



Woman Flees Forced Sterilization

Officials in a Chinese province try to force the operation on her for the second time.

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Women push babies in prams at a Beijing park, April 5, 2011.

AFP

Family planning officials in the southeastern Chinese province of Fujian held a woman down on an operating table in an attempt to carry out a forced sterilization, but her struggles made them give up the attempt, the woman said on Thursday.

Huang Yongchun, of Huyang village in Fujian's Shanghang county, said that officials from her local village first tried to insist she submit to a pregnancy test, before putting her onto an operating table at a local family planning clinic and holding her down.

"They took me over there this morning, and about eight of them held me down on the operating table," said Huang, who has already given birth to two children, one more than is commonly allowed under China's draconian "one-child" policy, aimed at curbing rapid population growth among its 1.3 billion people.

"There were men and women doing this."

She said the doctor had eventually refused to carry out the procedure because of her state of agitation.

"The doctor didn't want to do the operation because I was terrified," Huang said. "I was shuddering there on the operating table because I felt so helpless."

"I cried for a very long time."

Huang said family planning officials had tried to carry out a forced sterilization on her once before, in 2010, shortly after she gave birth to her second child, but the procedure had been called off because she had health problems.

"They wanted me to get a [pregnancy] test, but I'm not going to have any more kids. What do I need a test for?" she said.

Birth quotas

Forced sterilizations and other forms of official abuse are still commonly reported in rural areas of China, where family planning officials try to avoid fines from higher authorities if their region exceeds local birth quotas.

Huang's husband Lai Liangping said officials had moved to force the operation on his wife while he was away working in Beijing.

Calls to the Shanghang county family planning bureau went unanswered during office hours on Thursday.

Huyang village chief Chen Renhe said the government had called on Huang to get sterilized several years ago, but that the couple had managed to evade birth quotas and had given birth to a second child.

"They didn't comply with family planning regulations," Chen said. "In our country, the policy is that people who don't comply are not forced, but we have to do ideological work with them."

He said it is common practice for rural women to get sterilized if they have had a second child.

"They have never cooperated," Chen said.

Guangzhou-based rights lawyer Tang Jingling said forced sterilizations are common in China, as well as the use of excessive peer pressure and financial incentives to get women to comply with the policy.

"If one person in a work unit has an extra child, then the whole organization ... could lose out on economic benefits," Tang said.

Hostage

Meanwhile, family planning officials in the eastern province of Shandong forced a woman from Linyi county into a sterilization operation after taking her and her second-born baby son hostage last month and demanding 40,000 yuan (U.S. \$6,300) in fines from her family.

"They detained me and told [my wife] that they wouldn't release me until she had the operation, so she agreed to have it," said Linyi resident Liu Zhi. "My release was conditional on her getting sterilized."

The incident took place in Shandong's Linyi city, close to where rights activist Chen Guangcheng, who has been fighting against such abuses, is being held under house arrest with his wife and daughter.

Aside from highlighting forced abortions and sterilizations by local family planning officials, Chen has also spoken up against official harassment and attacks on families who exceed local birth quotas.

Unsanctioned births under China's population controls usually incur fines and the loss of access to certain welfare services.

Liu said the couple first fell foul of family planning restrictions in August 2010, when they had their second child, exceeding urban birth quotas.

The Liu family's plight is similar to many other cases of abuse of power by family planning authorities in Linyi city and neighboring Yinan county which Chen, a self-taught lawyer, helped to expose, advising local women and their families of their rights in law.

He and his team of legal advocates exposed cases of forced abortion and sterilization, as well as financial abuse and physical attacks on families who exceeded birth quotas.

Last month, Hollywood actor Christian Bale was shoved and chased away by unidentified guards in a well-publicized attempt to visit Chen, following more than 100 attempts by Chinese netizens and well-wishers.

Reported by Hai Nan for RFA's Cantonese service. Translated and written in English by Luisetta Mudie.

