



ORIGINAL

Social perception of the legalization of abortion in young people aged 18 to 25 years at the University of the Armed Forces Espe, Latacunga Centro Campus

La percepción social a la legalización del aborto en jóvenes de 18 a 25 años de la Universidad de las Fuerzas Armadas Espe Sede Latacunga Centro

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the legalization of abortion can be deduced as a current issue since it can be evidenced by various factors and events that have been put into public discussion around the world.

Objective: to determine the perception of students regarding the legalization of abortion.

Method: an observational, descriptive and cross-sectional study was carried out on the social perception of the legalization of abortion in young people aged 18 to 25 years at the University of the Armed Forces Espe, Latacunga Centro Campus. The information was collected using a survey.

Results: 16,50 % totally agreed, 22,40 % agreed, 41,20 % neutral and 20 % disagreed with the legalization of abortion. 65,90 % of young people are in complete agreement that adequate sexual education could reduce cases of unwanted abortion, 38,50 % are not sure if legalizing abortion is a right by law. The opinion held by the majority of respondents with 36,70 % is to be in complete agreement that legalization of abortion only occurs in specific cases of rape or incest.

Conclusions: the main finding indicates that they perceive abortion as a normal medical practice like any other that should have safe hospital care. The issue of decriminalization is still controversial in the country because the Ecuadorian constitution does not approve the legality of this.

Keywords: Abortion; Legalization of Abortion; Social Perception.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la legalización del aborto se lo puede deducir como un tema actual ya que se puede evidenciar mediante diversos factores y sucesos que han puesto en discusión pública alrededor de todo el mundo.

Objetivo: determinar la percepción de los estudiantes en torno a la legalización del aborto.

Método: se realizó un estudio observacional, descriptivo y transversal sobre la percepción social a la legalización del aborto en jóvenes de 18 a 25 años de la Universidad de las Fuerzas Armadas Espe Sede Latacunga Centro. Se realizó la recopilación de la información utilizando una encuesta.

Resultados: el 16,50 % totalmente de acuerdo, un 22,40 % de acuerdo, un 41,20 % neutro y un 20 % en desacuerdo con la legalización del aborto. Los jóvenes están con un 65,90 % totalmente en acuerdo según consideran que la educación sexual adecuada podría reducir los casos de aborto no deseado, un 38,50 %, no estando seguros si legalizar el aborto sea un derecho por la ley. La opinión que tiene mayoría de los encuestados con un 36,70 % es estar totalmente de acuerdo con que la legalización del aborto solo se de en casos puntuales de violación o incesto.

Conclusiones: el principal hallazgo apunta que perciben al aborto como una práctica médica normal como

cualquier otra que debería contar con una asistencia hospitalaria segura. El tema de la despenalización todavía es controversial en el país debido a que en la constitución del Ecuador no se aprueba la legalidad de este.

Palabras clave: Aborto; Legalización del Aborto; Percepción Social.

INTRODUCTION

Media coverage of legal cases, protests, and debates surrounding abortion has increased significantly. Media attention contributes to public awareness and reinforces the perception that the legalization of abortion is a topic of current relevance.

The decriminalization of abortion in Ecuador is still being debated as the religious sector overly influences it. However, within Ecuador, abortion has been decriminalized in the following cases according to the Comprehensive Penal Code (COIP):⁽¹⁾

- If the life or health of the mother is in danger and when,
- The pregnancy is the result of the rape of women with mental disabilities.

The diversity of opinions on abortion and its ethical, religious, and social implications continues to generate public discussion. Cultural and political differences between different regions of the world and within countries also contribute to the perception that the legalization of abortion is a current and constantly evolving issue.

In several countries, there have been significant changes in abortion-related laws and policies in recent years. Some places have legalized abortion or modified restrictions on access to it, which has generated intense debate and led to the perception that this is a current and evolving issue.

In recent years, abortion has intensified, as have the judicial processes against women who have decided to have an abortion. Until 2018, there were 243 women, while a year later, this number doubled to 430 girls, adolescents, and women waiting to be prosecuted. Currently, there is no exact figure of the women awaiting trial for having decided to have an abortion.

The perception of the legalization of abortion can be deduced as a current issue, as evidenced by various factors and events that have brought it into public discussion around the world. Therefore, we will deal with points or criteria that validate the issue's relevance today.

