



SINGLE AND PREGNANT

WHAT ARE MY CHOICES?

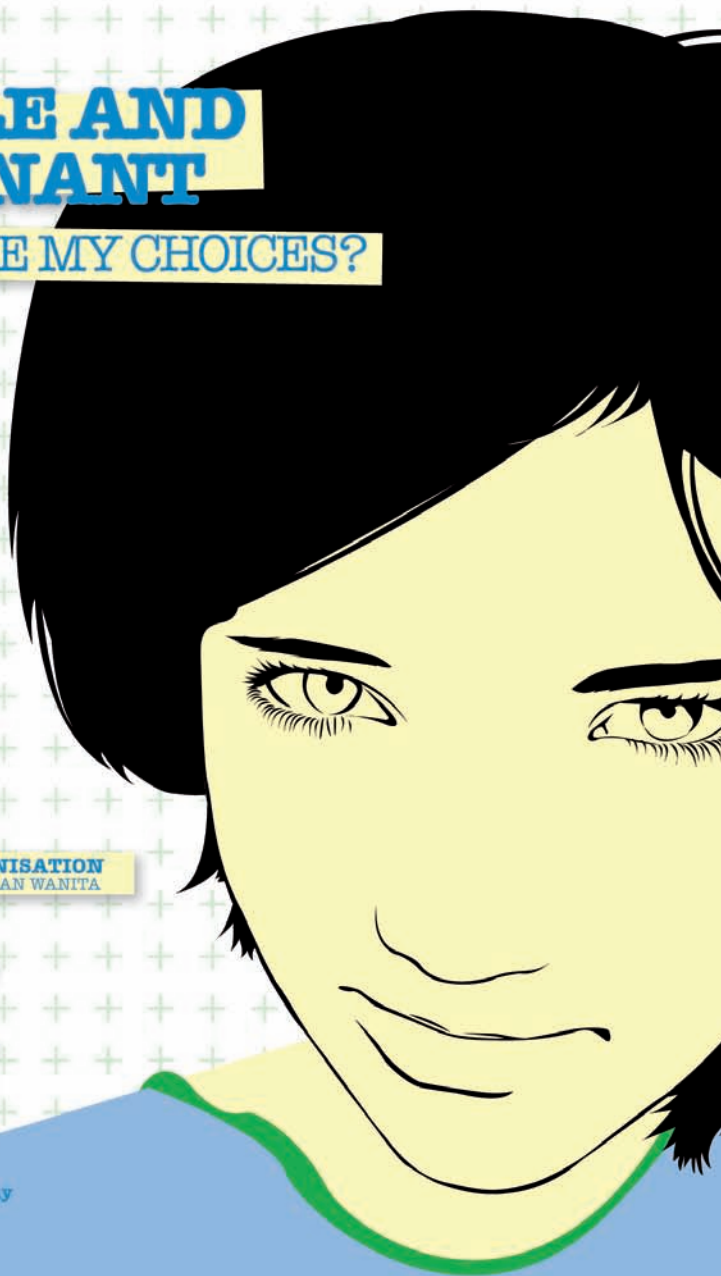
WOMEN'S AID ORGANISATION
PERTUBUHAN PERTOLONGAN WANITA

SUPPORTED BY

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CHAPTER 1:

Introduction



Person A: Did you read the newspaper yesterday? A newborn child was found in a dumpster, still covered in blood.

Person B: Yes, I heard. Thank goodness someone found the baby before it was too late.

Person A: I wonder what happened to the mother? I can't believe she just left her child like that.

Person B: Just the mother? Hey! What about the man, the father?

Person A: Yeah, you're right. It does take two people to create a child!

Person B: C, what's wrong? Why are you so quiet today??

Person A: You look quite pale. Are you okay?

Person C: I have something to tell both of you... I'm pregnant.

Person A: Are you sure??!!

Person C: Yes... I don't know... I think so... What am I going to do?!

Person B: Okay, calm down. It's not the end of the world. You do have choices, and you are not alone, we will help you figure this out.

CHAPTER 2:

Discovering the pregnancy

Have you missed your period? Felt nausea and vomiting in the morning? Notice swollen breasts? Often tired? Had sex recently and did not use any family planning methods? Or took a pregnancy test that just confirmed your worst fears?

