

Magnitude and perceptions of the abortion in Cuba

Qualitative and quantitative study

Summary

Introduction: In Cuba where the fertility has very low-level, the abortion is very high, it is legalized and it has very good statistical data, but very few studies exist it about approaches and perceptions on the women and the society practice. The **objective** is to show the evolution, the perceptions and different point of view on this practice. **Methodology:** The study uses documents and official statistical information, articles and results of studies with focal groups and interview in depth. **Results:** The effect of the reduction of the abortion rate and the increase of the menstrual regulation indicate that the descent of this practice is low. The study finds that the abortion is intimately linked to the way of thinking of the social environment, of the woman and her couple that limit its to modify.. **Conclusions:** In Cuba discharge abortion and factors that favor it persists.

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EXTENSIVE SUMMARY

I.-INTRODUCTION

The induced abortion has been defined in the literature like the deliberate action of a woman or another person of finishing with a not wanted pregnancy, not foreseen or not planned. The history of the regulation of the fertility picks up that from very remote times, in spite of being recognized the risks of the abortion practice, there are many women that appeal to this under non sure conditions¹.

In Cuba it is allowed the abortion practice and all those are done are legal. The legislation establishes that the practice is of to the woman free decision until the week 10, that is inside the first pregnancy trimester, once this period has pasted an abortion obtained under certain conditions. For their practice it has a complete and well organized attention system, where the services are free and they are carried out by high level professionals that offer appropriate and careful attention in the whole country. [The sanitary authorities have norms and procedures guided to the continuous and permanent analysis of the unfavorable effect of this practice²](#).

There is enough information in Cuba about the magnitude, characteristic and procedures in the abortion practice, but there are another very little studied aspects, among this the women perceptions and approaches that appeal to this practice, the roll played in the abortion practice by the couple's male partner and the professionals approaches who carry out this work every day. There are authors who tell they don't know about these aspects, which limit the factors comprehension that condition the sexual behavior that takes to the abortion. The woman thinking, her couple way of thinking and the type of society make up all those factors that may hinder successful actions on this topic.

The **Objective** of the present work is to the evolution, the perceptions and the factors of the abortion practice, related with the woman, with her couple and with society components like health.

Methodology: To carry out this study documents, statistical official information, articles and available works about abortion in the country have been used, and also it was deepened with information coming from focal groups and interview in depth. They were obtained from researches in different parts of the country, not only women and their spouses, but with health leaders, what has more all than very important for Cuba sexual and reproductive health.

The study of the abortion generally considers the facts and the fellows quantity, i.e. intensity and frequency. Nevertheless changes that determined this phenomenon characteristic are ether investigated in connection with the necessary to carry out studies with qualitative and quantitative technical^{3,4}.

The attained information and the researches done permit to analysis the factors to proveque the abortion practice and give hypothesis in relation to the perceptions and way of thinking abortion practice in Cuba.

II.- THE ABORTION PRACTICE.

Before 1959 the abortion was legal in Cuba only in case of the pregnant woman's life danger, violation or hereditary illnesses transmission, but the real practice was very different, This was determined by the applicants economic resources or another reasons like politicians.

When the new penal code was established the law only punished the induced abortion when it was practiced without the pregnant woman's consent or under insecure conditions. The Cuban legislation and the creation of health institutions where the abortion practiced guaranteed the abortions were registered carefully, and their accounting was exact, truthful and complete, what is notably different from other many countries of the region⁵.

When analyzing the available information in Cuba on the abortion, it stands out their magnitude. Before 1960 in spite of the legal restrictions, the abortion was practiced secretly, Since the economic power, conditioned its practice comfort and security, but in general registrations didn't exist⁶.

The Cuban official figures began to be counted in the years 70, following the abortion international definition and fertile age, it allowed to know that from 1975 to 1986 the rates varied from 40 to less than 60 abortions per a thousand women in fertile age*. Starting from that last date, a slight but sustained descent is shown in that the abortions percentage per childbirth in that year arrived to 96.6%. From 1993 to 2005 the abortion relation per 100 childbirths descended to less than 60%. Using another fertile age group the rate of abortions was of 26.6 per thousand women with fertile age to 12 to 49 years old in 1993. In later dates it has stayed below 30 per thousand women⁷. Since the 1980 it is observed that more than a third of the pregnancies finish in abortion⁸.

It is also practiced another technique in the country that is the Menstrual Regulation (RM). They are cases that from the medical point of view give pregnancy signals very previously to their confirmation. Therefore when practical abortions are counted RM is not included. According to a health official interview ". The menstrual aspiration is a technique that produces abortions in more than 70 percent of the times"⁹ and according to studies of RM practice it has been verified that in more than 50% of the cases they are abortions. Although Cuban authorities that consider they cannot be defined as abortions, they should be included to take them into account when the actions of health are elaborated.

III.- PERCEPTIONS AND OPINIONS IN CONNECTION WITH THE ABORTION.

-THE WOMEN

According the studies results carried out in the country, not wanted pregnancy is considered a problem for the woman and her family and not for her partner, Everybody agrees that when a woman is pregnant it is generally the result of a sexual relationship without protection, that is why the future of that referred pregnancy concerns to the couple's members. The Cuban traditions, as a cultural feature of any community, in spite of the experienced changes, with the increase of the woman role in the society, the interrelations of the couples still manifest tendencies that are strongly associated with the social traditional behavior, in which stays the role of the woman's submission in the sexual thing and the man imposing role.

