

# To Get an Abortion in Brazil, I Lied and Said I Was Raped

by [JILL FILIPOVIC](#) and [ANA SIEDSCHLAG](#) APR 11, 2014



**Recife, Brazil** — Though more than a million abortions are performed in Brazil every year, almost all of them are illegal. Some are performed in illicit clinics by practitioners of varying skills, and some are performed at home by the women themselves, often with drugs obtained over the Internet or on the black market. Brazil's universal health system means a woman going through an incomplete abortion can usually get medical care to prevent her from dying, although the hospital may report her to the police.

Yet despite its pervasiveness, abortion remains clandestine and stigmatized in this deeply Catholic nation. Juliana\* is a recent university graduate living in a popular Brazilian city. She shared her story with [Cosmopolitan.com](#).

Last year, I had an abortion.

I was with my boyfriend, who I had been dating for five months — it was my first sexual relationship. Last July, my period was a week late, but then it came. In August it was late again. That time, I felt something beyond paranoia — I knew something was wrong. I went to a drugstore and bought a pregnancy test. I was at home alone. It was a Thursday.

The test was positive, even though we used condoms every time. Looking at that positive test, I was in a total panic. I saw all of my dreams being destroyed. I saw my family pointing at me and saying I was a failure.

I called my best friend, and then I called my boyfriend. My best friend and I have known each other since we were children, so she knew I didn't want to be pregnant and I would do anything to not have this baby. She tried to calm me down, saying, "Don't panic, we will figure out something out." My boyfriend's previous girlfriend had gotten pregnant too but had a miscarriage, so he was even calmer.

I got really sick over the next two weeks. I was dizzy and felt nauseous all the time, and couldn't eat anything. I didn't tell my parents — they still don't know about it. My parents are divorced and I live with my mother, who is really old-fashioned. She was a virgin when she got married, and even if I told her I was being careful but I still got pregnant by accident, she would never believe me. I thought about telling my father, since he's a little more open-minded, but I thought if I told him, he would tell my mother.

I researched abortion on the Internet, and I found two websites where people write about their abortion experiences — what worked and what didn't work. I read a lot about abortive teas that I could drink, but I didn't really believe they would be effective. I asked friends at my university for help, and while everyone said they wanted to help, no one actually wanted to get involved. There were a lot of people telling me what I shouldn't have done, but no one could say exactly what I should do now.

I tried lots of contacts. I found a lot of dodgy people, and I found 1,000 medicines that could help me out, but everything looked dangerous. My worst fear wasn't dying. My worst fear was the abortion not happening and having a baby that was born with problems.

One friend told me I should look for small drugstores with suspicious-looking people inside, and I should ask them for medicine. But I wasn't brave enough to do it, so my boyfriend did it for me. He went into many different drugstores and talked to a lot of people, but he couldn't find anything at all.

When I couldn't find anyone to help me, I started thinking about going to the police and saying I was raped, since here in Brazil abortion is legal in

cases of rape. Getting a legal abortion didn't sound bad, not like getting an illegal abortion sounded to me. Illegal abortion sounds like something dark. Going to a clinic that is not allowed — it sounds like I'm not coming back if I go there.

At the same time I was trying to find a way to get an abortion, a good friend of mine who had been trying to have a baby for the past two years finally got pregnant. Her husband was so happy for her and for them. That's the way that a child should come into the world: being loved from the very beginning, and having a mother who loves him from the very beginning. That's not me.

I took lots of medicines. I tried everything I could find, but nothing worked. My boyfriend's friend brought me losna tea. It didn't work. I took cinnamon tea. It didn't work. I took pure wheat leaf tea. It didn't work. I tried taking an anti-inflammatory. I felt as sick as a human being could feel, but it still didn't work. I stayed in bed for a month, barely eating.

My mother thought I was going into a depressive phase — when I was 15, I was diagnosed with depression, and I attempted suicide in 2011. I think she was afraid that if she questioned me or tried to take me out of the room, I would take a turn for the worse. So she didn't ask very many questions. I think she knew or at least she thought about it, but she has never asked me directly.

