

funding is also being proposed for state-sponsored contraceptive programmes, when a recent survey found that some 75 per cent of women surveyed obtained their contraception from these public programmes.²

In Paraguay, months of work have resulted in the public presentation of a draft bill on sexual and reproductive health for public discussion in Paraguay. The bill was prepared by the Coordinación de Mujeres del Paraguay and proposes to alter those parts of the country's Constitution which regulate the exercise of reproductive rights, and which protect and promote responsible fatherhood and motherhood. Various parts of the bill cover provision of primary health services in this area, including for safe motherhood, training for health workers, provision of information to those requiring services and promotion of responsible by both partners in a couple.³

1. Referendum seems likely in Irish abortion debate. From: *In Catholic Circles* 1999; 4(6):3-4.
2. Filipino government considers abortion legislation, increased family planning funding. From: *In Catholic Circles* 1999; 4(6):4-5.
3. Soto C. 1999. Salud sexual y reproductiva: una propuesta de ley. *Revista MujerFempress*. 217(Dec):11.

French women march for abortion rights and Scotland cracks down on abortion extremists

IN January 2000, women's rights activists organised a demonstration in Paris to celebrate 25 years of legal abortion in France and to call for new measures that would liberalise the law further, particularly to make abortion more accessible to women who delay seeking help beyond the first weeks of pregnancy. Some 5,000 French women are forced to seek abortions in other European countries each year because of an exceedingly low time limit (10 weeks) for getting an abortion on request, the lowest in Europe. The last demonstrations for abortion rights in France – in November 1995 and November 1997 – brought together 10,000 people and 30,000 people, respectively. The latter denounced the return of so-called 'moral order' and defended the right to contraception and abortion.¹

The Health Minister in Scotland has announced

a crackdown on extremist groups targeting abortion clinics, warning them to back off or face a range of tough legal actions. She urged women seeking abortions at clinics and health workers who have been harassed to file complaints using existing legislation regarding harassment. Her announcement came amid growing concern over an anti-abortion group called Precious Life, which has set up a branch in Scotland. The Health Minister hopes to keep the situation from escalating to levels seen in the USA, where seven people have been murdered and 12 abortion clinics have been bombed in the last six years.²

1. Une manifestation, le 15 janvier, en faveur des droits des femmes. *Le Monde*. 15 January 2000, p11.
2. Abortion extremists face legal crackdown. *Scotsman*. 2 December, 1999.

Maternity and employment in Brazil

THE Legislative Assembly of São Paulo, Brazil passed a law on 24 November 1999 protecting the rights of women workers who may be pregnant to seek work, without endangering their chances of employment. This law is intended to stop discriminatory pregnancy tests being required prior to an offer of employment to women of reproductive age, as practised by some large employers, e.g. according to this source the aeronautics industry and bus companies.¹

1. National Network of Women's Health and Reproductive Rights (Brazil).

Laws on rape in UK, Canada and Costa Rica and honour killing in Jordan

THE conviction rate for rape cases in the UK dropped from 24 per cent in 1985 to 6 per cent in 1999, the lowest rate ever recorded in the country. This is thought to have happened since the law on rape was made more strict and a minimum five-year sentence was set for all rape convictions. All rapes are considered to be of the same gravity; a proposal to create a lesser crime of 'date rape' with a shorter sentence attached was rejected by the government minister concerned. This author argues that not all rapes are the same, and that there should be a range of classifications and differential sentencing for different kinds of rape cases. She cites the

example of Canada, where in 1983 the law was changed and the crime of rape was replaced with that of criminal sexual assault on three levels, with a range of sentencing possibilities. The conviction rate in Canada across all three levels of sexual assault in 1999 was 40 per cent.¹

In Costa Rica, an article in the Penal Code which provides an exemption from penalty for perpetrators of crimes of indecent assault, abduction or statutory rape if they offer to marry their victims, has been superceded with regard to indecent assault and statutory rape by an August 1999 law against sexual exploitation of minors. The provision exempting those who offer marriage after an abduction remains in force.²

In Jordan, the lower house of the parliament voted for the second time against amending the article in the Penal Code which provides a reduced penalty for men who murder women relatives in cases labelled 'honour killings'. The amendment had been defeated in the lower house in November 1999, was then passed by the upper house in December 1999 and was sent back to a second defeat in January 2000 to the lower house. Its opponents argued that it would incite widespread social delinquency, presumably on the part of women. A further vote is to take place sometime this year before the parliamentary session ends. A coalition of women's groups, journalists, lawyers and other advocates organised a march and rally in February 2000 to protest at the defeat of the amendment, and it was reported that several members of the royal family marched with them.

1. Sarier C, 2000. All rapes are not the same. *Observer*. 9 April.
2. Information from Costa Rican President, in *Equality Now*. *Women's Action* 16.3 Update. March 2000.
3. Information from Reuters, in *Equality Now*. *Women's Action* 16.3 Update. March 2000.

Ban on births from frozen eggs lifted in the UK

THE UK Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority announced in January 2000 that frozen eggs can be used for fertility treatment.¹ At least 50 women have had eggs removed in the UK and frozen for future use, mostly women undergoing radiation or other cancer treatment that would otherwise have damaged their eggs and made them infertile. Prior to this year, the

Authority had not allowed frozen eggs to be fertilised because of lack of sufficient data on safety and concerns about possible chromosomal defects. The ban was lifted after a report, based on evidence from around the world, in which an independent expert pronounced the procedure to be safe, even though it was 'not without risk'.² This procedure as carried out in other countries has had low success rates so far, estimated between one and ten per cent, and probably closer to one per cent. However, as it is permitted in more places, there are hopes that these low rates will improve with experience.

1. Ashraf H, 2000. UK allows for frozen eggs for fertility treatment. *Lancet*. 355:386.
2. Boseley S, 2000. Ban on births from frozen eggs lifted. *Guardian*. 26 January.

Controversy over posthumous conception of children

MEDICAL advances now make it possible for a man to bear a child after death. There have been a number of cases in recent years of women posthumously using previously stored semen to conceive a child by insemination. This is termed 'planned orphanhood' in one article, which examines the psycho-social and ethical aspects of the medically-assisted birth of children whose conception has been planned by women whose spouses have died prior to the conception. It looks at the situation mainly from the perspective of the offspring and argues that overall 'there is no doubt that being born an orphan *a priori* places such children at a relative disadvantage and compels them to cope with the fact that they will never ever know one of their parents'. The paper argues for discouraging this so-called planned orphanhood so as to avoid violating principles of human dignity and liberty, human welfare and human justice.¹

In the UK, at least six children born in 1998 were conceived several years after their fathers had died, and a survey of half of the 101 fertility clinics in the UK found that almost one-third had assisted women with posthumous conception. This finding has prompted concerns that these children might face psychological problems in later life.² The perspectives of women who have conceived in this way, however, provide a more positive view. These are mostly cases where a couple had intended to have children before the