of course this is all for the good of the women, but I am now again...I have sinned again!"

My informants say how other groups providing the services not always do so in a good and compassionate way. Groups with a feminist understanding might have another protocol for providing abortion than a family planning organisation. They were unhappy with the way the women were being treated when they referred them and therefore set up their own services. But that comes with a constant worry of being caught and risking their position as a high profile advocate for the RH-bill. "The services are so sensitive, and your advocacy could suffer or the services could suffer, you know. And this is actually what is happening when they label us publicly as abortionists".

They tell me how they receive calls and text messages with threats, creating an atmosphere of insecurity, questioning if it would still be safe providing the service of abortion. But knowing that there is very little safe abortion, and that in the communities there are hilots and midwives that do it under terribly unsafe conditions they keep on. It might be much at stake publicly being pro abortion, but the group keeps on providing abortion which to me becomes

more than having a verbally expressed opinion in a climate that does not welcome nor embrace that opinion eagerly. But this group believe there should be a safe way to have abortion “and that’s why, that’s why medical abortion was so important to us”.

### No Liberating Stories; Just a Criminal Ban and Consequences

In the Philippines, the framing of abortion if we want to win over people it is not to say this is my body, this is...I can decide on my body. It’s, it’s not like that, the culture is not like that. You can’t say; I can decide on this. Actually you cannot use it. You can say it, you can practice it, but you cannot use it as the frame for any discussion on abortion precisely, because we are way, way, way back.

Abortion needs to be treated from a perspective that takes local and national context into account. The Philippines is not a context in which the liberating part of abortion on demand can be highlighted according to my informants. It is more about the fact and reality of what happens if women are deprived the right to safe abortion. They say you cannot talk about a woman’s right to abortion in the Philippines because people are not ready for that. To them the Philippines is far away from a right-based perspective of abortion and something that would be difficult for Philippine women to identify with. A first step and focus in addressing the issue of abortion is instead on demanding safe services and access to family planning.

My informants want the extreme cases of abortion in the Philippines to be shown. They see it necessary to focus on the most compelling reasons for having an abortion, the extreme cases where the failure to provide abortion cause grave problems for women. According to them the illegality of abortion is their biggest concern and problem. One of the informants has undergone a abortion herself and puts it like this:

I just want to point out, that even for those like me, who were lucky enough to have a safe abortion because of access to friends. It’s not that liberating. Per se. I still have to agonize over the decision for so many years. (...). Every woman with a story of a abortion that I meet up to today always remind me of that experience. Even if it is a conscious decision, I am comfortable with the decision, and I was lucky to have a safe abortion. It is still not that easy. So it is not liberating. Going trough that is...within that Philippine context it will never be easy.

As most stories of abortion in the Philippines are stories of illegal abortion, women having difficulties accessing abortion, women who need to access it from the backstreets and women who have complication you can’t inject the framing or the context of a country where abortion is available on demand. My informants are under the belief that there is nothing liberating about abortion in the Philippines. There are no happy stories of abortion, besides the ones being lucky enough having had a safe abortion at the clinic of this organisation. And that is a tiny number compared to the numbers of unsafe abortions and the clandestine backstreet business of it. That is why only the grim side of it is and should be uplifted. They

say that maybe one percent of the Philippine abortion stories are liberating stories of women having their abortion with this group or its peers. They treat the women well and with respect but do not provide a balanced side to the bad parts of abortion in the Philippines. This group performing safe abortion is just an alternative given to too few women in need.

In the Philippine context you can't even talk about abortion and wanting to legalize it without stirring up a fight. You have to base abortion and your advocacy on the current political and legal context. And at the moment the legal context is that even contraception is a taboo, looking at the prolonged process of discussing the RH-bill. "You talk about reproductive rights as a spectrum. Where it includes contraception, and post abortion care AND abortion." As a conclusion you can not only focus on the question of abortion, as so many other parts of a satisfying provision of general Reproductive Health services and rights are yet to be addressed. In a context where even the use of condoms are being questioned as it according to some are considered a abortifaciant, the sole question of abortion becomes very much a charged issue and delicate matter to discuss.

## Group 2

Because if you are like, yes we are pro abortion! They will already, they would be closed on you. They wont listen to you and say you are evil, we shouldn't talk to you because what you are campaigning is abortion. You see? That's why the reproductive bill is not moving forward because they call it already an abortion bill. So...go around. Change the mindset. Tell them the truth. The issue, the concern. That's what we should be talking about, it's the problem. Not that abortion, because when I worked with (name of org.) 60% of the women having an abortion are Roman Catholic women. And the church is anti abortion. And the church is not giving services to women who are victims of rape. You can't just pray and your rape victimisation is gone away. You can't pray and that children without food will grow away. So that's how we project the other side. So we have our own concerns to promote. Like the church save the soul, we save the life.

This group advocates women's empowerment and equality to men. They are working with and addressing concerns of reproductive health and rights. On the issue of abortion they consider it part of a woman's right. As part of their advocacy and empowerment of women they consider abortion a reproductive right. They want to advocate safer direct services with regards to the pregnancy termination. "The problem is not that abortion occurs but if it is the safe way or the unsafe way? Cause there is no government way to do it. So we have to do it as you said it, underground, or secretly. But if you do it in the backstreet way, it is not safe".

The group think that a woman should be able to decide for herself whether to have a child or not. "With regards to abortion; if you don't like to continue any pregnancy due to some circumstances which you yourself know best, because it is your body, then you have the right to decide, if you pursue or not pursue your pregnancy". The group emphasize the right for the

individual woman to make a decision of her own, a decision about her life and her health. There might be consequences within the community and among the family as getting pregnant without reason and abortion is both related to such a social stigma, but the decision should lie freely with the woman. My informant is very expressive and tells me how she has no problem of publically say she is pro-abortion, it is something she considers to be a right that should legally and safe be provided the concerned women. But during our talk arise the same issue as during my talk with group 1. Because abortion is illegal and a very stigmatized topic publicly using the term being pro-abortion as an organisation is not as easy as one might wish. The discourse on abortion and what is publicly claimed by this groups is equally negatively affected by the criminal ban and the social stigma of abortion as is the case for group 1.

### “It’s All About How You Talk About It And How You Mention It”

It doesn’t matter if they call me pro abortion because openly we say; we advocate exercised right over body. If a woman calls it; “I had an abortion”, so be it. But, if you are facing like a Christian, a bishop. You know, you have to be friendly with all the other side of the fence so you have to use friendly terms. Rather than becoming adversary (sic) on the issue they are against. But we are just being honest and true to our column, that’s what we call it.

This group does not say that they are pro-abortion as it would have a negative impact and affect how people will look at the organisation. In a kind of calculated risk management the price one pays for making such a statement is considered higher than the possible gain if doing so. They do not say they are pro-abortion because of women’s rights in discussions, instead this group uplift abortion situations and tell them about women’s real situation. “We don’t call it abortion, we call it “...” (other term). If it’s “abortion”...(it’s) negative. So call it something else. And they will listen to you”. They connect the issue of abortion to real life stories of circumstances and actual cases of abortion. Many times people are in favour of abortion without realizing, simply leaning against that general opinion that is anti abortion.

My informant experience that when you talk about actual cases many people are supportive and admit that if they were in that situation they would also opt abortion. She says how the group want to change the mindset of people and make a change. What they are advocating is the safe way, instead of publicly talking about abortion and saying they are pro-abortion they publicly provide a service they call “...” which is another term for abortion (I will here not present the term used by this group as a means to express they provide abortion as that might have a harmful impact). “So that’s how we advocate and get around the laws so that we will not be judged as criminals and advocating criminal acts”.

## Abortion and the Roman Catholic Church

If you are a Christian, if you are fighting the church, you are a sinner; you don't want to be called a sinner, even if you know that you are. (...). So, if you talk to people they say they are against, but they had an abortion, they have children who had an abortion. Because they know that it is a problem, it is a situation and they have to decide to save the life of their children, the women, or to be economically (...) able. But if they talk about it; No I am against! Because you will be branded as a sinner. Do you want to be called a sinner? No! So, you say no (to abortion).