The man's role studies in the reproduction allow to consider that the man's perception on the abortion practice, differs of that of the woman, and they indicate they don't feel responsible for this

* Fertility ages 15 to 49 years old.

situation³. In general for the woman and especially for the adolescents, the partner is not who shares actions in connection to this practice. The Cuban laws consider the fertility is the couple's member duty. However, the society considers the woman herself is the only one responsible for her decision, but her family should support her unconditionally, while her partner family doesn't assume it as its responsibility.

In "10 de October" municipality study, they express that in most of the interviews carried out, when referring to the pregnancy interruption the woman said they took their own decisions. In an interviewee a 19 year-old woman with 2 children, who had 3 interruptions, in stable union when she knew she was pregnant she commented it with her sexual partner and she said the following thing: *"Se asombró, me preguntó "qué vas a hacer" yo le dije que él sabía que me lo tenía que interrumpir, porque nosotros no podemos tener hijos ahora, yo empecé a trabajar... ... él estuvo de acuerdo. La decisión yo la había tomado antes de que me faltara la menstruación y después esperé un tiempo para no asustarlo, después se lo dije".* Another working woman of 42 years of age expressed it in the following way: *"Mi pareja era único hijo y él si quería que yo lo tuviera, pero bueno era difícil por lo que te conté continuar ese embarazo. Al final él se convenció...al final todo el mundo se dio cuenta de que era una locura dejarme ese embarazo, ...".* In the analysis of the discussions of the Focal Groups the study investigator meditated on the results and she commented: "The man in general doesn't participate in the taking of decision, the woman awards him and he assumes it a passive role in the whole process. The friends never influence in an important way"

Also it appears in these interviews the way the women perceive their family action respect to their pregnancy. A 24 years old woman with stable partner with 2 spontaneous abortions referred that she made her decision, although her family was in favor or in against, but did not mention if her partner's family was agreed or not to maintain or to interrupt the pregnancy.

- HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND THE MEN

The discussions results of the health professionals, show the woman thinking way in favor of the abortion before a possible pregnancy, when they say: (leader of the Maternal-infantile Program (PAMI)) *"Mira, antes las pacientes llegaban el médico le hacía un tacto, un reconocimiento clínico y ahí detectaban el embarazo ahora las mujeres vienen directamente solicitando un Ultrasonido para que les detecten el embarazo ... Ya lo piden. Entonces la decisión la toman después que se hacen el ultrasonido al médico no le queda ni siquiera hacer la pregunta, pero por otra parte llegan directamente diciendo: Dra. estoy embarazada y me lo voy a interrumpir, aunque es verdad que el médico no está exento de una formación en la cual las mujeres tienen una cultura abortiva".*

In general it is known very little regarding the partner's male played in the abortion practice role. Several studies show data that indicate the man doesn't participate. There are authors that consider that this lack of knowledge limits our understanding on the sexual behaviors in relation to couples, what takes to meditate on the situation seen on the whole in the partner's members and the necessity of determining the role that corresponds each one, before such an intimate problem as the abortion. There are another factors besides women thinking way, their partners and the society that don't support the couple's unit situation.

Studies carried out allows to go into the form of the both sexes young and adolescents, thinking in Havana City (Cuban capital) and in Sancti Spiritus (central county of the country) In these studies they expressed in the Focal Groups the following thing (Havana an student, male, 19 years old). *The adolescents perceive the practice, the risks and the technique peculiarities according to the sex. They are subordinated to the society culture and traditions about masculinity. The males pointed out the women are more exposed to the sexual activity risks than them, to social and*

health risks in relation to complications in interruptions of the not wanted pregnancies, in the attention to born children of that type of pregnancies and in not being able to continue studies,

In the discussions of the health professionals, they reflect that many campaigns have been made to prevent sexual transmission illnesses and many others, but they consider that it doesn't stop the prevention not wanted pregnancies and not using the abortion indiscriminately. This was reflected in the following comments: “ *Yo pienso que nuestra población es una población bien informada pero carente del conocimiento necesario para hacer un uso adecuado de esa información. Y nuestra experiencia médica está reflejando eso... .. Cuando se empieza a conscientizar en la población la problemática del SIDA y las ITS se aumenta el uso real del condón, ahora nunca se ha conscientizado en la necesidad de usarlo para proteger contra un embarazo no deseado, porque el uso del condón para la protección contra un embarazo requiere de técnicas de su uso y esta técnica se obtiene de conocimiento y ese conocimiento la gente no lo tiene*”. (Municipality leader of PAMI). In another point of the discussion another leader exemplifies the problem in connection to the knowledge and the information. According to another the PAMI leader it also happens with the coitus interruptus.

All the results allow to outline the hypothesis that in general one works to reduce the abortion practice and to increase the use of the contraception, but it is necessary to deepen in the women approaches their self and their partners, in order to modify their opinions and attitudes and they achieve a bigger integration of both in their relationships of intimacy, this allows them to act in favor of their sexual and reproductive health.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS.

- The abortion is a topic of which one has information In Cuba and there are different studies that allow to value its evolution.
- The health system has norms and procedures guided to the continuous and permanent analysis of the practice unfavorable effect.
- The women perceptions and the whole society is that the abortion practice is a problem that is of the woman's decision, what should be considered when taking actions directed to achieve a reduction of this practice.

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