

# 'SIT DOWN GIRLIE'

## Girlie goes medical



### Abortion reasons

The first Victorian study into why women seek abortions has been published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* (19 January 2009). The research audited 12 months of telephone calls to the Women's Hospital Pregnancy Advisory Service which received 5400 calls between October 2006 and September 2007. While it is no surprise to women's health providers and services, the *Herald-Sun* (19 January 2009) featured the story under the headline 'Abortion shock' apparently because hundreds of the women surveyed had experienced violence at the hands of their partners and about eight per cent had been raped. *The Age* ran the same story on the same day under the more subdued headline 'Report reveals abortion reasons'. About 3200 callers wanted abortions and 752 had previously had at least one abortion. The most frequent reason was 'Do not want children now'. Dr Heather Rowe, lead author of the study, wants pregnancy-advice services reviewed and said younger, poorer women who live outside Melbourne sought advice or counselling later in their pregnancies than other women. Over half the women were between 18 and 29, more than 260 were 17 or younger and one caller was 13.

### The truth!

While so many Australians reeled from the shock of the devastating bushfires in Victoria which wreaked havoc and promoted enormous bravery and good will, one religious leader has uncovered the real truth. According to *Catch the Fires* Christian leader Pastor Danny Nalliah 'incendiary' abortion law reforms last year made Victoria 'the baby killing state' and are responsible for the bushfires. Apparently the Pastor had a dream when the laws were passed that forewarned of the disaster (*Diamond Valley Leader* 10 February 2009 and *The Age*). So who needs fire plans and Royal Commissions of Inquiry? Several politicians including Peter Costello and Danielle Green have said they are appalled by Nalliah's comments.

### Them who don't know, don't know they don't know.

*Australian Doctor* (23 January 2009) reports on the unsettling story of a most unenlightened judge in Canada. Justice Jon-Jo Douglas of Ontario ordered an HIV witness to be masked while giving evidence. He was reported as ordering rubber gloves for court staff and for the trial to be moved to a bigger courtroom so there would be more space between His Honour and the witness. The judge boasted of having worked as a hospital orderly before becoming a judge and said he knew a little bit about infection control. The judge has since been obliged to spend a day in an HIV hospice to get a better understanding of HIV. (See the *Torstar News* website).

### Abortion and human rights

Two articles on abortion appeared in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* on 3 February 2009, one on the subject of the incidence of clandestine, potentially-unsafe induced abortion in Peru and the other a commentary on this study. Citing the 2005 United Nations Human Rights prosecution of Peru for failing to provide a 17-year-old woman with an abortion to which she was legally entitled, the author observes:

The implications of the decisions of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, the Constitutional Court of Columbia, the Northern Ireland Court of Appeal, and the European Court of Human Rights are substantial. Where Ministries of Health fail to provide abortion services to women to which they are lawfully entitled and do not investigate whether women are actually receiving such services, ministries might be held legally liable for negligent violations of their local laws or international human rights. Where women do not have effective access to abortion services, failure to provide necessary guidance in order that they may receive services aggravates the violation.

### Religious humour

Some of the religious brotherhood have begun the New Year by unwittingly revealing their very strange senses of humour. First, leaders in the Roman Catholic Church blamed women who have taken the oral contraceptive for causing men's infertility because there are more hormones around. Then Muslim cleric Abu Hamza was reported as having messages on his website that make rape in marriage okay (Mark Dunn, *Herald Sun*, 24 January 2009). Muslim wives, according to the cleric, can 'laugh off' rape and rape can be misinterpreted as merely having a 'pushy husband'. The story and another in *The Age* concerning cleric Samir Mohtadi, provoked several letters from readers ranging from those who accused the media of dredging up an old story from 2002, just prior to Australia Day, and compared that to 'a repeat of Cronulla. Good for sales and ratings, bad for our country'. Others called for the need to educate some clerics about Australian law which makes it clear rape in marriage is a criminal act.

### They've got some hungry women over there

'Faced with their favourite foods, women are less able than men to suppress their hunger according to research that may help explain the higher obesity rates for women'. (*The Age*, 21 January 2009) Gene-Jack Wang of the Brookhaven National Laboratory and his colleagues were surprised to find significant differences in brain responses to controlling food intake between men and women. The researchers had set out to determine why some people overeat and gain weight but others do not. The experiment involved brain scans on 13 women and ten men who had fasted. With such a small sample this is one Girlie who won't be considering weight reduction psychosurgery just yet.

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