

Abortion legalized: Challenges ahead

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Abstract

Objective: To see whether advocacy for abortion law and comprehensive abortion care (CAC) sites after legalization of abortion in Nepal is adequate among educated people (above school leaving certificate).

Method: 150 participants were assigned randomly who agreed to be in the survey and were given structured questionnaires to find out their perception of abortion and CAC sites.

Result: Majority know abortion is legalized and majority have positive attitude about legalization of abortion, however majority are not aware of abortion service in CAC sites and none knew the cost of abortion service

Conclusion: Proper and adequate advocacy of the new abortion law and CAC service is essential.

Key words: Abortion law, CAC site, Advocacy

In Nepal, for every 100,000 live births, 539 women die due to pregnancy and child related complications¹. 54% of all hospital admissions are due to abortion related complications². Similarly a hospital study found that 20- 60% of patients admitted in Obs/Gyn ward in government hospital were due to abortion complications³. The 2002 Nepal Demographic Health Survey found that more than one in five births were unwanted⁴. Prior to the new abortion law women with unintended pregnancies had clandestine abortions, often risking their own health and lives evidenced by the study done in 1994 which estimated clandestine abortion in age group 15-19 to be 117(117(.9(5)).11)-5.9 CAC sites in 37 districts

to be in the study. They were given the structured questionnaire, explained to them the questions of questionnaire and a week time was given to them to complete in February 2006. After a week time some, 11 not completed question in questionnaire were omitted from the study and a total of 139 participants survey was analyzed.

Age group ranged from 20 or less than 20 to 40 or more than 40. Female constituted 62.2% while male were 37.7%, non health background constituted 36.7% followed by nursing 34.5% and medical 28.8%

Results

Of the 139 participants as shown above in the Table 1, 87% knew abortion was legalized in Nepal, 12% said it was not legalized and 0.7% said don't know. However majority could not identify which year it was legalized, only 12% could tell the correct year of legalization (Table 2). Though 49.6% respondents knew women seek for abortion however 35.4% did not know (Table 3). As to where should a woman seeking for abortion go to get its service, only 27.4% said government hospital and as high as 72.6% identified private clinic as the main source for abortion service.

⁷. FPAN in its Endeavour to make Centre of Excellence in safe abortion did a baseline survey to see if advocacy was adequate in abortion.

Materials and methods

150 participants from health background such as nursing students, nurses and undergraduates, residents of Obs/Gyn, doctors of Institute of Medicine, Tribhuvan University Teaching hospital as researches in abortion is ongoing in this institute and from non health background, students of National college of Information Technology were asked to fill a survey in the structured questionnaire who agreed

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The study also wanted to know indirectly if they knew about the new abortion law by asking them if they thought abortion helped woman's life and should abortion be legalized or not. As shown in Table 5, 86.3% considered that women's health improved after abortion has been legalized while only 12.2% did not think legalization helped woman's health

and 1.45 said they were not sure. High percentage 93.5% was positive about abortion, said legalization should be done, only 3.6% said it should not be done while and 2.9% were indecisive (Table 6). None of them either could tell the cost of CAC, the range was from 1000 to more than 10,000.

Table 1: Is abortion legalized in Nepal

Abortion is legalized in Nepal	Number	Percent
Yes	121	87.1
No	17	12.2
Don't know	1	0.7
Total	139	100.0

Table 2: When has it been legalized?

When legalized	Number	Percent
1959	1	0.8
1984	1	0.8
1998	1	0.8
1999	1	0.8
2001	16	13.2
2002	15	12.4
2003	27	22.3
2004	12	9.9
2005	10	8.3
Don't know	37	30.6
Total	121	100.0

Table 3: Do you know anyone who has seeked abortion services

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	69	49.65
No	70	50.4%
Total	139	100.0%

Table 4: Where do they seek for abortion

Site	Frequency	Percentage
Private	104	72.6
Government	35	27.4
Total	139	100.0

Table 5: Has legalization of woman helped woman

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	120	86.3
No	2	1.4
Don't know	17	12.2
Total	139	100.0

Table 6: In your opinion should a woman have a right to abort

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	130	93.5%
No	5	38%
Don't know	4	29%
Total	139	100%

Discussion

All participants in the survey were educated and majority were from health background and they were given ample time but only 87% could tell that abortion was legalized which is very high as compared to survey done by CREPA in 2005⁸ and 12 % categorically said no, while 0.7 were not sure. Very few (12%) could tell the year of legalization and among them not a single could tell the cost of abortion service as it is in CAC site. This shows that even a majority of participants from health background dealing with women's health even after 3 years of legalization are not adequately aware about abortion law then certainly less educated women who belong to rural areas of Nepal need a greater extent of information about new abortion laws. Similarly the survey shows that although high percentage (90%) thought that abortion should be legalized, this figure is quite high as compared to the study done by CREPA where it was 54-60%⁹. The figure was as high as 81% in a study in 2005⁹ and 60.4% knew women seek for abortion but that only 27.4% go to government hospitals for abortion, comparable to a study done by CREPA in 2005 (23.1%). This indicates that public is still unaware of CAC sites. Participants thought that women need abortion in different weeks of pregnancy and in certain conditions not to be limited to 12 weeks which shows that woman are in real need of abortion service but they are unaware about law and CAC service.

Conclusion

Legalizing abortion and even providing abortion service is not adequate to ensure access to safe abortion. Many challenges still lie ahead in our country so that no girl or woman have to risk her life or health to end an unwanted pregnancy, it is imperative that the community especially the poor, marginalized and the underserved need to be informed . Proper and adequate advocacy to increase awareness of new law and CAC service should be done with good media campaign and strategic public/private partnership.

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