You have just discovered your pregnancy, what thoughts go through your mind?

- Denial.
- Shock.
- Fear
- People talking badly about you.
- You are thought to be immoral.
- Family will disown you
- The father of your child is nowhere to be found.
- The father of your child has denied or refused responsibility towards his child.
- You feel hurt, humiliated and possibly even suicidal.
- You feel alone.
- You fear that you might be punished.

Do not FEAR ! Here is the GOOD News

Finding out you are pregnant can be both a blessing and a scary thing at the same time. But you are not alone. The first thing to do is to find a friend or family member who will support you, or you can even call a women's group for counselling and advice.. (Refer to page 14 for a list of support organisations.)

The next step is to learn more about pregnancy and childbirth. There are possibilities and choices for you.

During Pregnancy

Each pregnancy goes through 3 periods of trimesters.

The first trimester of pregnancy lasts for three and a half months. During this stage of pregnancy you may experience the dreaded morning sickness which can occur anytime during the day as well as sore and enlarged breasts. You will also urinate more frequently. Most miscarriages occur within the first trimester, so be aware of any unusual cramps or spotting.

The second trimester of pregnancy lasts until the end of the sixth month and is often the easiest stage of pregnancy as most women will start to regain some of their energy back. During this stage your stomach will begin to expand. At this time any feelings of morning sickness should lessen, although some women may continue to experience it but at usually a lesser extent.

On the final trimester of your pregnancy you may notice that you feel more sensitive, emotional and anxious. Extra care must be taken during these times. Often, the increased size and weight of your baby can cause increased discomfort, causing symptoms such as weak bladder control, severe leg cramps, and back-ache. Sit with your feet propped up if you notice that your feet have begun to swell. Have lots of sleep, rest, do moderate exercise and wear comfortable shoes. Sleep on your left side as much as you can. This is the best position for good circulation. Use extra pillows between your knees or under your belly to help keep you more comfortable.

Avoid soda and carbonated drinks as it can cause leg cramps. Alcohol and caffeine are strictly not allowed. Try certain types of prenatal massages available for pregnant women, it can help relieve weary feet and a tired body.

Do you know that when you are pregnant, your body temperature increases? Wear light, breathable clothing to make yourself comfortable

At whatever stage of your pregnancy, it is always best to consult your doctor regardless of how minor or major your concern is.

Do you know that when you are pregnant, you are eating for two persons? So eat well, and remember to have lots of green vegetables, fruits and dairy products.



CHAPTER 3:

Staying Positive & Preventing Depression

The circumstances that led you to being a single-pregnant woman is none of anyone's concern or business. Once you have identified the negative thoughts, you can now replace them with positive thoughts. Stop living in the past. Focus on what you can do right now to begin to make positive choices. Seize the moment. Your future is yet to be lived.

1) Self-assurance

Know and always remember this, "You **HAVE** NOT committed a crime. No matter people say, you cannot be charged or punished by the law for being pregnant"

One night I came home from a football game and the tv was on. It was a commercial about fathers and the great joy and fulfilment it brings. I dropped to my knees cried, and then i decided that I had to raise my child. So I stayed there every day of my girlfriend's pregnancy. I even held her hand as she gave birth to our son - Anonymous

2) Mending the past

While you can try to mend any relationships that you've lost or that has turned out badly, the harsh reality is that you have to prepare yourself to get rejected too. At least you can be assured and satisfied that you've tried your best.

3) Self Realisation

This will be a big change in your life. They say that once a mother holds her baby in her arms, the amount of love that swells in her heart is overwhelming. But for many mothers, the feeling begins even when the child is still in the womb.

4) Reaching out

Do not be afraid to reach out for help, either from a family member or a woman's organisation. You might feel embarrassed that you are in need of help, but after a while, you will start to feel comfortable and feel thankful for the help received.

5) You can do it!

There have been hundreds of women who have found themselves in your situation and have come out stronger than before.



CHAPTER 4 :

Getting Organised & Preparing for the Birth

Here are a few steps that you can take to be well prepared for the labour and birth.

