

Women Set Up Hotline to Fight Abortion Trend

39 Volunteers Form Right-to-Life System, Provide Alternatives to Expectant Mothers

BY MARY ANN LEE
Times Staff Writer

Although free abortion information and clinics are becoming more common with every passing day, a lack of alternatives has induced a group of Centinela-South Bay women to form a counter-abortion service.

A fully confidential hot line operating from a San Pedro answering service has as its primary goal the offering of alternatives to abortion.

The volunteers who handle the phones 24 hours a day also are trained to handle potential suicides as well as pleas for help from drug users although the bulk of their training goes into coping with the fears and turmoil resulting from an unplanned pregnancy.

The routine of one volunteer, Peggy Sinanian, is typical; for six hours every two weeks she waits for the phone to ring.

Just Sits by Telephone

She turns her car pool duties over to a neighbor, cancels interfering appointments and doesn't shop or visit neighbors. She sits by the telephone, waiting.

Mrs. Sinanian is one of 39 volunteers who take telephone shifts to answer calls to the Right-to-Life Lifeline which is available for women who need help in an area from Long Beach to Manhattan Beach and as far east as Compton.

Mrs. Sinanian, with her neighbor, Dorothy Butcher, are coordinators of the new Lifeline at 831-HELP.

That number rings at a San Pedro answering service where the operator checks the duty roster and puts the call through to whichever volunteer has that segment's assignment.

"We use an alias for our own privacy," said Mrs. Butcher, "and those who call us may do the same. Only if they ask for personal service and are referred to one of our eight professional social workers is their name ever asked."

Right-To-Life Offshoot

The Lifeline is an offshoot of the Right-to-Life League of Southern California and its primary goal is to offer alternatives so that a pregnant woman will not have to choose abortion.

Mrs. Butcher said each volunteer must complete the 18-hour training session before she can be hooked into the Lifeline. The training explains the legalities of abortion, looks at the morals of society and explores the various types of crisis calls.

"There's a lot of role playing," said Mrs. Sinanian. "We act out the various calls which have been made to other Lifelines around the area and we show our members how to meet each situation."

And they keep lists.

Each volunteer has phone numbers of clergymen, psychiatrists, social workers and medical doctors, all readily available to offer competent advice. They have the phone numbers of emergency rooms at area hospitals and they know how many spaces are available at the various maternity homes throughout Southern California.

Many, Many Solutions

"We offer the woman many, many solutions to her problem but abortion is not one," said Mrs. Sinanian.

Mrs. Butcher said Lifeline formed after a number of women became alarmed with the results of State Sen. Anthony Bielsen's controversial legislation in 1968 which legalized abortions. In 1970 more than 70,000 such operations were performed in the state and the 1971 estimate by health officials is 125,000.

Although the local group began at St. John Fisher Catholic Church, Mrs. Butcher emphasized that most religious denominations are represented. Meetings are scheduled at St. Peter by the Sea Presbyterian

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Hotline to Battle Abortions

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Church and some of the volunteers have no religious preference.

"Moral obligations may be taught by religion," said Mrs. Butcher, "but they are not religious obligations in the sense of referring to Revelation. Abortion is a crime against any specific religious but a crime against humanity in destroying innocent human life."

"Society does not legislate morality but we can and must legislate morality. We do so all the time, in laws forbidding murder, theft, assault and other immoral acts. Morality and religion are not the same. Likewise, abortion is a moral issue and not a religious issue."

Mrs. Butcher named several psychiatrists who claim there are no psychiatric reasons for abortion.

Suicide Seldom Heard
"And yet, in California with moderate laws, 95.7% of hospital abortions are performed for mental health reasons. It's a broad and vague category, almost meaningless. Thus it's a convenient catch-all category for abortions which would be refused."

Mrs. Butcher said the line receives almost no calls from women claiming they'll commit suicide if they have to deliver the child.

She said the suicide rate



ALWAYS AVAILABLE—Among leaders of abortion hotline in Centinela-South Bay are, from left, Mmes. Dorothy Butcher, Peggy Sinanian and Joaquin Acosta.

of pregnant women in California is so low it isn't measured. And she cited Minnesota which, in 15 years, counted 14 suicides. Four of the women were pregnant for the first time, none was illegitimately pregnant.

"Perhaps women are reluctant to take another life with them in suicide," said Mrs. Butcher. "About one suicide a year in California involves a pregnant woman."

However, feelings of guilt and depression appear in as many as 82% of women who have had abortions, she said.

"Not wanting a child is a temporary state of mind and in each case of abortion, there's danger of se-

vere depressive reaction," said Mrs. Butcher.

Lifeline volunteers are taught to use positive words, never to imply that abortion is anything which would make women feel guilty afterward.

"We play down the radical, emotional approach," said Mrs. Sinanian. "If a girl goes ahead and has the abortion, it's her choice. She must not be made to feel guilty because of anything we've said or done."

Who calls the Lifeline? Records show about half the women are married and don't want an additional child. The others are usually teen-agers, many of whom haven't confided in their parents yet.

Calls from unwed fathers are not rare and the volunteers are trained to offer suggestions even though he has no legal rights at all.

"These calls are usually very sad," said Mrs. Sinanian. "Most of the boys want to know how they can help to keep the baby. Few fathers even think of abortion, far fewer fathers than mothers."

The women told of one call from the mother of the unwed father.

"She didn't want her grandchild aborted," said Mrs. Butcher. "We gave her the names of some shelter homes and advised her on financial aid. We helped her locate a social worker and gave her all the support we could. But the girl had the abortion. Then our job was to convince the mother that at least she'd done all she could. She'd made an effort."

Few Night Calls
Most calls are early in the morning or after school. The late night shift rarely records anything. Only one call after midnight was logged in one two-week segment.

Some women cry, others talk so fast it's hard for the volunteer to understand. Most stutter.

But training has prepared the worker to get across the idea that no matter how the woman may feel, there is someone on that telephone who can help.

"But we help the girl to come to her own decision," repeated Mrs. Butcher. "We just give alternatives. Too many of the free clinics don't. They just give the names of doctors who'll do abortions."

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