



CHINA

China: Forced-Abortion Victim Promised \$11,200, but Family Fears for Life

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By **HANNAH BEECH** | July 13, 2012 | 3

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HOW HWEE YOUNG / EPA

Chinese parents walk with their child in Beijing. China's one-child policy has come under scrutiny after a woman who was seven months pregnant was forced to have an abortion

Just how much is a dead baby worth? This week, a settlement from **China's** Shaanxi province put that figure at \$11,200. In early June, Feng Jianmei was bundled into a van with a pillowcase over her head, then driven to a hospital by family-planning officials and held down while medical staff **injected poison** into her pregnant belly. The forced **abortion** of her seven-month fetus occurred because Feng and her husband Deng Jiyuan did not have enough money to pay a \$6,350 fine for contravening China's so-called one-child policy. Such late-term forced abortions are illegal by national Chinese law, but such violent incidents are not unusual. Feng's case, though, was different in one key respect: a photograph was posted online of the 23-year-old lying in the hospital bed with her lifeless baby girl beside her. A horrified Chinese public rallied to her cause.

At first, Feng's case seemed like it might follow a familiar trajectory in a country with faulty protection for individual rights. After Deng was contacted by media, he and his family were harassed by local officials. Feng was essentially kept hostage in the hospital. Deng was later beaten up and evaded security forces to make his way to Beijing, where he publicized his wife's case.

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But then the Internet outrage over Feng's case appeared to galvanize an official response, even as other similar incidents of coercive abortion failed to trigger such a rapid reaction. National family-planning officials promised to look into Feng's mistreatment. Two local family-planning bureaucrats were dismissed from their **jobs** in late June, and the city of Ankang released a statement professing "deep apologies" for the forced **abortion**. Then came this week's promise of compensation from the out-of-court settlement.

China's one-child policy is, in fact, not a monolithic family-planning system. Ethnic minorities, for instance, are allowed to have more than a single child. So are couples who are only children themselves. Rural parents can procreate more if their first child is a girl or disabled. In some big cities, like Beijing, families are actually being encouraged to have more than one offspring because municipal officials are worried that there are too few children around.

But in small towns and county seats across China, the one-child policy is often still applied with deadly effect. That's because the promotion of local officials is tied to their success in keeping extra births to a minimum. (Local governments also make good money from collecting hefty fines from those who have more than one child.)

The cruel tradition of forced abortions has been periodically exposed over the years. One of the most vocal critics of the practice is Chen Guangcheng, a legal activist from eastern Shandong province who earlier this year made a dramatic dash to the U.S. embassy in Beijing, setting off a **diplomatic crisis**. (He is now studying in New York City with his family.) In 2005, Chen **lobbied** on behalf of women from China's eastern Shandong province who were the victims of either forced abortions or sterilizations. For his advocacy, he was jailed, beaten and placed under house arrest before his move to America.

(MORE: A Chinese Activist Lost in the System)

This month, three high-level Chinese researchers published an essay in a state-run newspaper calling for the one-child policy to be revised. "The longer we take to adjust the policy, the more vulnerable we become," the authors wrote, noting that a population bulge of retirees will strain the country's social services and family bonds. The academics also worried about a future labor shortage in China.

Any future policy changes, however, won't bring back Feng's child. Nor can \$11,200. "In terms of compensation, the word *satisfaction* doesn't even enter the equation," her husband Deng tells TIME. "But this is the result, so we just have to accept it." Village and township officials originally told Deng that the money would be delivered to his family on July 13. But on Friday, officials called to say they would bring the funds the next day. Deng isn't convinced the money will come at all — and he feels his powerlessness keenly. "I'm just an ordinary villager," he says.

Far from feeling any sense of closure, Deng wonders why no criminal charges have been filed against the officials who signed off on the forced abortion. More immediately, he professes deep worry over his family's future safety: "There are rumors on the street that after this thing calms down, when people are not paying attention to us anymore, they will kill my family."

— *With reporting by Chengcheng Jiang / Beijing*

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