In the Philippine society you will be judged for having an abortion and my informant consider the Catholic Church being the number one institution blocking the abortion issue. With its strong normative voice it helps shape society's discourse on abortion. To go against the church is hard, especially in politics, and it affects the current debates, the RH-bill and the common reluctance to openly be pro-abortion. My informant say that politicians work towards the votes, and in order to protect ones votes you have to be on friendly terms with the church, even if you are pro-abortion and/or pro the RH-bill.

Concerning the people searching the service and the women having abortion there is a conflict between what you do and what you say. A large number are women going abroad for work to earn for the family and therefore needing an abortion to end an unwanted pregnancy. Many women seeking abortion are married Roman Catholics and my informant say how they many times after having had an abortion are the ones condemning it loudly. "They have an abortion and they pray. And they think it's forgiven, and they don't say they had an abortion. They say that abortion is evil. It is a sin. But they will have an abortion because they are in a dilemma (...). And when they talk they say it's a sin, but they had it themselves".

## Providing the Service of Abortion through Referral

No we don't explicitly say that if you need an abortion you come to US! Because that is advertising abortion services. We do it in the advocacy way that we have services like; If you are not able to manage your sexual...your reproductive, sexual whatever....and then...you are in a dilemma. You have to decide, it's a life, it's a lifetime thing. Then you can come, come to us. Ok. Because part of our services are; if you are a victim of rape and you get pregnant, you have to decide what to do with the pregnancy you can talk to us. All those things. So, it may be for counselling or for direct service to address your issue or your concern. That's how we do it. But, if they ask us; are you pro-abortion? And we go the other way around and say; we don't call it abortion, we call it; managing your concern. And for you to decide for your body. That's how we call it.

This group does not have a clinic of their own where they can perform abortion but they have a partner that perform medical and safe abortions to whom they refer their clients. They want to be an alternative to all the unsafe abortion methods and provide safe abortion. They do not keep any records and therefore can't say how many women they have attended. This because my informant consider that one woman having an abortion is already significant. They don't care about the number nor keep tabs on who the women are, if they are married, students, rape

victims, prostituted women etcetera.

She speaks of the type of abortion that the majority of Filipino women are forced to seek and that is not safe. How Hilots and abortionists doesn't practice the safe way to perform abortion. Providers generally perform abortion in highly unsafe ways and with no medical background. Even if the woman has passed the trimester and is five or six months into her pregnancy many will perform the abortion and there are lots of cases where women receive infections, become infertile and suffer damage to their reproductive health. But with no safe alternatives they will keep on doing it themselves, underground or at the backdoor. That's where this group wants to step in and be the alternative.

They advocate and inform that there are safe ways to do it. But when they talk about abortion they must conceal it in other terms and words and in a way so that it is not too obvious what they are getting at, this is how the illegality affect and form how the intervention to provide safe abortion is formed. For example they conduct seminars, and when invited among young crowds of students and adolescents they talk about their services and include abortion, though covered up behind a message that address the issue without using the actual word abortion. Instead they talk about it in terms of services they provide. If you have been raped and become pregnant and if you want to have counselling and services on how to manage that situation you can contact and talk to them. That way they get in contact with women that need and want abortion. They endorse the case to safe service providers, their partners in this concern, and that's how they give their service on abortion.

**“But Of Course We Can't Advertise; Abortion! Abortion training!”**

The group is also involved in the providing of training on how to perform abortion, so that the procedure of safe abortion can spread among medical trained people. If they know a person who is supportive of abortion and advocate for women's right they ask if that person want to do this training. According to my informant most people want it. She says it is more of an organisation matter more than a personal agenda, participants provide the service as an organisation. This group cannot do it themselves because they, according to my informant, will be raided. But there is a network of services and providers that has undergone training, where they can endorse women to access the service. The clinics are limited because they don't advertise. They can't. Instead of advertising openly they need to be clever about how to code abortion and what words to use so that partners and peers know what is the code for the service of abortion.

We had cases where the young, the woman got infected because it is not safe! Because the abortionist doesn't practice the safe way to do it. So they should advocate, or tell the information that there are a safe way to do it. Because women really have to find...they will do it themselves, so if your purpose is to save lives, you give the safer way. Rather than they do it underground, or at the back of the door...unhealthy. It is their choice.

The group aim to spread the access to safe abortion and make it accessible and affordable by those in a less fortunate socio economic situation. "I have known doctors, who are doing it at the back, here in (name of city) they do it. But you know, it is a secret also, and it is expensive also!" The doctors who are performing abortion secretly in the clinics are charging expensive fees. If you are rich you can access a safe way to have an abortion with the private clinics, if you are poor you are not as lucky. Therefore this group offer this training provided by an international organisation that is dedicating itself to issues and concerns of reproductive health. So that safe abortion will spread in spite the criminal ban. Their target is those women who cannot afford private clinics and therefore mostly the victims of unsafe abortion. They want to make the service affordable by women who might not be able to afford the private clinics and doctors who are doing safe abortion.

### An Underground Movement

My informant keeps on emphasizing the fact that abortion is a present occurrence. Under the criminal ban you cannot advertise such a service. As the word abortion in itself is so charged, when talking about their services and their work they do not nor can say; if you need an abortion come to us. As providers of abortion the group have to maintain a low-key profile. At the same time my informant want to stress the importance of telling women that there are services like this. Equally to group 1 they rely on word of mouth and cannot accept a walk inn patient. Women learn that they exist and that they can refer them somewhere to have a safe abortion. The women that come to them and receive the service are lucky because they heard of them. "So, part of the responsibility of the people who access the kind of services is to spread the word! You know, that there are services like this available".

My informant does not fear being raided or set up, but emphasizes the importance of being and maintaining a protective obscurity about their service. If they would openly advertise That they provide abortion it would be a back clash and my informant believes that service providers will be subjected to their opponents. Acknowledging the services will have negative effects and my informant say it is better that they do it among people who needs it and that they will find them. Often parents bring their children to access the services. Adolescents between 14-15 years old having pre-martial sex and ending up with an unintended pregnancy.

They take their children's options in consideration and they decide on abortion and seek the help of the group. They always have counselling and then refer them to partners that perform the actual abortion. Going to the clinic for the services they still must have another counselling session before going through with the abortion. They ensure that the woman's health is ok and that the pregnancy has not exceeded the trimester. Those providing the abortion are medically trained and the procedure is safe and free of charge. "And now it will multiply. But some people don't talk about it. But we have like women who had the services and they had friends who had the same kind of problem and they will pass on the information that there is this service available for that kind of concern".

## **ANTI-ABORTION**

These two groups have that in common that they both act within a policy that is anti-abortion. Though they do this in somewhat different ways. Group 1; Pro-Life, is actively on a mission to fight abortion and are anti-RH. Group 2; The Centre for Youth and Adolescent, are pro-RH and not on that agenda that seeks to fight abortion. They problematize the matter more but still act according to their policy being anti-abortion.

### **Group 1 – Pro-Life**

We assure them that there are other alternatives to abortion. Adoption! Yeah, it's an alternative, so we have, so far we have three babies already adopted this year. Only this year a lot of babies adopted. They come here, determined to terminate the pregnancy and have an abortion. And when we say adoption is an alternative.....so they see..... Cause they think when they have an unwanted pregnancy the only solution is an abortion. But, adoption is an alternative.

Pro-Life is a nationwide non-profit organization that educates and advocates on the matter of respect and responsibility of human life. They are anti-abortion, anti-RH and pro- natural family planning. This local office set up their service as a response to reports of high numbers of teenage pregnancies and abortions in the city. They see it as their responsibility to decrease the number of abortions in the city and their office was set up to help these women in crisis.

They acknowledge abortion as an existing problem and want to prevent abortion through education and abstinence with the notion not to have sex before you are ready to have a child. They have no consideration what so ever concerning abortion, no matter the circumstances they would never support it. One of their missions is to find and shut down those places where women avail the service of abortion, but they say it is hard and that they do not know how or where to find them.

## Adoption instead of Abortion

Mainly it is education, because many of those who go into abortion think...number one they think that the baby in their womb is just blood. Just blood...tissue...so you just have to flush it, flush it like menstruation. But if they are informed you know, fully, that it is not, then many of them, a majority, is already convinced that it is a human life existing in their womb. So they will not opt for abortion.