- **Get regular prenatal check ups.** Prenatal checkups are advisable every two weeks for women who are 7 months pregnant, and every 1 week for those who are 8 months and after. Your checkups are very important. It may surface any problems that you are not even aware of. Prenatal checkups can sometimes mean the difference of life & death for you and your baby. Prenatal and postnatal checkups are FREE in all government clinics, married or not married. So do not be afraid to go for check-ups.
- **Choose where you will be giving birth.** ALL women have the right to give birth in a government hospital for a minimal cost. Note that some hospital require a deposit, others do not.
- **Think about who will raise the child:** You will need to figure out future plans for you and your child. You will have to decide whether you will be raising the child, or giving up the baby for adoption.
- **Get support.** It is important that you surround yourself with the people you love and who care about you while you await childbirth. Do not be shy to ask for help, financially, emotionally, or in any way you can think of.
- **Plan your budget.** Money will be a very important factor and you will need to start saving. Soon you will be paying for two people.



CHAPTER 5:

Your Choices



As hard as it is, you need to keep calm and think how each choice will affect you. YOU are the only one that matters in this situation. Consider:

1) Adoption

Giving a baby up for adoption is by no means an easy thing to do. Others might tell you otherwise, but remember that you will be the one who will have to carry on with the pregnancy, give birth to the child and then give it away. Can you stand the thought of someone else bringing up your baby or never seeing your child again? These are things that you need to consider.

There are 2 methods for adoptions

i) According to the Adoption Act 1952 (ACT 253) (applicable to non-Muslims only):

The adoptive parents (who are not Muslims) can petition for adoption in the Sessions or High Court after three months of caring for the child. In this case, the birth certificate is altered to include the adoptive parent's name as the child's natural parents. The birth mother would then have no rights to the child.

ii) According to the Registration of Adoption Act 1952 (ACT 257) (applicable to both Muslim & Non-Muslim):

The adoptive parent must have resided with and had continuously cared for the child for a period of not less than two years. There would be evidence of care, maintenance and education of the child during the two years. After two (2) years and the registration has been completed, the adoptive parents may request to the court to instruct the National Registration Dept that the child's birth certificate is altered to include the adoptive parent's name as the child's natural parents. The birth mother would then have no rights to the child.

What you need to know if you are giving your child up for adoption :

- If you the mother would like to take your child back after giving the child up for adoption, after the adoption has been approved, then you know that you CANNOT take the child back until and unless the registered adoption is first cancelled by a court order.
- Any possibilities of you and your child meeting again in the future would only be possible if you and the adoptive parents had agreed on it prior to the conclusion of the adoption. There is NO law that requires the adoptive parents to give you the permission to see your child.
- Any application for adoption is to be referred to the Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, or you may also refer it to the respective hospital Medical Social Worker.
- Often the Medical Social Worker or the Welfare Officer would interview both the mother of the child and the adopting family.
- You as the mother may opt to meet the adopting family if you want.

Coping with giving your child up for adoption.

A number of factors might have influenced your decision to place your child for adoption, and as in many circumstances; lack of support, lack of finances and not being able to tell your family regarding the pregnancy might compel you to do so.

Upon placing your child for adoption, you may have many mixed emotions. You might feel sad about not being able to raise or have a relationship with your child, anger and pain as a result of losing your child. Or you might instead feel positive and relieved from the beginning about the adoption decision and accept that the decision brought with it certain consequences. You decided on adoption because you had considered the best interest of the child.

However, just about all mothers would wonder how their son or daughter is doing, especially when the child has reached the age for important events such as starting school, graduating from school, getting married, or becoming a parent.

As a birthparent, I know that placing a child for adoption—a child that you cannot take care of properly is the most unselfish thing that any birthmother can do for her child
- Anonymous

Birth mothers who get out of this cycle of emotions usually do so by doing one or more of the following things:

- Going for counselling
- Talking with supportive family members or friends
- Writing their feelings down in a story or poem
- Writing letter, even if they are not sent, to their child

All of these are positive methods for dealing with the separation.

2) Raising your child on your own

If you think that giving your child up for adoption is not an option for you, then raising your child is another choice.

