

Executive Summary

Termination of pregnancy was the third leading cause of direct maternal deaths, constituting 11.3%. They constituted 8.6% of all maternal deaths, from both direct and indirect causes. Therefore, this study is aimed at identifying the knowledge of the women attending antenatal & gynaecological clinics of the Colombo South Teaching Hospital regarding termination of pregnancy.

In Sri Lanka termination of pregnancy is illegal, except when it is performed under certain conditions in order to save a mother's life. It is known that approximately 95% of unsafe abortions take place in developing countries. As in many developing countries, in Sri Lanka a significantly large number of women of reproductive age are faced with unwanted pregnancies. The increased number of unwanted pregnancies among women in Sri Lanka was due to lack of knowledge on reproductive and sexual health, lack of knowledge on family planning methodologies, access to such services, lack of negotiation skills within man dominated sexual relationships, alcoholism, rape and socio-cultural influence. As a result an increasing proportion of women use abortion to prevent unwanted births. Thus, the approximate number of annual induced abortions in Sri Lanka is 150,000 – 200,000.

But the fact that the termination of pregnancy also should be allowed on socioeconomic grounds has been a major point raised on the issues of termination of pregnancies in Sri Lanka. But due to strong objections especially on cultural and religious grounds, it has not been a reality yet. But still around 100 illegal terminations of pregnancies per day is believed to be performed in Sri Lanka. Given these severe restrictions on abortion, as well as the region's low contraceptive prevalence and high birthrates, many women die each year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. Therefore as other developing countries in the world Sri Lanka struggle with the question of whether to decriminalize abortion,

However in Sri Lanka relative to the large number of illegal termination of pregnancies performed in the country, relatively a small proportion appears to die from abortions. Although one of the authors termed this special situation as “safe abortion in an illegal context”, the disease burden and the misery women go through abortion is immense.