In order to prevent abortion Pro-Life mainly do a lot of preventive work and educate people so that unwanted pregnancy will not occur. They go to different school's, they go to the dormitories and talk to the girls and the young students about the consequences of pre-martial sex, teenage pregnancy, and the consequences of abortion both physically and psychologically. They talk about the risks of abortion, that it is not safe and with lots of complications. They advice anyone who needs help, is pregnant or have had an abortion, to come to their office.

Pro-Life advocates adoption as the alternative to abortion. Many women seeking abortion at Pro-Life end up keeping the baby, but if a woman have decided and want to give her baby up for adoption they help with the legal process. Before starting the process they make sure the woman in question is ready and really determined to have the baby adopted. Then Pro-Life try to find adoptive parents. As Pro-Life is against abortion in any circumstance they do not consider anything different in cases of rape or incest. If they would have such a case they refer them to the Department of Social Work and Development (DSWD).

They also have a doctor who provide pre-natal, check-ups and maternal care for free. With the assurance of the help that Pro-Life provide throughout the pregnancy a majority of the women will not abort their baby. My informants think that women will not opt for abortion if they knew there is a solution to their unwanted pregnancy. Pro-Life are anti the RH-bill and natural family planning is their alternative. They say that it is not a question of religion, belief and God; "But we have a lot of studies that support that the use of contraceptives will not prevent abortion".

## Pregnant? Need Help?

Yes, because of the sign that says "Pregnant, need help?" and so the phone number is there and they call up. And (name) would wisely say; let's just talk about it, come to the office. And so they come, she would say it is not good to discuss this things over the phone. And they always ask how much (laughter). Is it expensive? (laughter).

Women wanting an abortion for whatever reason turn to them and seek help, usually thinking they are an abortion clinic because they have a signage that says "Pregnant? Needs help?" After a phone call most of these women come to the office, not knowing what Pro-Life is or what they stand for. "Sometimes I think it is the man that calls to find out what services we

offer. But (name) always say; come over and lets talk about it. That's a trap (laughter)". In these cases they provide counselling in which they convince them that abortion is not the choice and that there are other choices.

Each month they estimate having 15-25 clients, most calling but also some walk in clients, all of them women thinking Pro-Life are providers of abortion. Most of these women are young girls who go to college or the university, but also married women are coming. The young girls many times fear their parents knowing they are pregnant.

Because especially, even in other countries when a woman gets pregnant and she is not married people would look down on her. And they would really look down on her in our society. That you are not married and you are pregnant, people would talk about...and even the family, it is a stigma to the family, that has a daughter, who is pregnant and doesn't have a husband. So it is really the parents who would get (...) angry! Really angry you know.

If there is a conflict present, Pro-Life offer counselling with the girl and her parents, trying to convince the parents to help their child. They claim their aim with the counselling is often fruitful and in the end they have convinced a lot of girls to carry their child full term. But they do not force the issue that they have to talk to the parents. They assure them that initially parents will really get angry but with time they will come around. "Because who will say thank you for getting pregnant?"

### What about the Right of the Child?

"(...) What right are we talking when we are saying about women's rights? She has the right to take care of her body, she has the right to have work, she has the right to be recognised, to have respect and the dignity of a human being just like the man has no? (...) So there is a child.... The focus here is in the right, but what about responsibility that goes with every act? Because when you make a decision, there is always responsibility that goes with it. There is consequences that goes with every act. So if we focus only on the right, then that is very limited, cause that only gives you one part of the human person.

According to my informants, Pro-Life focus on the life and rights of both the mother and the unborn child. They stress the importance of taking responsibility for ones actions and not engage in sex if not ready to accept and take care of the new life that might be the consequence of that act. When you decide to engage in sex and the consequence is a baby your responsibility is to take care of that new life. "So if they are not ready then they have to discipline themselves. That..if this is the consequence, and we do not want the consequence then we just have to do without the act".

One of their main messages is to wait with sex until ready to have a child, and they see inadequate emphasis on taking responsibility for ones actions and the consequences hereof, as they experience that discussions always focus on personal rights. "If you decide to have sex and you are ready for the consequence, which is new life, then go ahead. But if you are not

ready for it, then don't say it is your body. Because every decision has a consequence and you have to take up the responsibility that goes with it".

Considering cases of rape and incest, when a woman is not responsible for the action nor the possible consequence of pregnancy, Pro-Life says that there is no situation that is hopeless. They speak of the right of the child and how it is not the fault of the unborn if the mother was impregnated through rape or incest. They see how there are two things to deal with in such cases, firstly the feeling of guilt with the victim that will always feel that she is the cause of her rape and the baby. "But with counselling and support everything, somehow, all those we have helped.....DSWD, cause we are always in connection with them. Many things come out right. (...). And many cases where the baby has been born, through incest and the mother, the victim, has accepted the baby".

## Abortion and Religion

If somebody condemns another that is a personal thing. (...) It could be a self-reflection, that we don't want these things happening, but it is happening. No matter how much we want to stop it, it is happening, and sometimes we use the person to bring out our emotions. So I think it is human nature..like, you feel bad that this person has committed abortion, so you show her that what she did is wrong.

Being Catholics and Christians my informants say you have the belief that abortion is really something bad. They understand that in other countries where you don't believe in God it might not be much a thing of religion. But since religion is quite important in the Philippines women that have abortion feel that guilt of God. Then Pro-Life assures them that God will pardon you and that God loves you. They further consider it bad when Christians condemn and maltreat women that have undergone abortion, as it is considered a sin. Even so they believe that as a Christian you should be nice and understanding to fellow human beings, you should not condemn anyone for his or her action. Condemning a woman for having an abortion might be one way of telling her that it is not the best way. Still my informants think these type of responses need to change. " Because generally this is how Filipino would response to a wrong, to be mad".

## Post Abortion Syndrome

Many would believe that abortion is a solution to the woman, but no, it's another trauma. Even if ok, you scrape the baby inside, scrape it, destroyed, in the trashcan, finish! No, it is not, it will take time and that woman who had an abortion has to be helped. She needs counselling she needs to be accompanied until she is healed fully. Because the trauma is, it is like killing a person although she doesn't recognize that, but at the back of the mind, removing a new life...violently! Violently, that baby has undergone a violent death without the consent of the baby of course.

My informants discuss how there are cases of women, victims of incest and rape that have

ended such a pregnancy with abortion. Comparing the women that underwent abortion under those circumstances, with those that did not resort for abortion, they see a risk for that woman's physical well being. According to them those who resorted to abortion really put themselves in a pitiful situation because there is such a thing as post-abortion syndrome, no matter the reason nor the cause of the pregnancy and abortion. They say it's a psychological disease and a documented effect and complication of abortion. Women might have considered abortion the solution to their problem, but after the procedure they find themselves in psychological distress.

When they talk to people they tell them about this condition, and how a pregnant woman who did an abortion needs all the understanding in the world. If you know a woman that has had an abortion she needs support. "(...) After the abortion, she is so happy, even if you see her smiling...but deep inside she is bleeding, she is wounding. So she really needs advice, otherwise she will commit suicide". And if the people around her cannot handle that situation they tell them to refer them to Pro-Life.

To at least offer the friendship, the understanding. Of course not to say; Congratulations you had an abortion! (laughter). I mean what can we...we are very also clear about it, yeah of course what you did was wrong. And it hurt a life. But most of all you are the one hurt. And so you need to heal yourself.

They recall another case of a woman that came to them for counselling and help but in the end still went through with an abortion. She felt guilty and like she could not move on, being a Catholic one of my informants accompanied her for a confession to unburden and give her sins to God. "And they'll take care of it, make sure that you will be pardoned. (...) every now and then we text, to assuring her that God loves you in spite of what have happened, God loves you immensely. Just that assurance, cause they feel guilty".

### Support For Women That Has Undergone Abortion

In order to meet the need of help and support for women that have undergone abortion an organisation in Manila has organised a group of women in this situation. Mainly women in their thirties that have come out in the open about having had an abortion. Most of them had an abortion a long time ago but still feeling bad. It is a group of women who have had an abortion where they can support each other. With this group these women slowly come out and share their abortion stories and according to my informants bond together.