Social movements in different parts of the world have driven the struggle for reproductive rights and the legalization of abortion. Activist groups, both for and against, have gained visibility and influenced public perception of this issue.

A descriptive project is being carried out on the perception of young people in Latacunga. By means of surveys, we observe their perceptions and the arguments that accompany them so that they can make a decision on the issue of legalizing abortion, mainly in the city of Latacunga. We take into account the religious and cultural context that exists, as well as the social, economic, and educational context that the young people of Latacunga present, in order to have a perception about the legalization of abortion.

Latacunga is a city with high levels of poverty and inequality. This may contribute to young people seeing abortion as an option to avoid unwanted motherhood or to protect their health and future. Comprehensive sex education is essential for young people to be able to make informed decisions about their sexuality. In Latacunga, access to information and comprehensive sex education has improved in recent years. This may be contributing to young people having a better understanding of abortion and its implications.

The study was based on the need to regulate abortion in cases of rape in the legal system, given that worldwide, it is one of the forms of violence considered to be the cruellest that can be inflicted on a woman.

Given the above, the objective of this article is to determine the perception of students regarding the legalization of abortion.

METHOD

An observational, descriptive, and cross-sectional study was carried out on the social perception of the legalization of abortion in young people aged 18 to 25 at the University of the Armed Forces ESPE, Latacunga Center.

The information was collected using a survey based on the Likert method, "Questionnaire on attitudes towards the legalization of abortion," which has been digitally transferred to Google Forms; this questionnaire was developed by three automotive students from the ESPE University of the Armed Forces, Latacunga Belisario Quevedo campus, to determine attitudes in the areas of human and reproductive rights, legal and political aspects, and ethical, moral and religious values.

The researchers ensure that they obtain the informed consent of all participants before including them in the study. They guarantee the confidentiality of the data collected and the anonymity of the participants whenever possible. They address any ethical concerns related to the sensitive issue of abortion and public

perception.

RESULTS

100 % of the participants were students. The majority of the participants were aged 18,20, with a participation rate of 71,80 %. Meanwhile, the lowest participation rate of collaborators fluctuates between 20 and 25 years old, with 28,20 % in each age group. The majority of participants in this percentage, 35,30 %, are women, and the remaining 64,70 % are men.

Figure 1 shows that the majority of young people have a knowledge of 14 % knowledge of abortion laws, and 77 % of both genders know very little.

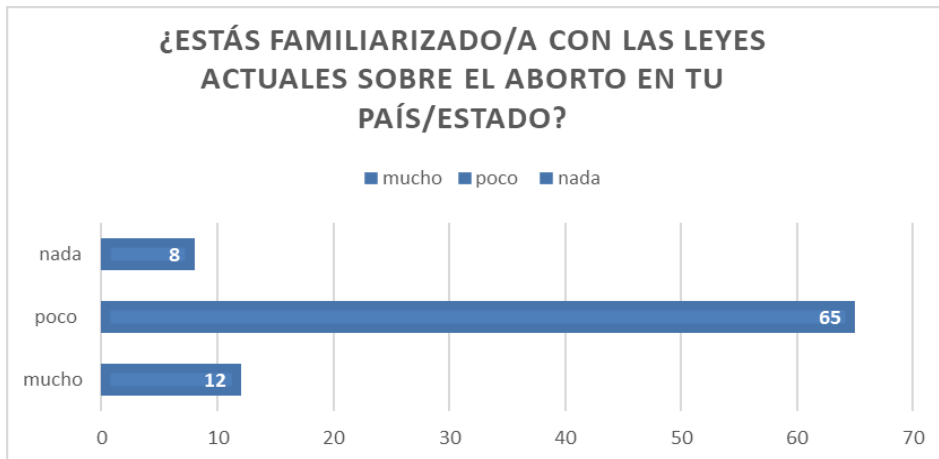


Figure 1. Distribution according to how familiar they are with the current laws on abortion in the country or state

The majority of young people (16,50 %) agree, 22,40 % agree, 41,20 % are neutral, and 20 % disagree with the legalization of abortion. In terms of whether they consider that the legalization of abortion would have a positive or negative effect on women’s health, the majority of young people have a negative attitude with 54,10 % and a less positive attitude with 45,90 %. When asked how they felt adequate sex education could reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, 65,90 % of young people agreed, 23,50 % agreed, 7 % were neutral, 1,20 % disagreed, and 2,40 % disagreed.

