

**A 27 year old woman with an uncertain number of pregnancies [3 living children ages 2, 4 and 5] was brought to the main women's hospital in Yangon from a village approximately 50 miles north of the city by relatives. She was unresponsive with a temperature of 39 C. Physical exam was significant for generalized muscle fasciculations, hyperactive reflexes and gross blood tinged pus in her vagina. Uterus was approximately 10 weeks size and boggy. Breathing was shallow and labored. Pupils were reactive to light. She was taken to the medical intensive care unit and intubated, and IV fluids were begun.**

*Defn: A procedure for termination of an unintended pregnancy done either by persons without the necessary skills, or in an environment that does not conform to minimum medical standards*

- **~250,000 women annually**
- **Maternal mortality**  
**282/100000 - 10% officially**  
**due to unsafe abortions**  
**(30% unofficially)**

Bamboos, bicycle spokes, umbrella shafts,  
feathers, twigs

How is **abortion** portrayed in the media, popular culture, prevailing religion, or common day-to-day discourse?

Theravada  
Buddhism

Patriarchy

# Theravada Buddhism

- Life begins at conception
- Karmic and moral consequences of the act

# Patriarchy

- Taboo to discuss sex or contraception
- No word for "vagina" in Burmese
- Can't say "No" to husbands
- Minimal education about own sexuality and reproductive cycles



# It's Illegal, mostly

What does the law say?

Myanmar Penal  
Code #312

Penal  
Code #314

Other  
ASEANS



# Myanmar Penal Code #312

312. Whoever voluntarily causes a woman with child to miscarry shall, if such miscarriage be not caused in good faith for the purpose of saving the life of the woman, be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both; and, if the woman be quick with child, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to seven years, and shall also be liable to fine.

*This includes: A woman causing herself to have an abortion*

# Penal Code #314

Whoever, **with intent to** cause the miscarriage of a woman with child, does any act which causes the death of such woman shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine;

and if the act is done without the consent of the woman, shall be punished either with transportation for life, or with the punishment above mentioned.

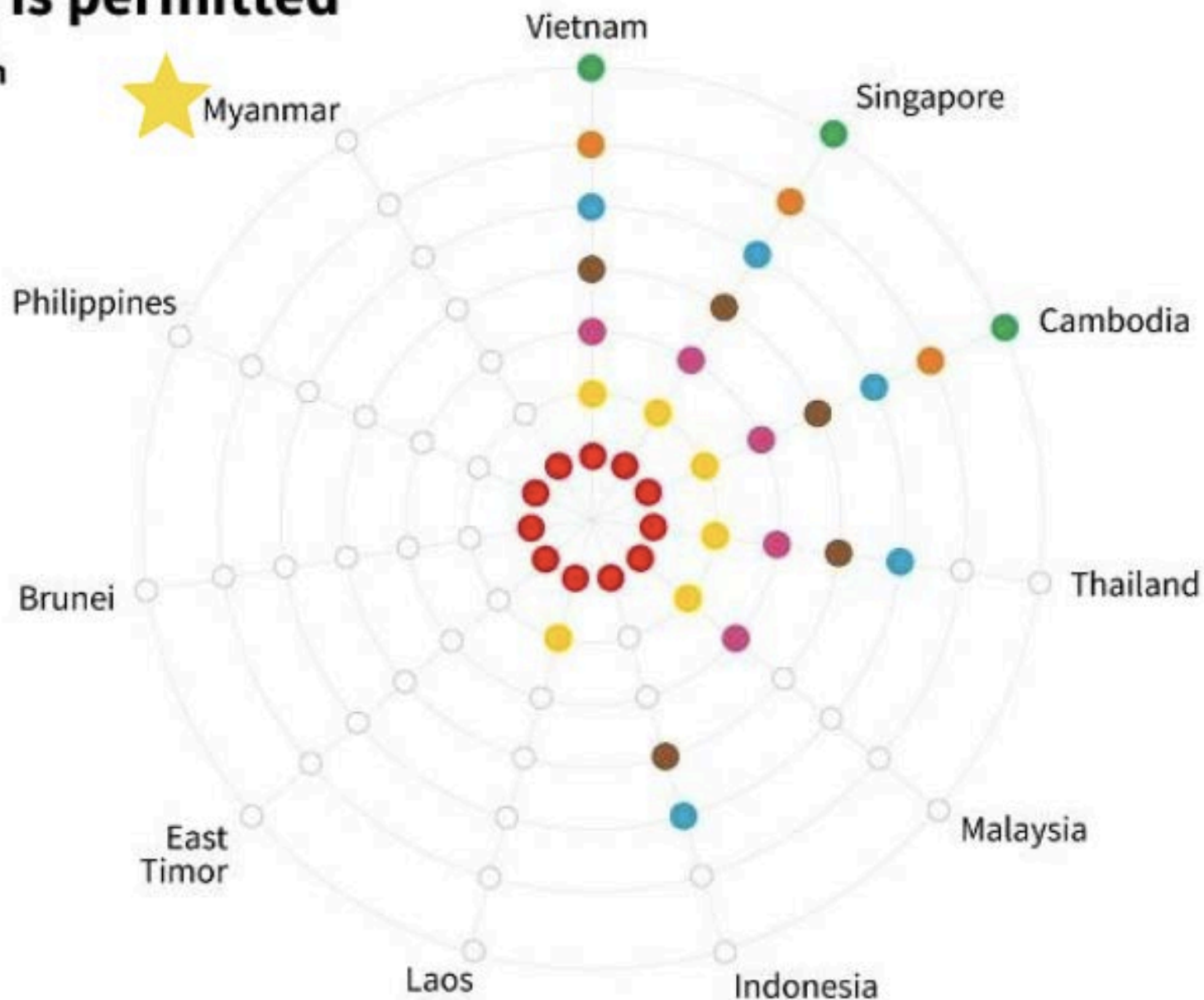
*Offender does not need to know that their act was the cause of death.*

# When abortion is permitted

## Legal grounds for abortion in South East Asia

United Nations data, 2013

- Save woman's life
- Physical health
- Mental health
- Rape and incest
- Fetal impairment
- Economic and social reasons
- On request



## Barriers to Care

- Providers reluctant to treat
- Lack of training and support
- Discrimination against the patient
- Disparity in quality of services
  - 61% are "unsafe"
  - \$20 - \$300

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- Coercion for marriage
  - Reluctance to seek help or support leading to delayed care
  - Social ostracization
  - Pressure for male infants

**Institutional  
Factors**

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**Legal  
Factors**

**Community  
Factors**

**Cultural  
Factors**

**Thoughts?**

***How did this happen?  
What would you do? In Myanmar, in the US?  
Where in her history could interventions have been made?  
How could this have been prevented?***

**Means  
to an  
End**