To support each other and to help other women come out. Because they suffer in silence. And they carry this burden the whole of their life. Nobody knows about it, nobody understands them, and society will look down on them. (...) So it is like you already fell on the mud and then people would still step on you. So how can you start a new life if there is no support?

This local branch of Pro-Life has not considered venturing into this kind of work by starting a similar group themselves. They work mostly preventive and offer counselling on a one on one basis telling the women that they have to go through a process of healing so she should come and visit them.

As an organisation they still acknowledge women that has undergone abortion and offer them support equally to as if she had not had an abortion. They think it self-righteous when hospital staff harasses women seeking help for complications of abortion and treat them badly. They tell of a former client that had an abortion with an abortionist that inserted a catheter into the woman's vagina. Bleeding and in severe pain the boyfriend rushed her to the hospital. "I talked to the doctors, please do everything you can to save the baby." After three days in the hospital the baby was aborted and the nurses in the septic ward treated the woman badly. "They gave her the foetus and said: Here! You are now happy! Imagine you are injured, she already had the injury of having an abortion and then you are so maltreated".

They see how those that opt for abortion might be standing without any support and not see another solution to their dilemma but to take a life through abortion. That is why Pro-Life wishes to spread the word that they are here and willing to help those wanting an abortion to find another solution.

## **Group 2 - Centre for Youth & Adolescent**

"Yes to abortion or no to abortion, we are in the middle, (but) we respect the culture of the Philippines". This group differ a bit from the other groups and organisations, being a centre for youth and adolescents informing about sex and fertility. But as part of the reproductive health section they face the issue of abortion and act on the stage where abortion is an issue. Being heavy on the preventive work of abortion and active in educating and wanting to inform youth about sex and rights they offer yet another interesting input to the discourse of abortion in the Philippines. "(...) We will always say; we don't fight with the Catholic Church, because we are together, we are promoting abstinence, we are promoting no to early sexual debut or teenage sex. And no to abortion. And more on values and responsibilities".

### **No to abortion but respect of personal choice**

The institutional principle of the centre is no to abortion, but they respect the right of women to manage their health and make their own choice. They address the issue of abortion educating sexuality and fertility management and risks, together with talks on values and critical thinking. Each year an estimated number of five girls seek help wanting an abortion.

“We have non-judgemental counselling with the girls, we do not impose our institutional values”. Still they are working with the hope that the girl will keep the baby. “I give you what I think is right, but at the end of the day it is your decision.”

Walking out of that door at the centre, whatever the decision made by the girl it is her decision and hers alone. She has the right to decide having an abortion but stand alone in doing so. My informant tells me that the girls that turn to them concerning abortion generally does not come back, as the centre cannot offer them that service nor refer them to someone who does. But if a girl would turn to them for post abortion care she would be welcome. One important part of the work after a young girl has had an abortion is to reintegrate her with an unsupportive family. “They should be her first level support system”.

They work preventative, to educate and inform youth and adolescent on reproductive health so that they can make “intelligent choices”. As part of that they are pro the RH-bill as they see that as a highly preventive measure to abortion. “Because the RH-bill is not promoting abortion. No. It’s managing, it’s prevention and management of abortion and its complications”. Further they claim to have a flexible approach between their institutional values and respecting the rights of the individual and her choices.

### Holistic View on Abortion

Prior to my interview at the centre they had a TV-reporter asking questions about the finding of two aborted foetuses in the city. One found by the Church Cathedral, the other near the city market. In such a case the centre consider both the death of the unborn and a life lost, as well as seeing and problematizing why abortion is happening.

The community suspect that above all young women do abortions and therefore the reporters wanted the centre’s view on the matter. My informant says that there is also the possibility of married women committing the act, not only young women, and that there are a lot of factors why women abort the foetus. The reasons for why young women would want to have an abortion she suggests can be many. They might have been impregnated out of accident, through rape. They fear for the future, for ostracism of the family and the anger of the parent’s if exposed as pregnant out of wedlock. As young girls they might have poor life skills and do not know nor think about the consequences of entering pre martial sex and teenage sex and are not prepared for having a child. “They do not really thinking about the consequence of their act, which is pregnancy, and eventually get into abortion, and not again analyzing critically on the effects of abortion, onto their body and also to their consciousness”.

The centre has a holistic view to the reasons for abortion and my informant mention how you first have to look into the individual situation and persona. How abortion might be the result of low life skills or that it could be a moral issue and a matter of how people value life from womb to tomb. Secondly you need to look into the situation and relationships at home as to why a young person has gone into teenage pregnancy. “(...) Because if we have this strong family value system, then maybe a young person would not commit abortion in spite of being impregnated out of wedlock”. Thirdly there are the external influences and circumstances, my informant talk about the media and how that affects the individual and the value system concerning questions like; “Is it ok to terminate life?”

### Not Being Ultra But More In The Middle

And this is very Filipino, because if you...or if you follow international code then you are also violating our Filipino culture. So I am now, now it will look like I am in between, I don't want to antagonize the community, because once you antagonise the community you can not really go promoting your advocacy.

The institutional value of the centre is no to abortion but they offer a somewhat less strict position as a group being anti abortion. According to my informant, they are not as absolute as the Catholic Church or other organisations might be. According to her they possess a wider paradigm and an understanding of rights and personal decisions, allowing them to see that women sometimes choose abortion, and they do not fault those who do. “Because we are in the middle, we are not ultra feminists and we are not ultra conservatives”.

My informant say that their institutional responsibility is to give full information about abortion but they do not interfere with the decision, even though they pray that the woman will keep the child. In spite of the services and the intervention given at the centre my informant say that they are not in control of a woman's decision. If a woman would choose to go for abortion they refer them to the hospital for more counselling and medical services if in need of post abortion care. Under no circumstances do the centre judge women that chose to have an abortion. They do not tell them that they are wrong, should go to hell, are bad women or give blame. It is still the choice of the woman and even though the centre has it institutional values and wishes concerning abortion my informant say that they do not force that onto the woman.

“(...) talking about spirituality, you are responsible to your own God, but don't impose your God on another person. Because spirituality is very unique and very relational, it is very personal. So to say that you are wrong, and to say that you are sinning, and I will ostracize you if you don't follow my rules then so be it, so be it. And would you believe that there are a lot more Catholics in the Philippines that are using pills and condoms, who also use...who also do abortion. (...) Married, Catholics blessed. So I will always say, the true Christian who is maybe impregnated will keep the baby of course, not all Catholics would do that. But there are a number of catholic's that go for abortion.

They are still heavy on the disadvantages of abortion. During counselling they speak of the implications of abortion and especially unsafe ones, where a woman might go to a nonmedical person and be given medicine that could destroy her body, cause maternal and child death, perforate the uterus and have lifelong implications on her conception ability and also affect her spirituality and conscious. “So if you are able to face all of these consequences, it is your choice. But I hope and pray that you keep the baby. And come back here for your counselling, further counselling”.

### **If You Want Abortion – You Are On Your Own**

The centre acknowledges abortion as a social issue and a public health problem but is heavy on being anti-abortion and promoting if possible what she calls the Filipino way. That is to keep your virginity, have self-respect, be abstinent and wait with sex until you are married and ready.

I am no to abortion, I give you the consequence of abortion, consequences that you choose. I will not fault you if you choose to go for abortion, I will not feel guilty neither. If you go for abortion when I have done my part. But I do not encourage them to go for abortion. Because of the institutional value.

The centre would not be able to identify any location or organization performing abortion, nor could they tell a girl in need of an abortion where to go to at least have a safe abortion as they do not have those connections. “ I respect your abortion, but if you decide to abort your foetus, then you look for your own service”. She says that they are heavier on no to abortion and if she in any way would refer or help women to get an abortion she would be a accomplice of a crime and of bad consciences. Further she stress how personal values and institutional values need be close and entangled. “Because your mission, vision and institutional values, personal values and organizational values have to be one and the same. Because if you are not it could be some disparity, or a gap, and you might find yourself not being happy in the organisation. If not, then you leave”.