Figure 2 shows that most young people are neutral (47,10 %), followed by agreement and disagreement (17,60 %). According to them, the legalization of abortion should be decided by the government.

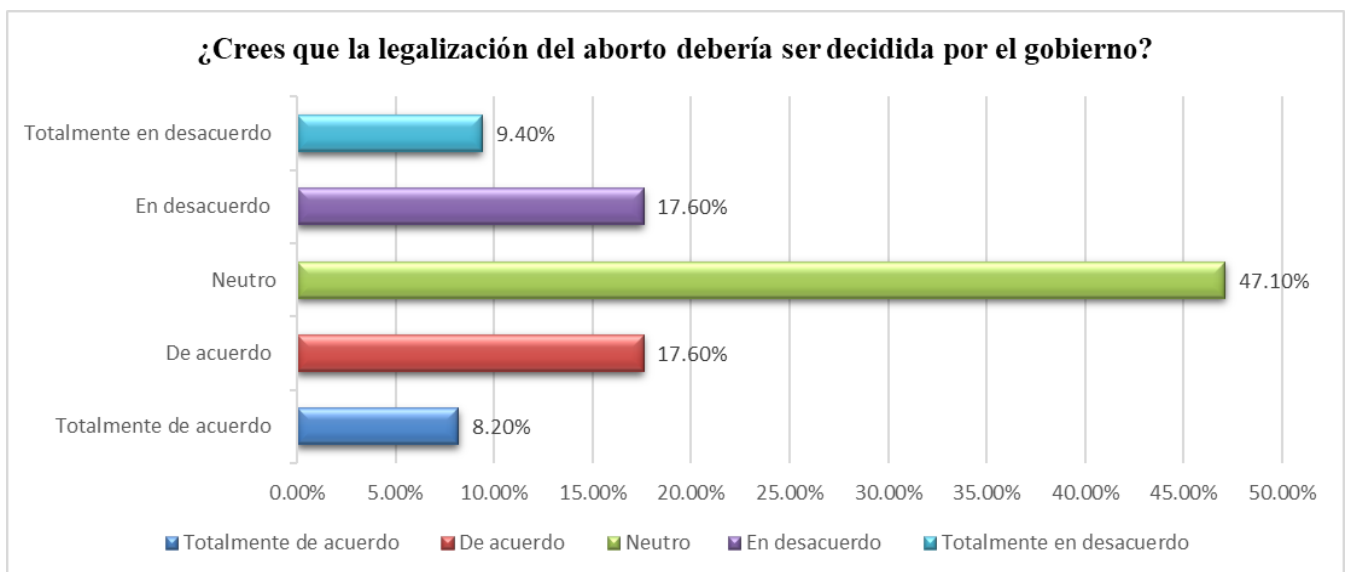


Figure 2. Distribution According to them, the government should decide on the legalization of abortion

A neutral 34,10 % with the highest number of responses, followed by 28,20 % in agreement, followed by 23,50 % in total agreement, followed by 8,20 % in disagreement, and finally, 5,90 % in total disagreement, as they consider that the legalization of abortion could threaten the right to life. 31,90 % chose to agree that

legalizing abortion could reduce the number of clandestine abortions. The majority opinion of the respondents, 31,90 %, is to agree with placing restrictions on the legalization of abortion.

In figure 3, it can be seen that the majority voted neutrally, with 38,50 % not being sure whether to legalize abortion as a right by law.