Be aware of the challenges that you will face. The social alienation of single pregnant women is still very prominent in our society. The glares, the criticism, the rejections. It is unfortunate that our society still carries such a perception, but it is reality. And you have to prepare for it, but never apologise for it.

Also, be prepared that as your child grows up and goes through life, they too might face prejudice themselves. As a mother you must be prepared and be aware that you can learn how to face and handle your child's anger and questions appropriately.

Before you make any decisions, here are some questions that you need to ask yourself.

- Could you cope with a baby?
- Are you physically, emotionally and financially stable?
- Would you be able to bring up the child knowing that its father had abandoned/refused responsibility / or who might have even attacked you?

*When my pregnancy was discovered, my mother kicked me out. I wish there was lot more help out there for me. I felt so alone at times. But when I was at my lowest I would gaze into my child's eyes and it filled me with strength
- Anonymous*

On the other hand, your parents might be so happy to have a grandchild that they would happily look after your child while you go to work/school. You have a friend who is willing to baby-sit your child. You also have neighbours or officemates who are supportive.

So if being a mother is part of your personal agenda right now, then do not let anyone tell you that it cannot be done, or that you do not have the right to do it. If you are still planning to keep your child, rest assured that there are many other single mothers who have persevered and stayed strong have found a happy conclusion to their story.



**Other alternatives for single mothers
(Also refer to chapter 7):**

- **Childrens Home** - There are numerous homes available throughout Malaysia. Several of these homes can provide temporary housing for your child while you settle down.
- **Single Parents Support Organisations** - There are numerous organisations that provide support specifically for single parents. These supports can come in the form of monetary, job opportunities, to even everyday daily necessities.
- **Women's Shelter Homes** - Their shelters can provide you a home prior to giving birth and for the first several months after you have given birth. But you will eventually have to move out and find your own place to stay.

3) Abortion

There are many issues that you must consider before you decide whether or not abortion is the right course of action. Abortion might not be the right choice for every woman. Whatever you decide, make sure that it is YOUR choice. If you are still unsure, then call any of the support organisations listed at the back and talk to a counsellor.

Abortion is allowed under the exception of Section 312 of the Penal Code so long as it is performed by a doctor registered under the Medical Act 1971. An abortion can only be done under the following circumstances:

- 1) Risk of life or injury to the physical health of the woman.
- 2) Risk of life or injury to the mental health of the woman.

The optimum time for abortion to be done is under 9 weeks of pregnancy. As in the case of any surgical procedures, there is a risk, and the risks will only increase when the abortion is performed in the later stages of the pregnancy.

So be sure to always consult a recognized and registered medical doctor or you could risk endangering your life.

If you are having:

- Heavy bleeding that last between 3 weeks to 5 weeks
- Very high fever for more than 48 hours.
- Do not respond to any pain medication
- Blood in urine

You must go and consult a doctor

If you have had an abortion, you are not alone. You may experience a range of feelings after an abortion; this is entirely normal. Women often experience feelings such as sadness, happiness, empowerment, anxiety, grief, relief and/or guilt. There is no “right” way to feel. Feelings are different for everyone and they often change over time. Don’t rush the process, and take your time to confront what you “feel”.

If you’ve just had an abortion..

- Find a way to express your feelings or talk with someone who listens. Call a helpline if you don’t have any other person to talk to.
- Take care of yourself, physically and emotionally, after the procedure is over.
- Get enough sleep, eat complete meals and do things you enjoy.

What are your Legal Rights as a Single Mother?

Now if you know who the father of your child is, and you want to hold him responsible for the support and maintenance of your child as well, it is possible.

Here is what you can do.

For non-Muslim single mothers, the law requires that you must first be able to prove that the man is indeed the father of your child using any available evidence or through a DNA test. If the father of the child refuses to undergo a DNA test, you may request to the court to oblige the man to undergo it. Using the evidence that you have, you may make an application to the court, and the court may instruct the father to provide maintenance and support for the child at an amount the court sees reasonable.

For Muslim single mothers however, the law does not provide such a remedy.

However, it is important to note that in the instance that you are unable or cannot afford to provide for your child you can approach the state welfare department for help.