### **Preventive measures – Education and Promoting of Critical Thinking**

Adolescents being such a captured group my informant is questioning what institutions like the schools are doing in terms of developing critical skills of young people. And what information the school give to young men and women in terms of sexuality and fertility. She considers it being something lacking, a gap and a possible inadequacy, in terms of such information in today’s educational system. She emphasizes the importance of education and information, in order to avoid unintended pregnancy and the need of abortion. One of the

centre's missions is to talk about sexuality and give young people information on fertility management, pills and condoms and where one could avail of reproductive health services when needed. During their talks with the young they present their stand of being no to abortion and positive to abstain of sex while young and not married.

However, this is now the balancing act. We give them also information on responsibilities and values, and respect on the rights of an individual. And this is now the balancing, cause if we are only to give the fertility and management and talk about pills and condoms and other contraceptives. This is gonna be...young people would become promiscuous.

Their work is preventive and aim to develop critical thinking that practically makes the young abstain from sex or (at least) use protection in order to avoid pregnancy. To give the young full information and talk about rights is one mission, but my informant believe it has to be done on an equal footing, balancing it with another mission which is talking about values and responsibilities, rights and personal decisions. They think that if they were only to offer fertility management and teach how to prevent pregnancy young will involve in sex. But if simultaneously also helping them develop critical thinking, give them values and talk about life skills, the centre hope that will provide them with a strong foundation which will create a balance and lessen the risk for pre martial sex and in turn lead to less abortions.

She see how other groups may give information on values but do not talk about sexuality. How a one-way focus on values only leaves young people to be curious of sexuality on their own. Instead there should be a rights based approach where young are given information, spirituality, and values, creating critical thinking that hopefully will prevent them from engaging in pre martial sex. “(But) it is their right, it is their decision. But you give them full information”. Rather than to say no to having sex and being curious the centre offers life skills and teach how to manage these temptations.

## **Analysis of Thematic Interviews and Findings**

Looking at my empirical data I keep on glaring at the definition of discourse in my book of Payne (2005, p. 31). I have before me a phenomenon; abortion. I have individuals and groups saying and doing things - spreading knowledge - concerning this phenomenon. It is a phenomenon caught within a structure and a social context, which is unequivocal with the perspective that abortion is wrong.

Findings show that there are groups that address the issue of abortion as a public social issue and health problem in the Philippine society, but that they do this in different ways, with different agendas and under different terms. Two major groups are identified— pro-abortion and anti-abortion – in different ways describing the situation, addressing abortion and either seeking to decrease unsafe abortion or stop abortion all together. A legislative context making abortion illegal further affect, form and steer what is said and done about abortion openly and publically. Notions that might not be verbally expressed are put into action when safe abortion is offered in spite the criminal ban.

The analysis will discuss and cover the combined picture of existing structures and discourses concerning abortion through the questions and findings of this study. It looks at how the two groups – pro-abortion and anti-abortion – within the same societal, cultural and legal framework address abortion under different terms and conditions. The analysis argue how these two separate notions are given fundamentally different terms to interact and spread their knowledge of abortion. It seeks to demonstrate the common knowledge that abortion is wrong and how this has created a natural attitude to that perspective, socializing the great majority of Philippine society into the anti-abortion discourse.

When analysing the findings of this study through social constructivism is discussed how these groups and present discourses, actions, interventions and ideas influence structure and how structure influence them, in a constant inter-relationship. Using the social constructivism theory throughout the analysis will be discussed how abortion is spoken about and what the repercussions of these ways of talking are. Who gains, who is hurt and who is silenced in the current discourse? What traditions are sustained and which are undermined?

### **The Issue of Abortion through Social Constructivism**

There are four individual groups present in the thematic interviews, offering two different sets of structures and understandings of abortion and reality. Within themselves, these groups of individuals interact and transfer their mutual view and knowledge of abortion, strengthening

their joint opinions as individuals and a group by how they speak and act this knowledge. Hereby they are constantly supporting, creating and re-creating themselves as well as that knowledge in a joint worldview. This is then transferred further through social interaction and relationships according to the theory of social constructivism as presented in this study.

The illegality of abortion in the Philippines is one of the most obvious and concrete structures framing the discourse and affecting the way in which my informants address abortion both verbally (through advocacy) and practically (through interventions). It is repeatedly argued in reports and studies that illegal abortion does not decrease abortion but rather increase numbers of maternal death due to unsafe abortion. (p. 21). The analysis treats the terms under which these groups are allowed to take, have and express their stand and view on abortion. What is allowed within existing structures and what create these structures?

### Different Conceptions – Different Consequences

According to social constructivism language is a reflection of the world and the world is a reflection of the word. It is in constant interaction with one another. Different sets of perspectives and opinions present different ways of speaking of and acting on the same matter. In this case providing one structure (anti-abortion) and a challenger to that structure (pro-abortion). Looking at the relationship between world and word the pro-abortion groups seek to deconstruct and confront and challenge the authority on knowledge, an authority that is anti-abortion. (Wenneberg, 2010).

Identified actions on abortion from the anti-abortionists are to publically be against abortion and instead advocate pro-life, to offer and promote adoption instead of abortion, to promote abstinence or contraception as preventive measures to avoid unintended pregnancies and abortion, to offer counselling and support for those who seek abortion and convince them to keep the baby, to support those who have undergone abortion, to provide maternal care and be a supportive source for young women to keep their child instead of aborting it.

The pro-abortionists are focused on providing the service of safe abortion and that is what they do in terms of action on the issue of abortion in the Philippines. Either having a clinic of their own or by referring women to partner agency that perform safe abortion. One group is involved in arranging trainings to teach safe medical and surgical abortion and spread this procedure and accessibility in the Philippine society. Interventions and underground movements like these cannot act in a public discourse and openly be pro-abortion, nor can they advertise that they provide safe abortion as an alternative for women in need. How they provide abortion as a clear intervention is highly affected by the criminal ban and their

limitation in the public discourse a consequence of abortions stigmatization. They are part of a feminist discourse where abortion is considered a woman's human rights, on a level meeting international voices on abortion as a woman's human right, but reason about how the Philippines is not yet ready for that discourse. Instead of talking about the right to abortion you might speak of the right to make your own decision in matters of RH and be pro-choice.

These interventions and more or less verbally expressed opinions are all acts that create, re-create and maintain a certain discourse in accordance with the social constructivism theory. Though, interactions and transfers of knowledge of abortion are not made under equal terms as we have seen in the interviews, it differs if you are pro-abortion or anti-abortion. The notion that abortion is wrong is more accepted publically and easily transferred throughout society, therefore that discourse is easier to re-create and maintain in comparison with being pro-abortion where the situation is fundamentally the opposite. The belief that abortion should be safely provided for women is not as welcomed publically and therefore a discourse more restricted and limited. The anti-abortion discourse carries the power while the pro-abortion seeks to grow and wish to challenge that power using the words of Gergen (1999).

### **Pro-abortion: How do these groups seek to decrease the number of abortions in the Philippines?**

By providing safe surgical and medical abortion these actors/groups/organisations seek to decrease the number of abortions in the Philippines. The illegality of abortion does obviously affect and form those interventions as it is a criminal act and therefore needs to be clandestine, secret and underground. They cannot inform women openly about performing this service and provide it in the scale they would want, as that would be too risky. Nor can they be publically pro-abortion in discussions or debates as that might harm them as an organisation and negatively affect their advocacy for the RH-bill. Also it might create suspicion and reveal that they illegally perform abortion. This shows how the criminal ban and the social stigma of abortion clearly affect these interventions.

Being pro-abortion is acting out post-modern ideological critique. It is about questioning, criticizing and challenging existing structures and conventions. It is a *generative discourse*, (Gergen, 1999). It challenges traditional understandings of abortion and as such it is an inconvenient and awkward notion for the general opinion. The terms under which the discourse wanting to allow abortion act, is much more restricted and limited. Because it wants to change what is already established and considered common knowledge. It wishes to

deconstruct and reconstruct what has been decided about abortion and hence goes against tradition, cultural discipline, conventions and common knowledge. (Ibid). Being pro-abortion is agreeing with what is being said at international conferences like the ICPD, FWCW trying to implement their plans of action and connecting unsafe abortion to maternal deaths and achieving the MDG5. (p. 22).