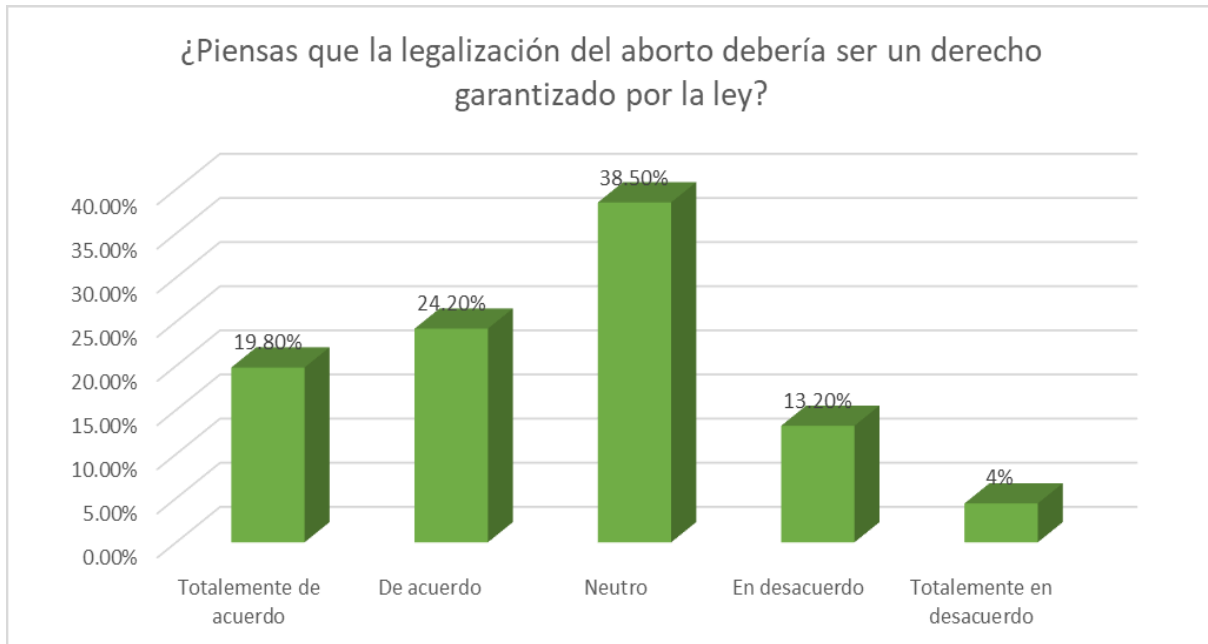


Figure 3. distribution according to whether they consider that the legalization of abortion should be a right guaranteed by law

The majority opinion of those surveyed, 36,70 %, is that they agree that the legalization of abortion should only occur in specific cases of rape or incest. In comparison, 27,80 % remain neutral on the issue, followed by 21,10 % who agree with the argument, 7,80 % who disagree, and, finally, 7 % who disagree. The majority of those surveyed, 42,90 %, are neutral about whether legalization should be decided at the state or national level. This opinion is due to how our government is constituted and the corruption that can occur in these cases. This is followed by 33,00 % agreeing with this question, with 18,70 % agreeing, 3,90 % disagreeing, and 2,00 % totally disagreeing with this opinion. The majority of students, 36,70 %, agree that the legalization of abortion would affect the infant mortality rate in the country, and only 21,10 % indicate that it would not affect the infant mortality rate in the country.

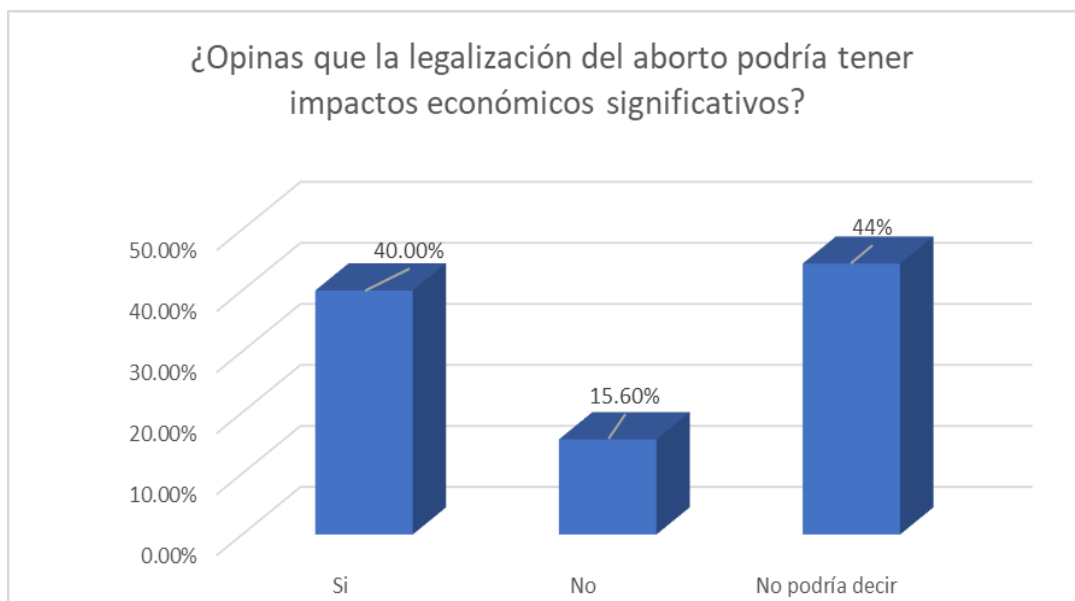


Figure 4. Distribution according to whether they consider that the legalization of abortion could have significant economic impacts

In figure 4, we can see that 44 % could not say whether the legalization of abortion could have significant economic impacts, with 40,00 % of respondents choosing that it could.