CHAPTER 6:

Giving Birth

Imagine the day you give birth. What do you see? Most women are terrified at the thought of seeing scissors, knives or any other sharp looking objects the moment they enter the room. Surprisingly, you will not be seeing any of those as you wait in the delivery room. Instead, imagine a baby cot, the delivery bed, a few screens to monitor the vitals of you and your child, as well as an oxygen supply mask. There will be a doctor, and a few nurses. And if you want, some family members can be there to give you support.



After Birth

- Maintain a healthy diet that mostly consists of fruits, vegetables, meat, fish and carbohydrate such as rice, bread and pasta.
- Eat food containing fat and sugar sparingly.
- Some form of exercise can be relaxing, it will aid your body to recover, help you stay fit and make you feel better.
- Breast feeding uses up the fat stored during pregnancy, it will help you lose weight and regain your shape back naturally, but you will need to consume more calories and when you feel you need to, have smaller meals and snacks throughout the day.
- Postnatal checkups are a requirement for women to assess whether or not you are recovering well, physically and emotionally from the childbirth.

The first few days after the delivery will be tiring and uncomfortable for you especially if you are caring for your baby all by yourself. Try and get as much rest as possible and don't use the time when your baby sleeps to catch up on unfinished chores.

Changes in your hormone levels may make you feel tearful, irritable, depressed and tired. Often, between three and five days after the birth you may feel particularly low and emotional. This time is referred to as the 'baby blues' and thought to be caused by sudden changes in your hormone levels. It should only last for a few days. Post-partum depression last longer and are more severe. So if your baby blues don't go away after about 2 weeks, it's time to consult a doctor regarding it.

How do you register your child's birth certificate?

The registration of a birth certificate is free of charge and the right of every child that is born. You will receive a form for the registration of your birth certificate from the hospital that you went to give birth. Using the form, you can register your child at the Jabatan Pendaftaran Negara (JPN).

Your child WILL receive a birth certificate. With your name automatically registered on the birth certificate as the child's mother.

In the case of the child's father, for a child born to a non-Muslim single mother, the law says that, as long as the father is present during the registration of the birth certificate, regardless of whether or not the parents are married, the father's name can still be inserted on the birth certificate.

For a child born to a Muslim mother, both parents MUST have a marriage certificate. And the marriage must have been registered at least 6 months before the birth of the child. So whether the father of the child is present or not at the time of registration does not matter, as long as there is a marriage certificate, his name will be automatically inserted into the birth certificate.

But if there is no marriage certificate, then the father's name would not be inserted on the birth certificate even if he is present at the time of registration.

CHAPTER 7:

List of Agencies & Organisations that can help

The following are a list of organisations that provide counselling and/or shelter for single-pregnant woman.

Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)

P.O. Box 493, Jalan Sultan
46760 Petaling Jaya, Selangor
Tel: 03-7956 3488
Email: wao@po.jaring.my
Website: www.wao.org.my

Darul Saadah Pusat Pertolongan Wanita

Kg. Delima, Jalan Jambu Laut
Kg. Batu Lima, Jalan Ipoh
51200 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03-6257 0960

Pusat Kebahagiaan Wanita & Remaja (KEWAJA)

19, Jalan SG5/4, Taman Seri Gombak
68100 Batu Caves, Selangor
Tel: 03-4025 4755
Email: kewaja@gmail.com

Women's Centre for Change (WCC)

24-D, Jalan Jones,
10250 Pulau Pinang
Tel: 04-2280 342
Fax: 04-2285 784
Email: wcc@wccpenang.org

Good Shepherd Sisters (RGS)

Good Shepherd Convent
4, Jalan Canning Estate, Canning Garden
31400 Ipoh, Perak
Tel: 05-5472 085
Fax: 05-5488 749

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- <http://www.womenshealth.gov> The Federal Government Source for Women's Health.
- <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my> Sisters in Islam
- <http://standupgirl.com> Stand Up Girl

Conceptualized by Shoba Aiyar
Key edits by Annie Varghese
Researched & written by Noor Diyana Yahaya
Coordinated & edited by Ivy Josiah & Special thanks to all of the
Social Workers at the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) for their
invaluable contribution.

Designed by Bright Lights at Midnight



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