INDUCED ABORTION: A SOCIETAL PROBLEM
IN SRI LANKA

RATHNAYAKE MUDIYANSELAGE ABYRA RATHNE

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS (HEALTH SOCIAL SCIENCES)
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY
2001
ISBN : 974-665-624-4
COPYRIGHT OF MAHIDOL UNIVERSITY
ABORTION: A SOCIETAL PROBLEM IN SRI LANKA

The intent of this study was to investigate the complexity of induced abortion in Sri Lanka where abortion is legally banned, but 1000-2000 induced abortions are practiced per day in many parts of the country.

A qualitative exploratory research methodology was employed. Data were collected from September to December 2000 in a private abortion clinic in a city in the North Western Province of Sri Lanka. A purposive sample of 10 women was selected at this clinic to understand the magnitude of the problem from women's point of view. In addition, eight community leaders were chosen to understand the public perception on induced abortion in the country. An open-ended, unstructured, in-depth interview guideline was utilized for collecting data. Line by line content, contextual, and thematic data analyses were performed to investigate the severity of induced abortion.

In the first half of the study findings indicated that women who resorted to abortion faced critical dilemmas from the very moment that they knew the concerned pregnancy was unwanted until they destroyed the fetus in the private medical clinic. More married women were highly likely to terminate their pregnancy, according to present study findings. However, for some women, especially, unmarried, sexually victimized women an unwanted pregnancy was not only an individual matter, but also it was a family matter as well. In unmarried women's unwanted pregnancy situations mothers played a significant role when compared to their fathers. Except, rape and schizophrenia cases all other pregnancies were results of birth control failure. Further, though all informants had one main reason for terminating pregnancy, more than one factor contributed to all women to seek induced abortion. As well, socio-economic factors were the most critical reasons that influenced women to destroy their fetuses.

In the second half of the results, it was revealed that the public perception on induced abortion in the country is rather diverse. The four religious leaders' attitudes towards induced abortion were religiously motivated and conservative. On the contrary, the other four members' general perception towards induced abortion was liberal. Thus, four religious leaders believed that the erosion of traditional social and religious values are the main reason for the increase in abortions in the country, while the rest of the community leaders thought that socio-economic conditions were the leading cause for the alarming number of induced abortions in contemporary Sri Lankan society.

The results of the study point to the need of formal sex education to combat abortion and sex-related matters in the country. As well, qualitative research-based investigations are urgently required to understand the magnitude of the problems prevailing in Sri Lanka. However, it is concluded that the law should have the primary jurisdiction over social and religious values on induced abortion.