Of the students surveyed, 52,30 % answered in the affirmative when asked if they considered the legalization of abortion to be an advance in women’s rights, and 47,70% of the students answered no. 17,6 % agreed, 22 % only agreed, 50,5 % answered “Neutral,” 7,2 % disagreed with the question, and 2,8 % disagreed as they considered that the decision to have an abortion should be exclusively that of the woman. According to those who believe that the legalization of abortion would contribute to gender equality, 65,9 % voted “No,” This is much higher than “Yes,” with 34,1 %.

In figure 5, it can be seen that 15,4 % “Strongly agree,” and 24,2 % “Agree” that abortion is inhumane.

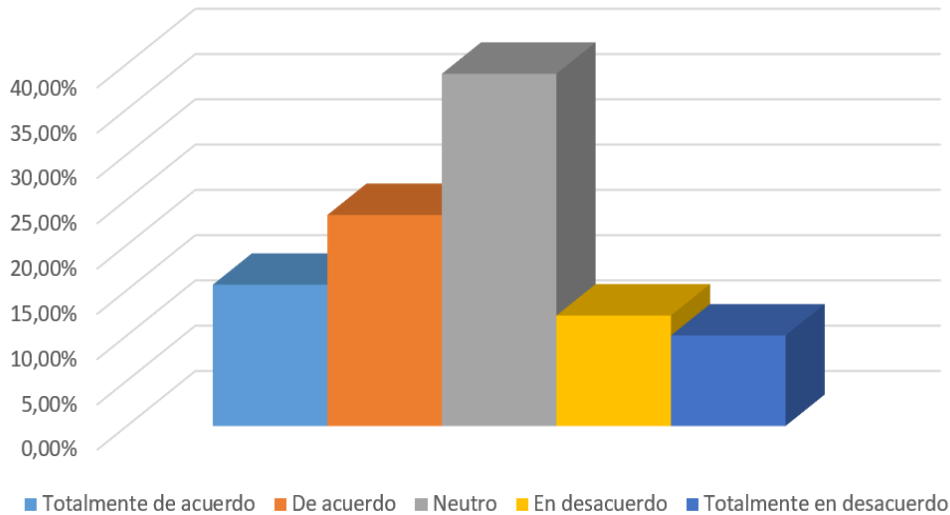


Figure 5. Distribution according to whether they consider abortion to be inhumane

22 % of the sample “Strongly agreed,” 25,3 % only “Agreed,” 33 % were “Neutral,” and 9,9 % “Disagreed” and “Strongly disagreed” because they consider that abortion denies the right to life. According to their opinion that abortion is an act of selfishness, 12,1 % either “Strongly agree” or “Disagree,” 15,4 % only “Agreed,” significantly with 46,2 % answered “Neutral,” and 14,3 % chose the option “Strongly disagree.” The lowest percentage was for the answer “Strongly disagree,” with 11 %, followed by “Strongly agree” with 12,1 %, 15,4 % for the answer option “Agree,” 20,9 % “Disagree,” and the highest percentage for the answer option “Neutral” with 40. 7 % consider that society would lose its value if abortion were legalized.

Figure 6 shows that the highest percentage of people who consider that it is unjustifiable for a woman to have an abortion even when she has decided not to have children is the “Neutral” answer option with 48,4 %.

