

THE PHILIPPINES REPUBLIC HEALTH LAW: A Big Achievement but We Still Have A long Way Ahead

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A big leap for the Philippines and Women

After a 15 year struggle, the Philippines finally has its own Reproductive Health law officially known as the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10354). It is a big leap for the Philippines and for women who will now have access to reproductive health services.

The Reproductive Health Law (or commonly known as RH LAW) requires government health centers to provide condoms and birth control pills that are non-abortifacient for free, as well as for public health workers to undergo family planning training. It also mandates schools to include sex education in their curriculum. The law also allows post-abortion medical care, but not abortion itself (Rappler, 2014).

15 Years of Struggle

The RH Law's first draft was the Bill 8110 filed on August 16, 1999 in the 11th Congress. It was then named "Integrated Population and Development Act of 1999" advocated for "universal access to reproductive health services, including family planning and sexual health."

Unfortunately, nothing came out of HB 8110. In the 12th Congress, Representative Bellaflor Angara filed a similar bill, HB 4110, the first to be called "RH Bill".

The bill underwent various refiling until it made progress in the 14th congress. It then reached the stage in the legislative process where the entire house could debate it in plenary.

In 2012, President Benigno S. Aquino III signed the RH Bill into law. But it still faced various challenges from religious groups, who filed petitions arguing that the law was unconstitutional. The Supreme Court then reviewed the law and in April 8, 2014 they have declared the RH Law as constitutional.

It is currently in its initial phase of implementation. In January 2015, the Department of Health allotted Php1.7 Billion for this endeavor.

RH's Impact

Teenage pregnancy remains to be a problem in the Philippines. One in ten young Filipinas age 15-19 is already a mother or pregnant with her first child (National Demographic and Health Survey, 2013).

Health Undersecretary Janette Garin said that the increase of teenage pregnancies is due to the youth's lack of knowledge about safe sex and family planning.

Furthermore, the DOH reported that the Philippines has at least 500,000 induced abortions annually.

Garin said "Why does abortion happen? Mainly because of unwanted or unplanned pregnancies... It's a big problem we cannot solve overnight. The RH Law intends to solve this."

As a Woman Living in the Philippines

As a woman living in the Philippines, the RH Law's triumph is my triumph as well. I would like to live in a country where women's reproductive health rights are protected. It is indeed a big leap for the Philippines and for women in this country. But I hope it will not stop here. It is a big achievement but we still have a long way ahead before we truly become progressive.

The RH Law is not a perfect law. It is still illegal in this country for women to have an abortion which should not be the case. Women should be given the right to decide what to do with their bodies and what is best for them. It should not be policed by the government, any institution, or anyone for that matter.

But this can be the stepping stone towards the more progressive Philippines. Hopefully this will serve as a gateway for the Filipinos to see that certain beliefs should be let go in order for the citizens of this country to live in a more inclusive and progressive society.

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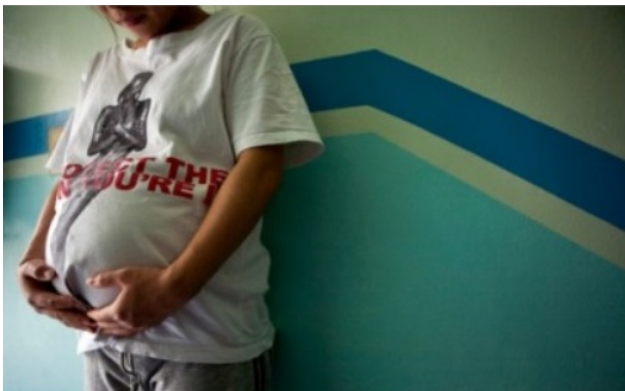
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A photo of a teenage Filipino mother whose face is not seen