One day I finally left home to go do some volunteer work and I passed out. A friend who lived nearby came to help me. She was the daughter of a former hospital employee, so she knew how the medical system worked. I told her my idea of telling the police I was raped. She thought it was awful and tried to convince me not to do it, but she called the hospital to ask how it works and what happens. In the end, we decided that was the best idea. So the next day my boyfriend and I went to a police station, and I made a report that I was raped.

I tried going to a women's police station, but it wasn't open on Sundays, so I went to a normal 24-hour police station. There were a lot of people there when I arrived, and I was embarrassed. I tried to be really quiet and to speak as softly as possible, but the officer couldn't hear. So I spoke a little bit louder and everyone in the station heard and looked shocked when I said I had been raped.

The chief arrived to interview me. A friend of mine was raped two weeks before this happened, so I told a version of her story to the chief — I told him a stranger raped me near a relative's house.

The chief was concerned about me. I could see in his face that he was shocked by my story, and he was even more shocked when I told him that my period had stopped and I was pregnant. I told him I was only reporting it because I was pregnant. If I weren't, I would never have told him.

He told my boyfriend he should be patient with me right now because I would suffer a lot, and that we should be strong and that he would do anything to help me. I felt safe with him — he was a light of hope after all I had been through. I felt really guilty lying to such a kind person.

After I told my story to the chief, he gave me papers to present at a hospital in a nearby city — the only one in that city that performs legal abortions. I went alone because my boyfriend was working and couldn't get off. One of my best friends sent me a text saying she wouldn't go with me because she couldn't support what I was doing. She said it was a crime and she wouldn't help me. If I wanted, she said, she would help me with the money to get an illegal abortion, but she wouldn't help me do it this way.

So I arrived at the hospital alone. First I had to do an exam to prove that I was raped — they had to take photos of my body to see if there were any marks. It was really cold. There were five kids waiting in the lobby to go through the same process I had just undergone — they had all been raped. That made me feel terrible. When I got home, I quit. I decided that I wouldn't do anything at all. I would have the baby.

A week later, I decided to go back. I met with the social assistant at the hospital who helps to coordinate the procedures. I was crying a lot. She talked to me and calmed me down and said I had three options: I could have the baby and raise it, I could have the baby and give it up for adoption, or I could abort. Before I make any decisions, she said I should have an ultrasound. I went downstairs and had the ultrasound that day.

I was really sick during the exam, and as I was walking up the stairs in the hospital trying to calm down before going to the social assistant's office, I opened the ultrasound results. I was eight weeks pregnant — I thought I was five weeks. I realized I told the police officers the wrong date of the rape. My boyfriend had read some stories of people who were arrested in this same hospital because they tried to get an abortion by claiming rape, and the hospital discovered it was a lie. I panicked. I thought, *I am going to be arrested.*

When I was 16, I really was raped. Someone put a drug in my drink at a party and I passed out. During the years, some flashes started coming back and I began remembering things. But I couldn't accept that it was rape, and I had never talked about it before. But when I got back to the social assistant's office, I told that story to her, as if it had happened eight weeks

earlier. I was really afraid of being arrested — I was more afraid of being arrested than I was of having a baby.

The social assistant wasn't a cold person, but I was expecting someone a bit more sensitive. She made unnecessary comments, like, "Why didn't you take the morning-after pill?" But she believed me, and she set up meetings with a psychologist and a doctor for the next week.

The next week I came in and the doctor asked me again if I was sure about my decision. I said I was definitely sure about it, and we scheduled the abortion for the following week.

My boyfriend lives in a city an hour and a half away, so he couldn't come to the procedure, and my best friend was out of town. My mom was traveling, so that was great, because it meant she wasn't at home. I told her that if she came back earlier than expected I was going to sleep in my friend's house. I arrived in the hospital on a Wednesday. The procedure was going to be done on a Thursday. On Wednesday night they put in the medicine to dilate my cervix, and the nurse said that some girls abort with the medicine alone and don't have to go to the surgical room.

I was really sick, but I slept. When I woke up, I went to take a shower. As I was brushing my teeth, I felt something going down my legs. When I looked, it was lots of water and a little bit of blood. I called the nurse, and she said it was normal and nothing was wrong. The nurse told me that next time I called her, I should be quieter and try not to make a scene — the other patients might complain if they heard what was happening.