How is the discourse on abortion - and what is publicly claimed by these groups - affected by the criminal ban and the social stigma of abortion?

In the pro-abortion groups there is a will to provoke and affect the public discourse that without further ado condemn abortion and the women committing the act. They want to challenge this authority on knowledge and provide an alternative interpretation of abortion and bring that into discussions. Let us call them *poetic activist* as they refuse and reject the meaning of abortion that is given them. (Gergen, 1999).

But in line with ARROW, that highlight the importance of uplifting abortion as a human right, the pro-abortionists see a big challenge to ever see a positive change, making abortion provided upon request, within such a restrictive legal system as found in the Philippines. (Thanenthiran & Racherla). While carrying this wish and direction, there is still a need to delicately address the issue, not to provoke the majority, the public, the Church, the anti-abortionists or the anti-RH. Change is slow and the need to carefully address the matter of abortion is obvious but frustrating and to talk about abortion as a human right in the Philippines far away. As expressing the opinion being pro-abortion carries certain risks and difficulties, this discourse stand limited. It acts within a social context that mainly is constituted by anti-abortionist supporters and trustees. Their notion does not fit into surrounding structures and therefore it is not welcomed and pushed away from the public discourse. They can't use language as a means to transfer their conception of abortion the same way that the groups being anti-abortion can. In their attempt to *deconstruct discourses* and offering alternative knowledge the pro-abortion groups through their actions seek to challenge power and prevalent structures. (Gergen, 1999).

Putting abortion in a bigger context of reproductive health concerns, where universal access and free choice of family planning methods is urged by international authorities, the pro-abortionists equally represent a discourse that seeks to implement agreed programmes of actions through the RH-bill. But as even the attempt to legislate a national policy and reproductive health program is opposed from different conservative sectors (Osias, 2011) the possibility to talk about and provide legal and safe abortion seems distant.

It is throughout my interviews argued that the church stands in the way for changed attitudes of abortion in the Philippines. In reports and studies is also argued how certain religious contexts affect the discourse on abortion and create stigmatization and taboo concerning abortion, affecting reproductive health and access to safe abortion negatively. (Shah & Åhman, 2009; Grimes et al, 2006; Center for Reproductive Rights & ARROW, 2005; Raymundo et al, 2001). Looking at Philippine structure and how the Catholic Church do have impact on political issues and decisions, the catechism provide an understanding of the source of the anti-abortion discourse and how deeply rooted that is in the Philippines. The inability to publicly say that you are pro-abortion demonstrates the power that the anti-abortionists have and how grounded and institutionalized their notion is throughout Philippine society.

A majority of my informants say that to publicly carry and express their opinion as pro-abortionists would be devastating; the structure would not allow it. Words describing the consequences if publicly being pro- abortion range from being hammered down to being killed and that it would be equal with a kiss of death. These *repercussions* of talking about abortion and being pro-abortion can be devastating not only for the groups and organisations that have this opinion, but also for those women they want to help. (Gergen, 1999).

### Identity Politics – “Bad” Reputation

In its relationship with the Philippine society, pro-abortion groups have a bad reputation. Their opinion is interpreted as wrong and they are represented as “murderers”, a vivid example of how *other’s talk* affect how groups are looked upon. (Gergen, 1999).

The pro-abortion groups have no legitimizing force equal to that of the church. They have no institution that publicly carry their perspective and make that conception allowed and ok. Behind closed doors people may be pro-abortion, but publicly they would not express that, hence acting subjugated under the disciplinary regime while also contributing to its progress. (Foucault; in Gergen, 1999).

Human Rights have gained authority and stand as a benchmark on how a certain phenomenon might be regarded in terms of Human Rights, a part of social work is detecting what might violate these and instead ensure to protect those rights. (IFSW). Some claim that to not provide women with reproductive health services, such as safe abortion, is a violation of universal human rights. (Center of Reproductive Right, 2010; Grim et al, 2006; Tanenthiran & Racherla). This discourse has internationally gained consensus and deconstructed traditional discourses on abortion through critical reflection. Talking about

abortion as a woman's human right instead of murder and the right of the foetus - present another perspective, offering new possibilities for action on new grounds and understandings. (Gergen, 1999). It represents another discourse on abortion, one the pro-abortionists in the Philippines want to spread further but believe the Philippines is not yet ready for. This discourse has been noted and expressed on the international conferences searching to acknowledge and address abortion as an important health matter and social issue, searching to decrease unsafe abortion and uplift abortion as a human right. (ICPD, FWCW. p. 21-23).

**In what way does the illegality of abortion affect and form these interventions?**

Being pro-abortion you question and disagree with the obvious structure and power of the law. This constitutes very harsh conditions under which these groups are to express, act and create themselves. Simply carrying the opinion being pro-abortion is understood as acting against the law. And the two groups that are pro-abortion do act upon that notion by providing abortion and hence actually breaking the law. For these groups to act according to their perspective, resistance against the law is demanded. Such discourse has trouble spreading to the general public and become accepted by the same. Because it opposes and challenge one of the most obvious and "natural" structures in society, it acts against Philippine institutions and what they stand for. (Gergen, 1999).

The consequences of such a conception might be devastating as well as criminal and punishable by law. Wanting to change the discourse and the harsh climate surrounding abortion in the Philippines is obviously difficult, as is any attempt to deconstruct power and change prevailing structures in any society. But if doing so might mean the loss of other (political) attempts working towards goals that in the end might bring about change concerning issues connected to abortion it is a dilemma. Reconstructing and trying to change the meaning of a phenomenon is a process. Still the critical reflection of discursive convention provided by the pro-abortionists is seen as a means in that process (Ibid, 1999).

Issues that are connected to abortion, such as reproductive health and family planning are being addressed in the RH-bill. This is one political way that might provide a new framework for thinking about these issues. Slowly putting abortion on the agenda, without focus on that sole phenomenon immediately is one way to go. To let abortion introduce itself in a natural manner among other subjects concerning reproductive health is a way to introduce new elements and getting closer to the issue of abortion step by step.

### Taking action – transferring new stories

Discourse is not only made up by conversation and talking, action is equally an expression for a certain perspective. (Payne, 2005). The issue and problem for those being pro-abortion is to publicly speak their minds and express their divergent opinion using language and rhetoric. Internally, amongst the members of their group and those agreeing with this picture and understanding of abortion, their stand as pro-abortionists is clear and further transferred in interchange. But how does this perspective and understanding of abortion spread further, gaining public grounds? How change the mindset of the general opinion if the pro-abortion discourse only is kept and maintained by those that already agree with it?

The criminal ban on abortion gives the very concrete social structure that is the law. Some of my interviews show how certain actions break this law, that way they challenge the system and the social structure. As said, being pro-abortion you might be unable to verbally and literally take a stand in the discourse of language. But by breaking the law when providing and performing safe abortion, new stories are at the same time created. These social actions transforms into stories that are spreading, new structures and more sensible conceptions may through this emerge, in line with Gergens (1999) hopes and arguments. These actions of resistance against the law and the power bearing discourse on abortion create stories of resistance. Stories that in turn affect structure. Stories about how something taken for granted and real can be understood and acted upon differently. Actions offering new stories that can be transferred among women that undergo these safe abortions, an illegal act, and hereby move towards changed structures. (Ewick & Silbey).

### **Anti-abortion: How do these groups seek to decrease the number of abortions in the Philippines?**

These actors/groups/organisations seek to decrease the number of abortions in the Philippines by preventive measures, mainly by decreasing the numbers of unintended pregnancies and in turn abortion. Adoption is presented as an option by one of the groups. They both offer counselling to women wanting abortion, without pushing them to a decision but of course wanting them to keep the baby. Further is mentioned counselling and support for women who have undergone abortion in-group sessions.

The notion to be anti-abortion carry no difficulty, as that acts according to and within what has been agreed upon and considered true already; abortion is wrong. Abortion is murder. It is a law offence. It is a moral setback. It is killing. By being anti-abortion you simply confirm,

stand for and spread what is already there. What has already been legitimized through a process creating social norms and conventions, and as such made into objective truth and facts. That is what constitutes the prevailing *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the time. (Wennerberg, 2010).

