

Women should have the right to decide if they want the child: Experts

[Pratibha Masand](#), TNN | Oct 24, 2012, 02.29AM IST

MUMBAI: Nima Purohit, Usha Jethwa and [Niketa Mehta](#) hail from different backgrounds, but they all have one thing in common—each underwent an unsuccessful pregnancy. But these three are not the only ones. Doctors say there are many [women](#) who have no option but to either wait for a miscarriage or the death of their newborn because rules prohibit them from terminating their [pregnancy](#) after the 20th week.

Dr Nikhil Datar, who fought for Niketa Mehta's [abortion](#) in 2008, said he sees at least three cases a year where the mother can't have an abortion despite her child suffering from lethal abnormalities. "After we lost the case (Niketa's) in the Bombay high court in 2008, we filed a special leave petition in the [Supreme Court](#). It is still pending," he said. "Usually, women who find out about their baby's anomaly and are denied an abortion end up turning to quacks or other doctors. Not only are these women exploited for money, they also risk their lives by depending on quacks. Women should have a right to decide whether or not they want to bring their child into the world."

Dr Arun Naik, secretary of Mumbai Obstetric and Gynaecological Society (MOGS), said about 2% of all newborns are born with lethal abnormalities. "If the small abnormalities are included, this number would be as high as 5% of the total newborns," he said, adding, "More anomalies can be picked up if women are allowed to have an abortion even after 20 weeks."

"Certain complications like cardiac anomalies can be detected only by the 24th week of pregnancy. Extending the 20-week abortion deadline will not affect the implementation of Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act as those who do not want a girl child will not wait till this late to abort," said Dr Naik.

Pointing out that it is possible to find out the sex of an unborn child from the 14th to the 17th week of pregnancy, doctors said that 20-week abortion limit can also be

misused.

Dr Duru Shah from the ethics committee of the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics said, "Some countries have a blanket provision to conduct an abortion even till the 36th week of pregnancy if the child suffers from lethal abnormalities. India must have special panels to review such cases and decide if a woman can abort after the 20th week."

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