I got in the shower, and as I was bathing, I felt something like a period. I wear glasses, so I put them on and saw it was like a normal period, nothing out of the ordinary. I took my glasses off, and that's when I felt something heavier come down. I put the glasses on again and I saw it — I saw the fetus. I called the nurse, and she said, yes, you had an abortion.

When I saw the fetus, it was one of the hardest moments of my life. I started crying. I thought I was a killer. I thought I could never live again. The fetus was shaped like a tiny baby. I felt like the worst human being in the world. I couldn't talk to the nurses. They were trying to calm me down, but I was in shock.

There was a girl in the room with me who was also there for a legal abortion. After the nurses dressed me and brought me back into the room, that girl said, "Oh, I'm so jealous of you that you had a spontaneous abortion and that you don't have to go to the surgical room."

I said, "No, don't be jealous of me. If I could go back in time, I would have this baby right now, now that I saw what I saw."

I left the hospital on a Friday.

My boyfriend came back into town, and that feeling of guilt went away. For the first time in years, I felt really happy. I have had problems with depression, but for the first time, I liked myself. I felt like I had done the right thing. I wasn't feeling guilty at all.

Then the next week I had another crisis. I started thinking, *Was it a boy or a girl? What would it be like? What would it like to do?* I went through both emotions — not feeling guilty, feeling really guilty.

But today I can say I would never have been able to have a baby. I never wanted a baby. I don't have the financial or psychological support to have a baby right now.

I don't think it was a life. I think it was a bunch of cells that were becoming a life. It's not as terrible as people say it is. I am sure that I chose the right decision.

I am strongly in favor of legalizing abortion in Brazil. It's such a stupid law. I passed through a series of obstacles that I shouldn't have had to pass through just because abortion is illegal. I took care of myself. My boyfriend was wearing a condom. Another friend of mine got pregnant even though she took birth control pills and her boyfriend wore condoms. Nothing is 100 percent.

I had people who helped me, but can you imagine someone who doesn't have anyone to help them? Who doesn't have any kind of financial support? Who doesn't have a boyfriend? Who doesn't have friends? Can you imagine a woman who already has five children and she gets pregnant again and she doesn't want the baby? What is she going to do? To obligate a woman who doesn't want to be pregnant and who doesn't want to have a baby to spend nine months carrying something that heavy in her mind and in her body is cruel.

I would recommend Brazilian women file false rape reports if they want to have abortions. The system is corrupt. The police don't investigate, and this is what we have to do — it's the safest way. I found myself looking in the mirror holding my belly and feeling disgusted with the idea of having a baby. So I don't feel pity for the system. I think if we have a chance to disrupt it and doing so will help us, then we should do it. I would say it's crazier to take medicines we find on the Internet than it is to lie to the

police and get a safe procedure. Taking those medicines poses a higher risk to our health than going to a legal hospital with real doctors.

After the abortion, I received a letter from the Brazilian public health system telling me how much money they spent on me. They spent less than 150 reais (about \$75 US) — to make a comparison, an illegal clinic charges 1,000 reais. By keeping abortion illegal, the government is maintaining these illegal clinics — the clinics make lots of money when procedures are 1,000 reais each.

My boyfriend broke up with me in January. After I had the abortion, we started fighting a lot over little things. After we had a huge fight and broke up for good, I asked him why he ended things. He said he couldn't see me with the same eyes he saw me with before, and that he couldn't take that image of me letting someone kill a life inside of me.

I'm still afraid of the police finding out. I'm now getting the courage to talk about the real rape that happened when I was 16. I know the boy. I know where he lives. But I'm afraid if I tell the police, they will investigate and find out that the first story was a lie. I really want to report the guy and get him arrested, but I'm afraid of being arrested myself.

Today, I volunteer with different nonprofits, including a homeless shelter and an orphanage, and I'm trying to start my own organization for people who attempt suicide. I want to keep helping people.

*\*Juliana is a pseudonym. Other identifying details have been changed, and this story has been edited and condensed.*

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