

ABORTION PENALTIES SHOULD BE DROPPED: LECTURER

THE NATION

Blanket penalties in the Criminal Code for women who seek and have an abortion should be nullified and replaced by new clearer guidelines which better protect them or fit their choices, while minimising risk of death or injuries, a Bangkok seminar was told yesterday.

Access for women with unwanted pregnancies to have a safe and legal abortion could prevent illegal operations and loss of life.

"Not giving them this access is a gender discrimination and unconstitutional, [and] based on selfishness," Thammasat law lecturer Assoc Prof Thaweekiat Meenakanit said.

Assoc Professor Krittiya Archawanitkul, of Mahidol University, said the Public Health Ministry should oversee a drastic legal change – but, it had been busy

inspecting and closing down illegal abortion clinics.

"Articles 301-305 in the Criminal Code should be nullified, and a new act put in place to deal with the abortion issue," she said. Termination of pregnancies could also be carried out by other medical personnel, not only by obstetricians, as required by a standard in the Criminal Code.

Former senator Somporn Thepsitha, an adviser to a government development panel on education, religion and culture, said unsafe and fatal abortions should be a national issue, but the government was not responsive to the problem.

He said the prime minister's focus was on economic issues and he had neglected social issues. "I gave an advice to him to form a social Cabinet forum two years ago but he has done nothing, and it is now near the end of this government's term."