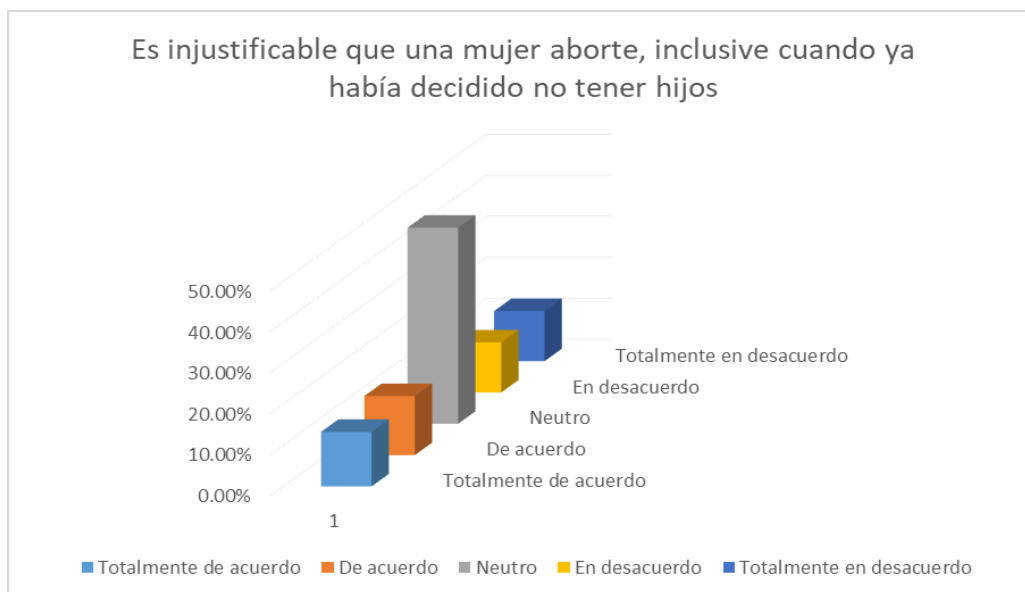


Figure 6. Distribution according to how unjustifiable they consider it for a woman to have an abortion even when she has decided not to have children

Regarding the opinion that a woman should be free to decide about abortion, 24,2 % “Strongly agreed,” 29,7 % “Agreed,” 35,2 % chose the “Neutral” response option, 8,8 % “Disagreed,” and 2,2 % “Strongly disagreed.” Regarding the opinion that women should have access to safe abortions in public hospitals, 28,9 % voted for the option “Strongly agree” 27. 8 % instead chose “Agree,” followed by the answer “Neutral,” with 31,9 %, 6,36 % “Disagree,” and 4,74 % definitely “Strongly Disagree.”

DISCUSSION

In the case of women, a desired pregnancy represents a series of motivations related to some benefits that motherhood brings. In contrast, for men, it means feeling in love with their partner and wanting to share motherhood with her. Unwanted pregnancy is those pregnancies that occur at an unfavorable or inopportune moment or that occur in a person who no longer wants to reproduce. The most common causes of this pregnancy, regardless of the age at which it appears, are lack of knowledge of contraceptive methods, little or no sex education, inadequate use of contraceptive methods, sexual abuse, and, finally, social pressure to start an active sex life without having prior knowledge about how to prevent pregnancy.⁽²⁾

It is essential to understand that childbirth is the “set of physiological phenomena that determine and accompany the expulsion of the fetus and the ovular appendages from the uterine cavity to the exterior or through the birth canal”.⁽³⁾

Abortion is the termination of pregnancy before the estimated time of delivery, whether voluntary or spontaneous. The weeks of gestation must be taken into account when performing an abortion because the longer the pregnancy, the greater the health and psychological risks and the more difficult it is, coinciding with the opinion of several authors.^(4,5,6,7,8)

Young people’s perception of the proposal to legalize abortion is relevant since we can propose to the city of Latacunga the idea of legalizing abortion and giving young people knowledge about sex education.

This knowledge is essential in the governmental decision-making process, especially when considering the implementation or modification of legal regulations related to abortion. Before establishing policies, it is necessary to understand the diversity of opinions in society. In this way, the concerns and needs of the population can be addressed more effectively, fostering a more inclusive and participatory approach to the construction of laws.

Advances in medicine and technology have influenced the perception of abortion by providing new perspectives on fetal viability, maternal health, and other related aspects. These advances have fueled ethical and legal debates, contributing to the topicality of the issue.

In 2021, the Constitutional Court decriminalized abortion when the pregnancy is the result of rape, but the sentence has not yet been implemented within the COIP. The criminalization of abortion is an act of sexual violence against women because it hinders the detection and prevention of gender-based and sexual violence, contributes to maternal mortality, generates delays and obstacles to the medical care of girls, young women, and women, and perpetuates negative stereotypes of women and young people living with disabilities.⁽⁹⁾

The issue of abortion is currently relevant, given that it is a public health problem and is present in our current social context. It should be emphasized that this is a worldwide problem; however, in Ecuador, in recent years, abortion has been increasing given that the majority of unwanted pregnancies occur in adolescence.

