

Forced abortion case stirs outrage in China

by [Calum MacLeod](#) in the [July 11, 2012](#) issue

The case of the pregnant woman who was dragged to a hospital by authorities and forced to have an abortion has enraged the Chinese and sparked an online flurry of debate over whether it is time to end China's draconian one-child family planning policy.

"Our country is the inventor of family planning committees—how couldn't we have accumulated enough experience after so many years? Must they kill people? Cold-blooded scum!" television director Liu Kang said in an online posting.

The scandal erupted when photos were posted online showing the mother, Feng Jiamei, lying on a hospital bed with the corpse of her daughter. Feng, who was in her seventh month of pregnancy, said she was dragged into a vehicle, her head covered and her legs beaten, then taken to a hospital for the injections that killed and induced delivery of her unborn child.

Feng said she was forced to have an abortion because she could not pay the \$6,300 fine for a second child.

In years past, Feng's forced abortion would have happened with little public reaction, but Internet-based social media tools now allow individual Chinese to take their stories directly to the people and are forcing the government to address complaints.

As of June 14, comments on Feng's abortion neared 1 million on the Twitter-like microblog site Sina Weibo. Many of the comments were calls to relax the restrictions on births that have been enforced for more than three decades.

Many couples are barred from having a second child in China, the world's most populous country, where the ruling Communist Party enforces the ban through a vast birth control bureaucracy, heavy fines and the threat of violence.

The government's first reaction to the outcry over Feng was that the abortion was merely routine law enforcement. A statement posted June 11 on the government website of Zhenping County in Shaanxi province stated that officials, "according to the law, carried out the termination of the out-of-policy second pregnancy of Feng Jiamei" on June 2.

As the fury grew, a preliminary investigation was conducted, after which the government admitted June 14 that it was wrong. The late-term abortion was a "serious violation" of national policies, "damaged the image of family planning work and caused extremely harmful social impact," said a statement by the Shaanxi Population and Family Planning Commission.

Three officials were suspended, the China News Service reported. The city mayor delivered \$785 as compensation for the loss to Feng's husband, Deng Jiyuan. It may take much more to calm the storm.

"I am not satisfied with the result," Deng said. "I want the real killer responsible to be punished." On their newly opened microblogs, Feng and Deng, who have a five-year-old daughter, have been conversing with Chinese who expressed their anger at authorities and support for the couple.

"I wish this case could be the turning point in China's family planning policy, to comfort the spirit of this child in heaven," wrote Zheng Haitao, a financial magazine editor.

He Yafu, an independent demographer, said any hope of change must await the party leadership transition this fall and a new cabinet next spring. He advocates abolition of the policy and says doing so would have minimal effect on China's birthrate. A major obstacle is that authorities have come to rely on the fines they can levy, He said.

Ignoring threats warning him not to get involved, lawyer Zhang Kai said he was traveling to Shaanxi to assist the couple. "I think governments shouldn't 'plan' family planning, it's the citizen's right," Zhang said. "God won't allow humans to do forced abortions, and he's unhappy to see it." —*USA Today*