While accepting the truth that abortion is wrong; is bad; is a sin; is murder etcetera, you nourish and transfer that knowledge and perspective on abortion through social interaction, creating a bigger system, which makes the anti-abortion notion, seem objective and *real*. The criminal ban on abortion is an institutionalized result of and at the same time a strengthening and legitimizing force to that perspective. It is very concrete fact of what we know as our way of living in everyday life. (Gergen, 1999).

**How is the discourse on abortion - and what is publicly claimed by these groups - affected by the criminal ban and the social stigma of abortion?**

As repeatedly argued, the “true” knowledge about abortion, which is carried and lived by the majority of people in the Philippines is structured and expressed as anti-abortion and pro-life. This knowledge is created, produced, constructed and determined in agreement between world and word, and institutionalized throughout society in an act of social constructivism (Gergen, 1999). It is a worldview that is shared by the majority of people and widely spread. It is a welcomed and taken for granted opinion that has become *common knowledge*. Being anti-abortion you also take part of the discourse that is given public space and appearance. It is transferred within the educational system, in political rhetoric, an opinion expressed by the president, by governmental institutions, the general public and even in organisations that might question the circumstances of abortion. It is what Foucault would call the *institutionalized disciplinary regime*. (Gergen, 1999).

The anti-abortion groups and the Catholic Church have been given/taken the preferential right of interpretation and the ones given abortion its meaning. It has created a system of concepts, which has become institutionalized throughout society. It is found in everyday conversation, in classrooms and schools, in public spaces and political discussions. Setting the agenda of abortion for society and the bigger whole, this discourse creates the structure and context in which abortion is found. It is a fine example of Foucault’s definition of discourse as power. (Gergen, 1999). With the Catholic Church as one of its most legitimizing forces it leaves the possibilities to question this conception and structure little space and capacity. How you describe and explain abortion and its consequences being anti-abortion is to rest assured against unquestionable knowledge and truth made and carried by the Catholic Church, culture and tradition, it is an opinion sustained by society’s major institutions.

Society and its inhabitants do not “see” this and act unknowingly and (in a sense) oppressed under the power of this discourse. The institution and rhetoric of the Church offers a *disciplinary power* that is well established in the Philippines, as many are Roman Catholics and as such indoctrinated to that view of the world. (Gergen, 1999). It is a structure and discourse that create and recreate tradition, it leave imprints that suddenly becomes something that has always been there. It is taken for granted; it is the way it should be. Abortion is wrong and it is illegal, because it cannot be any other way. It is a discourse that stand fundamentally in opposition to international consensus and that express a concern that WHO stand as a self acclaimed authority on presenting studies that show the need of universal access to reproductive health and question restrictive laws on abortion. This agenda is morally questioned and criticised. (Essig, 2010).

### Identity politics – “Good” reputation

The anti-abortion position, expressed through words and actions, is part of the Philippine *plausibility structures*. It is simply convention and part of every day life. It is opinions and perspectives that have become habitual; as such they stand unquestioned and not criticized. It is part of the cultural discipline; believing, thinking, saying and knowing that abortion is wrong. (Gergen, 1999; Payne 2005; Wennberg, 2010).

Religion in the shape of the Roman Catholic Church, has a good reputation. It is congratulated, described and explained in positive terms by its followers, hence a good reputation is developed and strengthened (Gergen, 1999). Discourses that condemn abortion enjoy equally good reputation, as it reproduces this knowledge. As noted in the empirical data many refer to the Roman Catholic Church when expressing their view on abortion. Even those women that have had an abortion participate in these activities, condemning an act they themselves have undergone as wrong and sinful. Being anti-abortion is the natural attitude and what is real and true, even if you yourself have had an abortion. If you in any context would say that, express understanding towards abortion or plainly claim to be pro-abortion, you would be ostracized. In the same way as a woman that undergo abortion would be. (International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2006).

Anti-abortionists share the perspective that life start at conception and call abortion a “sin” and consider it “murder”, adopting the language used by the church. This way of talking about abortion show the relationship with the church and the social context from which this perspective is rooted. It reuses a language and a rhetoric that has been successfully expressed and transferred by the church. The anti-abortion movement simply reproduce and carry on

that knowledge in the same spirit, strengthening this disciplinary regime. It is a system of concept and ideas that have become institutionalised in society. (Payne, 2005).

Interventions equally carry good reputation. They seek to help women make amends and come to terms with what they have done, without judgement and criticism. They offer supportive counselling helping women overcome this experience, all with the understanding that what she has done is wrong. Interventions are of preventive character, aiming to decrease abortion, save the life of the unborn and protect society's moral. Another example of how "opinions, behaviour and theory all affect and support each other". (Ibid, 2005).

**In what way does the illegality of abortion affect and form these interventions?**

The illegality of abortion does not affect and form these interventions as they act according with the law, nor is the discourse on abortion and what is publicly claimed by these groups affected by the criminal ban and the social stigma of abortion. Therefore the consequences of this conception is none, it is a publicly acceptable and shared conception. As such it can act with success in any Philippine context, as it does not question current and prevalent discourse. You act in accordance with convention, societal norms and the law, what is "real". Further establishing a discourse and a structure where abortion is illegal, something that is proven and repeatedly argued does not decrease the level of abortion. (Sedgh et al. 2012, p. 1, 2; ARROW, *Reclaiming & Redefining Rights*, p. 71; Shah and Åhman, 2009; Shah & Warriner 2006; Marge Berer, 2004, p. 2, 4).

This is also how the anti abortion movement is re-created and re-create itself, in a constant reciprocal action. You simply live the discourse that carries the power in everyday life, the discourse that is not questioned, because it is something that has always been there and therefore it must be true. It is considered an objective fact and as such it is of major interest for the post-modern vision of criticising such "true" knowledge bearer. This makes change in the field of reproductive health and abortion difficult (Osias, 2011; Cabral, 2010).

As a powerful institution and obvious carrier of certain interests and values the Catholic Church provides certain knowledge based in certain interests, as such it is subject of ideological critique. In its quality of religion, the entity that is the Catholic Church often stands unchallenged. It keeps on making its worldview and its laws gain meaning and power in secular society. Therefore, when entering the world of politics and more profane issues and questions, critical reflection of their discourse is encouraged. The discourse maintained and transferred by the Catholic Church preserve tradition instead of constantly reconstructing it in order to keep it sensible, as encouraged by Gergen (1999) and constructivism, instead it is

creating structures wherein change seems difficult and unwanted.

The Philippines is a state that is supposed to be secular, state and church are separated. Though it is repeatedly acknowledged that political success require the blessing of the church. If challenging the church, political points may be lost. You need the church as an ally and therefore do not challenge or object its notion on abortion. The sitting president have after a meeting with the CBCP acknowledged to be anti abortion (but pro the RH-bill), demonstrating how interacted the church and state still are, and how the anti abortion discourse keep on institutionalizing itself. The church and its anti-abortion discourse dictate the terms in accordance with Foucault's idea about the disciplinary regimes. (Gergen, 1999).

## **Conclusion**

This study has looked into the direct and present issue of unsafe abortion in the Philippines. It has beheld its consequences and what is being said and done about abortion by different actors on the field. The study seek to increase the knowledge of how the question of abortion – under its criminal ban – is being dealt with by those working with Social Work, Reproductive Health and Women's Rights and Empowerment in the Philippines. The analysis looks into how prevailing structures and discourses in the Philippine society affect that work, both considering interventions and advocacy.

The empirical material shows that there are groups addressing the issue of abortion as a public social issue and health problem in the Philippines. Through different measures and interventions they seek to either decrease the number of unsafe abortion or abortion all together. It also shows that interventions and advocacy in the area of abortion are highly affected by the criminal ban and the social stigma of abortion.

