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By Anthony Astrachan Washington Post Foreign Service

The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973); Mar 22, 1972; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877 - 1991)  
pg. A18

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UNITED NATIONS, March 21—An American expert today sought U.N. help in using his new abortion techniques to solve one of the saddest problems of the new state of Bangladesh—the estimated 20,000 pregnancies resulting from the rape of Bengali women by Pakistani soldiers before and during the war that made Bangladesh independent last December.

Harvey Karman, director of psychosomatic research at San Vicente Hospital in Los Angeles, said that during a brief stay in Bangladesh he had trained doctors and doctors' assistants—some as young as 16—to perform minimum-risk abortions, some on women as much as seven months pregnant. Karman estimated that at least 1,000 abortions had been done there using his techniques.

Karman, who is a Ph.D. but not an M.D., went to Bangladesh as a member of a five-man team including Britons, an Indian and two Americans.

They used abortion techniques developed by Karman.

One is a suction device with a flexible plastic tube that works like the syringe that a doctor uses to draw blood. The flexible tube insures that there will be no perforation of the uterus at the same time that it increases the ability to withdraw all the uterine contents. This technique is used on women three months pregnant or less.

The second technique involves inserting into the uterus one or more plastic

coils which slowly uncoil when exposed to the moisture of the womb, inducing the equivalent of a normal miscarriage.

This "supercoil" can be inserted by anyone who has been taught to insert an intrauterine birth-control device, which is widely used on the Subcontinent. Karman said that about 5,000 young women in East Pakistan had previously been trained to insert loops before and could help in the new program.

The coil technique, used on women from three to seven months pregnant, results in less hospitalization and fewer complications than usually result from saline injections that are commonly used for late abortions, Karman said.

Karman said no uterus damage has ever occurred with these techniques, which have been described in scientific papers covering 571 American cases.

Authorities in Bangladesh were reporting 300 suicides a week among the pregnant women, Karman said. He added that many of these cases were not really suicides, but unsuccessful attempts at self-induced abortion.

Karman reported that one of his first Bengali patients was a 12-year-old girl who had walked across country for a month to find an abortion clinic. In contrast, in most cases the teams could not find rape victims easily because no village wanted to admit it had any. Many villages sent their pregnant girls to neighboring communities and took in another community's victims to transfer the shame.

After the abortions, many of the girls expect to go home or to a new village and pretend to virginity, they told Karman's team.

Bangladesh needs U.N. or other outside help primarily for a helicopter that would enable abortion teams to reach every village systematically, train paramedics and leave the equipment there, Karman said. The devices are cheap and, after being sterilized, reusable.

"At this point, it's a distribution problem, like food and everything else in Bangladesh," he added. It takes a helicopter half an hour to reach a village that may take 12 hours to reach by land and water.

Officials of the U.N. Relief Operation Dacca asked Karman for a detailed report. The natural speed of the U.N. bureaucracy makes it unlikely that the relief operation could finance a helicopter in time, but it might be able to persuade a government or some voluntary agency to put up the money.

A church relief official said in January that up to 200,000 wives in Bangladesh were being ostracized by the Bengali community because they had been raped.

The Rev. Kentaro Buma, Asian relief secretary of the World Council of Churches, said on his return from a trip to Dacca that tradition prevented most Moslem husbands from taking back their wives; if they had been touched by another man, even if they were subdued by force.

The official said that despite efforts by Bangladesh authorities to break that tradition, "very, very few" men had taken their wives back after they had been raped.

Karman said that some Bengalis had told him that Pakistani soldiers—mostly Punjabis—had been instructed to rape women in order to create a new generation of Bengalis who would not be willing to fight their West Pakistani fathers.