

China Suspends Officials in Forced-Abortion Case
By Josh Chin
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BEIJING—Chinese authorities have suspended family planning officials who forced a woman to have a late-term abortion after news of the case sparked a torrent of outrage online and refocused attention on abuses carried out under the country's one-child policy.

Huanshang Luntan

A screenshot shows one of a series of photos circulating online that show 23-year-old Feng Jianmei after she was forced to undergo an abortion seven months into her pregnancy.

The woman, 23-year-old Feng Jianmei, was seven months pregnant when she was detained and taken to a hospital, where she was coerced into undergoing an abortion on June 2, family members said.

Ms. Feng's case attracted widespread attention after graphic photos of her lying on a hospital bed next to her aborted fetus began circulating online earlier this week.

The case brought the practice of forced abortions back into the news just a few weeks after one its highest profile opponents, blind legal activist [Chen Guangcheng](#), made global headlines with his daring escape from home confinement and six-day stay inside the U.S. Embassy in Beijing.

Mr. Chen, now a student at New York University, spent seven years under various forms of detention after he filed a class-action lawsuit in 2005 on behalf of women forced to undergo abortions or sterilizations in his home province of Shandong.

Authorities in Ankang, the city in central China's Shaanxi province where the abortion occurred, say they have apologized to Ms. Feng and her husband and that three officials, including the head of the local family planning department, have been suspended.

"Pending a thorough investigation into the incident, [the Ankang city government] will pursue strict legal and disciplinary action against the relevant parties," said a statement posted Thursday night on the Ankang city government's website.

In a separate statement, also posted Thursday night, the city said it had dispatched deputy mayor Du Shouping to the hospital to visit Ms. Feng and her husband.

"On behalf of the city government, I've come to visit you today to express our sincere apologies," Mr. Du said, according to the statement. "I hope we can earn your forgiveness."

Writing on his verified account on popular Twitter-like microblogging service Sina Weibo earlier in the week, Ms. Feng's husband, Deng Liyuan, said his wife was forced to have the abortion after the family failed to raise the cash to pay a 40,000 yuan (\$6,278) fine for having a second child.

Family members said local officials surrounded the house where Ms. Feng was staying and prevented anyone from leaving. Ms. Feng tried to escape but was caught and taken to the hospital.

"While I was rushing to the hospital, they forced my wife to sign a document with her fingerprint, violently held her down and injected her with poison to cause the abortion," Mr. Deng wrote on Sina Weibo.

Mr. Deng didn't answer repeated calls to his cellphone on Monday.

An official answering the phone at the Ankang Family Planning Bureau declined to discuss specifics of Ms. Feng's case, saying the investigation was continuing. "Grass roots comrades aren't stupid, but this is what they're forced to do," said the official, who declined to give his name. "This is a problem with the entire system."

Local governments have long resorted to forced abortions and sterilizations to meet birth quotas set by Beijing under the one-child policy. The practice has become increasingly controversial in recent years, feeding public anger over a family planning system that critics say falls particularly hard on the urban poor who often can't afford to pay the fine to have a second child.

Rural families are typically allowed to have a second child if the first is a girl.

Although Ms. Feng and Mr. Deng, who already have a 5-year-old daughter, didn't qualify to have a second child, it is illegal to force a woman to have a late-term abortion, China's state-run Xinhua news agency noted.

"To force a woman who is seven months pregnant to have an abortion is a serious violation of the law," said Zhang Kai, a lawyer who is in talks with Ms. Feng's family about representing her. "At the very least it should be considered willful and malicious injury."

Mr. Zhang said he had not been allowed to see Ms. Feng in the hospital and was unable to reach her or her husband by phone on Friday.

Ms. Feng was in poor health following the procedure and unable to eat, her husband's uncle, Liu Deyun, said. "She's incredibly sad, suffering psychologically," he added.

The photos of Ms. Feng in the hospital ranked among the most forwarded images on Sina Weibo throughout the week, according to data collected by Hong Kong University's Journalism and Media Studies Center. On Friday, "seven-months pregnant forced abortion" was Sina Weibo's most popular search term.

Massive online interest was a major factor in pushing local authorities to investigate the case, according to Mr. Zhang, the lawyer.

"A lot of similar cases have happened before, but before it was difficult to get the word out," he said. "I hope this forces the relevant people to reflect. The country really needs to think about the second-child question."

--Olivia Geng contributed to this article.

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