



REVIEW

Social perception on the legalization of abortion

La percepción social sobre la legalización del aborto

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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 characterize aspects related to the legalization of abortion.

Method: a review of the available bibliography in databases such as SciELO, Scopus and ClinicalKey was carried out, from which a total of 14 related articles were consulted, empirical methods such as logical history and analysis and synthesis were used.

Results: the topic of abortion today is relevant since it is a public health problem and is present in our current social context. Research into people's opinions provides a valuable component on how society perceives the topic of abortion. In the case of women, the desired pregnancy represents a series of motivations related to some type of benefit that motherhood grants her. Abortion is the interruption of pregnancy before the estimated time of gestation of the woman is fulfilled. It is important to address this research topic in social psychology.

Conclusions: the legalization of abortion in cases of rape contributes to the dignity of the pregnant woman. 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: caracterizar aspectos relacionados con la legalización del aborto.

Método: se realizó una revisión de la bibliografía disponible en bases de datos como SciELO, Scopus y ClinicalKey de las cuales se consultaron un total de 14 artículos relacionados, se utilizaron métodos empíricos como el histórico lógico y de análisis y síntesis.

Resultados: el tema del aborto en la actualidad es relevante dado que es una problemática de salud pública y se encuentra presente en nuestro contexto social actual. La investigación de las opiniones de las personas proporciona un componente valioso sobre cómo la sociedad percibe el tema del aborto. En el caso de la mujer el embarazo deseado representa a una serie de motivaciones relacionadas con algún tipo de beneficio que le otorgue la maternidad. El aborto es la interrupción del embarazo antes de que se cumpla el tiempo estimado de gestación de la mujer. Es importante tratar este tema de investigación en la psicología social.

Conclusiones: La legalización del aborto en casos de violación sexual contribuye a la dignidad de la gestante. 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

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

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

Media coverage of legal cases, protests, and debates around 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 under debate 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 been intensifying, 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 for the number of women awaiting trial for having decided to have an abortion.⁽²⁾

The legalization of abortion in cases of rape and the right to dignity of the pregnant woman were investigated. 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 review article is to characterize aspects related to the legalization of abortion.

METHOD

The available literature was reviewed using articles retrieved from SciELO, Scopus, and ClinicalKey databases. Filters were used to select articles in English and Spanish, and empirical methods such as logical history analysis, synthesis, and synthesis were used to compile and understand the information obtained. The terms "Abortion," "Legalization of Abortion," and "Social Perception" were used as keywords in the article. A total of 14 references were selected that addressed different considerations related to the legalization of abortion.

RESULTS

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. Still, it is also essential 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 for an understanding of the diverse perspectives and arguments for and against it.

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.⁽³⁾

People's perceptions of abortion depend on the social, cultural, and family context in which the individual develops, 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.⁽⁴⁾

Perception can be defined as making judgments in which the individual is stimulated by various factors that promote their decisions or opinions on a subject. 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.

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.⁽²⁾

For women, a desired pregnancy represents a series of motivations related to motherhood's benefits. In contrast, for men, it means feeling in love with their partner and wanting to share motherhood with her. To unwanted pregnancies, such as 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 prior knowledge of how to prevent pregnancy.⁽⁵⁾

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 annexes from the uterine cavity to the exterior or through the birth canal".⁽⁶⁾

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.^(7,8,9,10,11)

There are different ways of classifying abortion, but for this study, we will use the Clinical Practice Guide of the Ecuadorian Ministry of Public Health, which classifies abortion as follows:

Threatened abortion: considered to be the presence of intrauterine bleeding before the 20th completed week of gestation, with or without contractions, cervical dilation, and expulsion of the fetus.

- Ongoing abortion: this refers to an inevitable abortion due to increased pain, contractions, or bleeding (hemorrhage) with cervical modifications or rupture of the membranes to expel the gestational product.
- Incomplete abortion: this is a partial expulsion of fetal, placental tissue, or amniotic fluid through a modified cervix and variable bleeding.
- Complete abortion: the total expulsion of the intrauterine contents without the need for any other procedure.
- Delayed abortion: characterized by the delay in the uterine cavity of a dead embryo or fetus or the arrest of the normal progression of pregnancy; it may or may not be accompanied by viable bleeding.
- Septic abortion: considered an obstetric complication that occurs before, during, or after an induced or spontaneous abortion due to infection of the placenta and fetus.
- Therapeutic abortion: describes the medical or surgical termination of pregnancy to prevent serious or permanent injury to the woman when there is a serious risk to the life of the mother or a severe genetic disease and to safeguard the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman.
- Recurrent abortion: the occurrence of two or more consecutive abortions.
- Unsafe abortion: a procedure performed to terminate an unwanted pregnancy, carried out by individuals or institutions without medical safety and in unsuitable environments.

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.⁽¹²⁾

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

1. Oral: the pills must be swallowed by the pregnant person and this method is recommended up to the 7th week and after 12 weeks.
2. Vestibular: the pills 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 the same way after 30 minutes.
4. Vaginal: the pills are placed in the vaginal fornixes (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.

Latitudes are necessary elements for the construction of social representations. They are equally essential for structuring knowledge of reality since they relate to people's cultural and individual values and beliefs. 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.⁽¹³⁾

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 have also been ongoing controversies and debates 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 instead of traveling abroad. This has improved women's health and safety but has also faced resistance from conservative groups.⁽¹⁴⁾

It is essential to address this research topic in social psychology, given that in Ecuador, people do not have enough knowledge to perform 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 find out what attitudes are needed to raise awareness among the population about the effects of the criminalization of abortion, which is associated mainly with teenage pregnancy and maternal mortality from clandestine abortion.⁽⁵⁾

CONCLUSIONS

The legalization of abortion in cases of rape contributes to the dignity of the pregnant woman. The issue of decriminalization is still controversial in the country because the legality of abortion is not approved in the Ecuadorian constitution. In addition, awareness campaigns should be carried out on the reproductive and sexual rights of women and men.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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