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Abuses Cited in Enforcing China Policy of One Child

By [ANDREW JACOBS](#)

BEIJING — Thirty years after it introduced some of the world’s most sweeping population-control measures, the Chinese government continues to use a variety of coercive family planning tactics, from financial penalties for households that violate the restrictions to the forced sterilization of women who have already had one child, according to a [report](#) issued by a human rights group.

The report, published Tuesday by Chinese Human Rights Defenders, documents breadwinners who lose their jobs after the birth of a second child, campaigns that reward citizens for reporting on the reproductive secrets of their neighbors and expectant mothers dragged into operating rooms for late-term abortions.

Not uncommon, according to the report, are the experiences of women like Li Hongmei, 24, a factory employee from Anhui Province who was at home recovering from the birth of her daughter when a dozen men employed by the local government carried her off to a hospital for a [tubal ligation](#). “I promised I would have the surgery when I got better but they didn’t care,” Ms. Li said in a telephone interview. “I screamed and tried to fight them off but it was no use.”

Although most of the abuses documented in the report are not new, its authors are seeking to highlight the darker side of birth-control restrictions at a time when the public debate has largely focused on whether [China](#)’s family-planning policy has been too successful for its own good. This year as the nation marked the 30th anniversary of the so-called one-child policy, officials have been praising such measures for preventing 400 million births. A smaller population, they argue, has helped fuel China’s astounding economic growth by reducing the demands on food production, education and medical care.

Some demographers, however, argue that plummeting fertility rates and a rapidly aging population are reasons enough to ease the rules. Sociologists fret about the surfeit of unmarried men — the result of selective abortions that favor sons — and the demands on only children forced to care for elderly parents.

On Monday, the director of the National Population Family Planning Commission sought to put to rest any speculation about a change in the status quo, saying the current policies would remain in place through 2015.

Groups like Chinese Human Rights Defenders say the current family-planning policies should be abolished altogether. “The state’s role in shaping the population should be through incentives and by encouraging couples to have fewer children through education,” said Wang Songlian, a researcher who worked on the report. “They should not be using coercion and violence.”

As the report makes clear, China’s family-planning policies are unevenly applied and replete with exceptions. The rich simply pay the fines levied on those who ignore the restrictions, and some middle-class women have gotten around the rules by traveling overseas to give birth to a second child. Millions of couples refuse to register their newborns with the authorities, although that approach leaves such children ineligible for an array of social benefits, including a free education.

The policy is also not as all encompassing as many believe. Parents who themselves were raised in single-child families are allowed to have a second baby, as are many rural residents if their first is a girl. Ethnic minorities in some places, like Tibet and Xinjiang, can have as many as four children.

The worst abuses, the report says, take place in small towns and in rural areas, where a point system rewards or punishes local officials based on their ability to meet quotas. In many places, the revenues earned through fines on scofflaws, known as “social maintenance fees,” feed an entrenched bureaucracy.

In Jiangsu Province, parents who give birth to an “out of quota” child can be fined four times the average annual per capita income of the area. Other fines are imposed on women who miss regular gynecological exams or fail to undergo surgery for an intrauterine device. In one city in Hunan Province, the authorities [collected \\$1.8 million in fines](#) between July and September, according to government figures.

He Yafu, an independent demographer who has studied family-planning regulations for two decades, said one of the biggest obstacles to changes in the policy are county and township governments. “It’s become a huge vehicle for officials to collect money,” he said. “In some localities, the budget relies almost entirely on such fines.”

The report cites a number of recent cases that have wiggled through the media controls that normally filter out stories about family planning excesses. Last April, more than 1,300 people in Puning city, in Guangdong Province, were [held hostage](#) in government buildings in an effort to force women who had had a second child to undergo sterilization. The detainees, it turned out, were mostly elderly people whose daughters had left town to evade family planning restrictions. The campaign was so effective, according to a government Web site, that 3,000 sterilizations had been carried out by the fall.

In a case that drew widespread media coverage, Yang Zhizhu, a law lecturer at Beijing Youth Politics College, was [fired](#) after he refused to pay the \$30,000 fine imposed after his wife gave birth to their second child. Last April, Mr. Yang decided to make his displeasure public by holding aloft a tongue-in-cheek sign during protests that offered himself as a slave to anyone who would pay his fine.

“Why should I pay money for having my own kid?” he told China Daily at the time. “It’s not human trafficking. It’s our right as citizens.”

Zhang Jing contributed research.

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