

Comparability of two survey instruments employed in the investigation of induced abortion.

Recognising the difficulties in data gathering on induced abortion, the present study has attempted to employ an innovative approach for better information, by investigating the opinions of health professionals in the context of Colombo district in Sri Lanka.

The opinions of two groups of health professionals were investigated using two different survey instruments. The first survey, using an interviewer-administered questionnaire (IAQ), was conducted in 1991-93 while the second survey, using a self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) was conducted in 1998-99. The objectives were to find out whether there were similarities and differences in the characteristics and responses between the two survey samples and to explore the advantages and disadvantages of two survey instruments. The response rates in the two surveys were 81% (IAQ) and 48% (SAQ) respectively.

The SAQ sample was educationally highly qualified than the IAQ sample. There were more SAQ respondents who had over 10 years of professional experience, than the proportion in the IAQ sample with similar duration of experience. The IAQ sample was evenly distributed at all age categories with the peak at the age group, 30-39 years. Over 57% of SAQ sample were older than 50 years of age. Nearly 86% the IAQ sample constituted female health professionals. The male-female proportion in the SAQ sample was approximately two to one. The differences in the opinions between the IAQ and SAQ samples were evident at several instances. For example, a majority of IAQ respondents did not wish for a change in the abortion law, while a large proportion of SAQ respondents agreed that there should be a change in the law allowing more freedom for the women to seek abortion. The adopted methodology has provided a general model for resolving some obstacles that affect the investigation of induced abortion. The two cooperative survey instruments provided the ways of improving the representatives of the study samples, and increasing the range and validity of the information collected on a sensitive topic.

The SAQ sample may be a better-qualified group of respondents for data gathering on induced abortion in contexts where abortion is illegal. The SAQ survey had the advantages of deriving thoughtful responses under complete anonymity and use of moderate amount of resources.