

Abortion figures still rising

The number of women seeking legal abortions has risen by 14.5 per cent in the three months from January to March, compared with the corresponding period last year.

The increase suggests that many women who used to go to illegal abortionists for help now come out into the open and seek help the legal way.

"As a matter of fact, illegal abortionists appear to have been rooted out from the community," the executive director of the Family Planning Association, Mrs Peggy Lam, said.

The trend is also in line with the growth of population and people's more open attitude to sex, Mrs Lam believes.

Between January and March, there were 3,431 legal abortions — an increase of 435 cases compared with the same period a year ago —

according to official Medical and Health Department statistics.

During the same period last year, the number of legal abortions was 2,996, with the year's total 12,219 cases.

In 1981, the total number of legal abortions was 10,622, an increase of 12 per cent over the previous year.

This trend indicates a continuing rise in the number of legal abortions in Hongkong since the law was relaxed two years ago.

Under the amended law women diagnosed as being pregnant with an abnormal foetus, women under 16 and victims of rape, incest and sexual intercourse procured by drugs, false pretences or threats are entitled to abortions.

Previously, abortions could only be carried out legally if two doctors decided

that the pregnancy involved danger to the mother of a greater physical or mental injury than if the pregnancy was legally terminated.

The abortions must be carried out in 13 designated Government, subvented and private hospitals.

The number of abortions performed by hospitals in Shumchun and Canton, however, is not known.

At present, abortions are easily available to women, married or not, in Shumchun, for the price of a room in a hotel for one night.

The charge was \$600 yesterday, including transport.

Business was brisk, said a Yaumati agent for a Shumchun hospital which offers abortions.

He told a SCM Post reporter to hurry and book a place in the hospital because demand was heavy.

No official explanation for the increased number of abortions during the first quarter was available yesterday.

But two medical practitioners agreed that possibly the recent economic and political uncertainty in Hongkong could be a factor contributing to the increase.

Most of the women who requested abortion were unmarried, they said.

Giving birth and the upkeep of a child under present conditions could be a heavy burden for some, the doctors believed.

But they admitted that it was very difficult to explore the real motives of women seeking to terminate their pregnancies, unless there were physical reasons.

It was a violation of the law for a doctor to perform an abortion on economic grounds, they pointed out.