

Unsafe abortion ‘a leading cause of death’

Unsafe abortion is a leading cause of death for pregnant women globally, according to a prominent CDU researcher.

Research Associate with CDU's Graduate School for Health Practice, Dr Suzanne Belton has completed the first study on unwanted pregnancy in East Timor.

Entitled "Maternal Mortality, Unplanned Pregnancy and Unsafe Abortion in Timor-Leste: A Situational Analysis", the study was presented during East Timor's Institute of Health Sciences' first Congress on Health Sciences in early December 2008 in Dili.

Co-authored by Dr Belton, Andrea Whittaker and Dr Lesley Barclay, the study investigated and recommended strategies to reduce morbidity and mortality associated with unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion.

The maternal death and fertility rate in Timor-Leste continued to be very high, but the proportion of maternal mortality due to unsafe abortion was unknown.

Dr Belton said the law regulating termination of pregnancy in Timor-Leste was highly restrictive and women could not request elective abortion for any reason, including to preserve their health or save their lives.

"A huge problem is that there has been no research conducted on unsafe abortion since Timor-Leste's independence from Indonesia in 2002," she said.

"This study describes the context of unplanned and unwanted pregnancy and fertility management, as well as investigating and canvassing a way forward."

Dr Belton said a number of key findings in relation to induced abortion were uncovered.

"Key findings included that induced abortion continued to be performed in secret, 40 per cent of all emergency obstetric care was managing and treating complications from early pregnancy losses, and doctors and midwives continued to be reluctant to speak with women about induced abortion," she said.

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Indigenous coxswains to help protect coastline

An innovative Searanger program hosted by CDU has provided real training and employment opportunities to Indigenous people.

After two weeks on Groote Eylandt covering navigation, boating procedures, maintenance and other skills needed to be a coxswain, 11 Indigenous participants passed the testing eight metre coxswain course.

CDU Lecturer in Maritime Studies, Milton Miller said the program delivered a wide range of training including driver education, coxswain training, survival at sea, and occupational health and safety.

below
In training for
an important job.

"The course equips participants with the skills to command, with safety and efficiency, a commercial vessel of less than eight metres and provides employment opportunities in the small vessel sector including tourism, commercial workboats, fisheries and aquaculture," he said.

The course also achieved a national first with participant Ida Mamarika becoming the first Indigenous woman to qualify for the eight metre Inshore Coxswain Certificate.

Mr Miller said the course also aimed at meeting the need for coxswain training for students with limited literacy and numeracy skills.

"These are the people who will help guard our coastlines from illegal fishing and manage the environmental issues that spring up in some of the Territory's most beautiful, if inaccessible, areas," he said.

"The training scheme is based on the concept that the best people to patrol the remote coastal fringes are the people who live on the coast – the 'saltwater people' – or traditional owners whose ancestors have been managing the environment in their own way for hundreds of years."

Several course graduates are hoping to use their qualification to gain employment with Customs and join the frontline in patrolling the vast expanses of coast across the Territory.

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