In recent years, abortion has been a topic of debate in various social contexts because the conceptions of each individual vary according to their beliefs, values, socioeconomic level, etc.

The study of perceptions of abortion is not only novel from a scientific perspective but is also of great importance in promoting citizen participation and formulating legal regulations. Researching people’s opinions provides a valuable component of how society perceives the issue of abortion, allowing us to learn about the different perspectives and the arguments for and against it.

In Ecuador, organizations such as Las Comadres recommend the use of mifepristone and misoprostol as a safe abortion method. In the country, misoprostol is not found under that name but as Cytotec and is marketed in 200 microgram tablets.⁽¹⁰⁾

There are four different routes of administration for the use of medication:

1. *Oral*: The tablets must be swallowed by the pregnant person, and this method is recommended for up to the 7th week and after 12 weeks.
2. *Vestibular*: the tablets must be placed between the cheek and the gums and swallowed after 30 minutes.
3. *Sublingual*: the medication (pills) are placed under the tongue and swallowed similarly after 30 minutes.
4. *Vaginal*: the pills are placed in the vaginal fornices (deeper parts of the vagina), and the woman must remain lying down for 30 minutes to complete the process.

5. *Surgical method*: a transcervical procedure is performed to end the pregnancy, including vacuum aspiration, dilation, and evacuation.

People's perceptions of abortion depend on the social, cultural, and family context in which the individual operates, resulting in whether these perceptions will be negative or positive in the person. Comprehensive sex education is essential for young people to be able to make informed decisions about their sexuality.⁽¹¹⁾

Perception can be defined as making judgments in which the individual is stimulated by various factors that promote their decisions or opinions. In other words, people's perceptions are influenced by the experiential mechanisms that the subject has, which are involved in both the conscious and the unconscious of the human psyche.

These attitudes are necessary elements for the construction of social representations, and, in the same way, they become essential for structuring knowledge of reality since they are related to the cultural and individual values and beliefs of people. Attitudes have affective (response of the nervous system and verbal statements), cognitive (perceptual responses and verbal statements), and behavioral (public behavior and verbal statements) components, which, when operating together, make the subject act by the attitudes they have towards the group or the person.⁽¹²⁾

The legalization of abortion in Uruguay in 2012 had positive impacts. Maternal mortality related to unsafe abortions was reduced, and women gained access to safer and legal reproductive health services. In addition, sex education and family planning were promoted. The legalization of abortion in Canada in 1969 allowed women to access safe medical services. This contributed to a significant decrease in maternal deaths related to unsafe abortions. However, there has also been ongoing controversy and debate about the limits and restrictions on access to abortion. The legalization of abortion in Ireland in 2018, following a historic referendum, marked a significant change. Irish women can now access abortion services within the country rather than traveling abroad. This has improved women's health and safety but has also faced resistance from conservative groups.⁽¹³⁾

The World Health Organization (WHO) conceptualizes pregnancy from a medical perspective as a process that begins 5 to 6 days after fertilization when the blastocyst attaches to the uterus wall, crossing the endometrium and invading the stroma. Subsequently, between 12 and 16 days after fertilization, the implantation process ends when the defect in the surface of the epithelium closes and completes the nidation process, thus giving way to pregnancy. In other words, pregnancy is a period in which the fetus develops inside the woman's womb or uterus and lasts approximately 9 months or a little longer.⁽¹⁴⁾

It is essential to address this research topic in social psychology, given that in Ecuador, people do not have sufficient knowledge to carry out this procedure due to the lack of specialized institutions and information on abortion within the country, resulting in the stigmatization of women who have had an abortion. Also, in this way, it will be possible to determine what attitudes are needed to raise awareness among the population about the effects of the criminalization of abortion, mainly associated with teenage pregnancy and maternal mortality from clandestine abortion.

CONCLUSIONS

The main finding is that they perceive abortion as a standard medical practice like any other that should have safe hospital care. The perception of university students is favorable to a certain extent, as they agree that abortion is a decision that is clearly up to the woman and that neither the state nor religion can intervene in it. The issue of decriminalization is still controversial in the country because the constitution of Ecuador does not approve of its legality.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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