The two groups identified as pro-abortion seek to decrease the numbers of unsafe abortion by providing safe abortions, hence breaking the law. The illegality of abortion does without doubt affect and form these interventions and also the fact that these groups cannot openly advocate for abortion. Findings show that what can be officially and publically claimed by the pro-abortion groups is highly affected and limited by the criminal ban and the social stigma of abortion. Pro-abortion advocacy is negatively affected and also a direct consequence of the criminal ban and the social stigma of abortion in the Philippines. Being pro-abortion is automatically challenging the power bearing discourse and the societal normative structure that is anti-abortion and therefore stand limited in representing and spreading their opinion.

The groups identified as anti-abortion wishes to end the occurrence of abortion all together

and seek to decrease the numbers of abortions in the Philippines through preventive measures. Abstinence is promoted and taught to avoid unintended pregnancy and abortion. Group 1 is anti-RH and teach and promote nothing but natural family planning methods and abstinence. Group 2 is pro-RH, promote contraception and critical thinking more than abstinence. The illegality of abortion does not affect interventions provided by these groups as they are publicly against abortion and as such acting according with the law and within the societal norms. What is and can be publically claimed by these two groups is positively affected by the criminal ban and the social stigma of abortion, as they share the same view and as such create and maintain the power bearing discourse.

## **Discussion**

How can a public discourse change if abortion is being treated with silence, and no one is publicly pro-abortion out of fear to get isolated from the vast majority? There is a paradox and a constant movement back and forth between wanting to loudly and publically address the issue of abortion. At the same time there is need to prevail in the Philippine context where such a move might have much negative impact and effect the survival of the group and steps made towards other reproductive health rights. A conflict emerges between what you say behind closed doors and among your likes versus what opinion you dare speak out and stand for publicly. In a sense locking all attempts to discussion in a very disciplinary structure. Where does it go from there?

**We are anti abortion – but...**

Many of the organisations and groups verbally emphasize that they are not pro-abortion. Although, throughout many initial meetings and interviews arise a somewhat paradox manner in how informants talk about abortion. One literal saying does not always correspond with the other. In a sense some groups claim to be neither pro-abortion nor anti. They are against abortion and that is many times manifested in their policy. But they also acknowledge abortion, as an issue of grave importance with consequences women should not suffer. There are groups that say they are anti-abortion but don't stand as condemning or firm in that opinion. They do realize it is not that simple and see insufficiency in the existing structures. Still they are unable to express being anything but anti-abortion when talking on the matter. They are perhaps questioning the structure, showing doubts about the restrictive law, and consider a woman's right to make a choice. But they are repeatedly coming back to the fact

that they are anti-abortion.

The illegality of abortion is constantly there to consider, setting the stage in a clear way and putting up boundaries that seem more real than those found within language and discussions. There is a big risk involved in supporting something illegal, and an even bigger risk acting illegal as some of my informers do as providers of abortion. The illegality of abortion might be the reason to why some informants might not have been - nor can be - completely forthright with their opinions of abortion.

Although, in that ambivalence they may bring new perspectives into a otherwise very closed discourse, transferring the notion that you may be anti-abortion but you can consider and realize the need of the service in some cases. Offering a perspective that is not as literal and fundamental as the anti-abortionists that consider no exception any circumstances for allowing abortion. These groups that are more in the middle do provide an option that might soften a structure that at times appears to be too solid and strong to influence.

### Abortion – a phenomenon and term containing a certain meaning

At some stage the question of abortion becomes a question of language and terms. How you talk about abortion and how you mention it affect the responses you get from people. It becomes a question of addressing the issue without using the word “abortion”. Because if you speak of “abortion” using that term the response is already given, with no further reflection. Because the term abortion in itself carry a truth which becomes its meaning; abortion is wrong, is sin, is murder, is bad. This is an example of how language is bound to institutions such as culture and tradition and what we know as our way of living in everyday life.

Language represents certain institutions and what they stand for.

Asking people what they think about “abortion” then becomes pointless in a sense, as the answer is already given in the term, the term “abortion” in itself implicate the response; abortion is wrong, so of course I am against abortion. The statement being anti-abortion simply arises as a natural part of that logic. Claiming to be pro-abortion and with that questioning the meaning of the term become nothing but provocative and blasphemy.

So you have to talk around abortion to get to the truth, by replacing the word “abortion” with something else. Talking about choice most people are prone to agree with people having the ability to freely make a choice. Putting the question of abortion in another way gives other responses. It becomes a new way of talking in a generative discourse.

If simply asking someone what they think about abortion they habitually say it is wrong. When instead cutting abortion down to real stories, explaining circumstances and reasons,

talking about extremities such as rape, incest and consequences of unsafe abortion makes it easier for people to listen and digest the story. Accepting it. You have to locate the discourse behind what is not being said. Replacing words that are so charged and with such clear definition (abortion=wrong). Instead to near the issue with another language, other terms, that does not yet bear an agreed upon meaning. Terms and ways of talking that might loosen up structures. Pro-choice is for example a term that has been adopted and understood as being the same as pro-abortion, springing from an understanding of peoples rights to make free and informed choice for themselves. In time that concept might include the right to choose abortion.

### Women's Human Rights?

How abortion is generally looked upon and dealt with in the Philippines is an issue of power. The prevailing discourse recent and reject abortion - and at the same time women - and it does not wish to let go of its power. Those who gains are the ones in position of power, old traditions are sustained. Those that are hurt are the women. Silenced and undermined are the pro-abortionists and the will to change what is It offers no alternatives. It is maintained by a population, which might not realise the limited structure under which they act. A pattern and a structure found throughout the world and throughout societies.

Being pro-life and anti-abortion too many times equals protecting the life and the right of the unborn, leaving the life and the story of the woman somewhere in the periphery. It claims to equally protect the life of the woman and the life of the child. But actions seem to justify the sacrifice of the woman while protecting a foetus. Withholding women the possibility to safely terminate a pregnancy when she - the only one fit to decide why and if abortion is her solution - is a violation of her human rights. Not to act upon the fact that women suffer both physically and physiologically due to restrictive abortion laws out of fear of peoples reactions and a possible public backlash if liberating these laws is something that must be openly debated.

### Final reflection and future research

It is problematic to enter a new context and bring other understandings and believes about what constitutes a "good" structure in society and what is considered "right" in terms of abortion. I have troughout my resesrach been careful not to be bias nor judgemental. But some issues are in need of critical reflection and open discussion in order to ever change. There has to be an alternative to the anti-abortion discourse more accessable and more shown

and expressed in public debates.

The Philippines is a country with many social problems and issues, putting abortion in line with many other matters that need to be addressed. Resources are scarce and the needs many. Further research concerning abortion in the Philippines is needed to see how the neglect of the issue of abortion and concerned women affect society. Illegal abortion is repeatedly argued not to decrease the numbers of abortion, simply making the procedure unsafe and stigmatized. Many myths must be met with facts and research, and more stories about the women concerned need to be heard. There might be problematic to talk about abortion out of a human rights perspective in the Philippines, but if the pro-abortion side would be equally heard in the public discourse perhaps that notion is not too far away. The Philippines have agreed to international agreements that put abortion on the agenda and must act towards fulfilling these goals. In doing so international authorities and local branches working for abortion should present reasons in the shape of research that speak for their cause and abortion as a woman's human right, and point further to illegal abortion's negative consequences.

When beholding reality women in the Philippines suffer stigmatization, complications and die due to unsafe abortion. That is an undisputed fact. Consideration needs to be made about the value of a woman's life in a context where abortion is illegal. Who can neglect and overlook these women and their need? What has to be discussed and acted upon is how to protect those lives and women's right to decide over their selves, their bodies and whether to have a child or not. What matters and need attention is the reality of and the society in which women suffer due to illegal and unsafe abortion and denial or poor access to reproductive health facilities and services. These situations have been uplifted in research but need to be further acknowledged and debated. International authorities need to put pressure on governments with restrictive abortion laws by questioning these laws, instead of respecting sovereignty in agreements.

This study locates actors providing interventions on abortion. More research presenting the voices of these women, what they go through having an abortion in an illegal context and what type of interventions they ask for is of much interest. In a climate where abortion is so highly stigmatized, going through this act must have much negative impact on these women's well being. How this affect society in the long run is a topic for research. To get a broader picture of the issue of abortion and how the illegality and anti-abortion movement affect these women and their physical health, research in the field of what kind of interventions can and should be provided is essential.



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