Unmarried pregnancies still on the rise

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Sept. 19: Doctors across the city are of the opinion that while Medical Termination of Pregnancy laws and emergency pills have ensured that number of deliveries among unwed mothers has come down, the number of incidents of unwed women getting pregnant hasn't decreased. Incidentally, there had been a three-day D.K. Tank Memorial Conference on various gynaecology issues in Powai this weekend.

"Compared to a few years back, there have been fewer deliveries among unwed mothers, but this does not mean that unsafe sex is on a decline. Unwed girls are still getting pregnant and terminate their pregnancy legally. There are still quite a number of women who miss the 20-week deadline for legal termination of pregnancy and end up delivering the child. However, the number of such cases is comparatively lesser than what it was five years ago," said Dr Rekha Davar, head of the gynaecology department at JJ Hospital.

Dr Y.S. Nandanwar, head of the gynaecology department at Sion Hospital, said, "We won't deny that there are many unwed mothers who visit us from all strata of the society. There is no fixed preference among them, both medical and surgical methods of termination of pregnancy is seen. Only an advanced level of awareness can help bring this number down."

Although there are hospital records of MTPs, there are none pertaining to abortions in case of unwed mothers. Dr Duru Shah, chairman

of Gynacworld, said that she on an average in a week, she would get at least 4 to 5 cases of unwed pregnant women who would visit her private clinic in or before their 20 weeks of pregnancy. However, speaking of the lower income society, a doctor from Wadia Hospital in Parel said that there would be at least one delivery of unwed mothers in two months. The reason in an increase of deliveries in the lower strata of the society, could be due to a lack of sex education, state doctors.

In order to curb the number of unwed deliveries, some doctors even try to counsel the parents to allow the unwed couple to get married as soon as the doctors find out that they cannot allow abortion. Dr Rajashree Katke, unit head of Cama Hospital, said, "If the pregnancy crosses 20 weeks, we have no option but to give away the newborn child to adoption centres through a legal procedure. However, we make an attempt at our end to counsel the parents of the couple, and see if they allow the couple to get married to save the child's future. Sometimes, that has been possible too."

Dr Anibal Faundes, professor of the University of Campinas and chairperson of International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics said, "In my 54 years of experience, I can say that people will only become aware if abortion is legalised. In such a scenario, girls who want to talk out problems wouldn't feel any harm in visiting hospitals and being counselled on the sensitive issue. In France and Italy, after abortion was entirely legalised, there was an initial rise in abortion for a few years. However, 10 years down the line, the number of abortions have halved as compared to what it had been when abortion was a criminal offence."

However, other doctors disagree as legalising abortion until delivery would mean killing the baby within.