

**F-03: Induced abortion in Sri Lanka**

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The objectives of this study were to obtain information as to why women

resort to abortion and what can be done in order that these women may have better access to safe and effective methods to regulate their fertility.

The project was carried out during the period 1991-1993 in collaboration with WHO. A sample of 502 health professionals (15% doctors, 33% nurses and 52% midwives & others) who were directly involved with reproductive health services at government and local government health institutions in the Colombo District expressed their views by questionnaire and interview on the nature and extent of induced abortion in Sri Lanka.

Over 90% of the respondents felt that "unwanted pregnancy" was a serious problem in the country. Three important reasons for "unwantedness" expressed were economic difficulties relating to child rearing (35%), previous child being too young (19%) and mothers being unmarried (15%). The majority of respondents (76%) agreed that self-induced abortion is becoming less prevalent whereas over 85% felt that the number of induced abortions were increasing. According to the respondents, unsafe methods of induced abortions were most prevalent among women living in urban areas (88%), among women who were exposed to socially unaccepted sexual relationships (87%) among unmarried women (64%) and among working women (54%). Nearly 66% of respondents felt that induced abortion as is currently practiced as a method of fertility regulation was unacceptable due to the health and social consequences to the mother. 52% of respondents accepted the current abortion law as the best abortion law applicable to Sri Lanka. However, another 33% stressed the need for expanding the law in order to protect the physical and mental health of women.

It was interesting to note that 42% of doctors, 77% of nurses and 59% of midwives and others disapproved the use of contraceptives by unmarried women as a method of fertility regulation. Major reason for this disapproval was that it was against the socio-cultural values in our country.