



Assessment of Opinions of Nursing Students in Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia on Legislation on Admissibility of Abortion

Andrzej Brodziak^{1,2*}, Alicja Rozyk Myrta², Iveta Matisakova³ and Jana Kutnohorska⁴

¹Institute of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health, Sosnowiec, Poland

²Institute of Nursing, University of Applied Sciences, Nysa, Poland

³Faculty of Healthcare, Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín, Slovakia

⁴Department of Health Care Studies, Tomas Bata University, Zlín, Czech Republic

Abstract

Background: Today in various countries around the world, there is a dispute on the acceptability and legality of abortion. The recent attempt of fundamentalist groups in Poland to further tighten the already very restrictive legislation in Poland, caused in October 2016 contestations between the proponents of so-called pro-choice and pro-life attitudes, which took the form of mass street protests. Working on the attempt to explain the causes of the exacerbation of the dispute, we have also carried out our own focused surveys, which we describe in detail in this short report.

Methods: We conducted the surveys during three focus studies, which were organized by authors of the paper at the Department of Health Care of the University of Trenčín (Slovakia); Department of Health Care Studies of Tomas Bata University, Zlín (Czech Republic) and the Institute of Nursing of the University of Applied Sciences, Nysa (Poland). The used questionnaire contained three questions related to opinions on the legislation on the admissibility of abortion.

Results: The gathered data indicate that 36% of young women in Poland think that the present legislation should be maintained and a further 34% of women are of the opinion that it should be liberalized. Only approximately 5% of the young women think that the present legislation should be even more stringent. Moreover, only a very small number of young women in the Czech Republic (5%) think that the present, liberal legislation existing in that country should be tightened.

Conclusions: The legislative initiatives of fundamentalist groups of citizens are not justified in the prevailing opinions of young women in our countries. The mass street protests of women which occurred in Poland showed, however, that fundamentalist arguments no longer play a crucial role if there is a violation of the dignity of women and their biological safety, particularly when non-governmental organizations and feminist associations are involved.

Keywords: Public health; Abortion; Pro-choice attitude; Pro-life attitude; Legislation; Admissibility of abortion; Public health dispute

Introduction

Today in various countries around the world, there is a dispute on the acceptability and legality of abortion [1-3]. In Poland in October 2016, contestations between the proponents of so-called pro-choice and pro-life attitudes took the form of mass street protests [4-7]. Understanding the causes of such violent reaction of women facilitates comprehension of the essence of the dispute. Data on these social changes can be helpful in analyzing and subduing similar controversies in other countries.

In our opinion, understanding the causes of the ongoing culture war requires at least a brief review of the historical development of views on the acceptability of abortion and a review of current legislation and social circumstances in different countries of the world. It is important to outline the historical development of legislation in Eastern Europe countries. It is necessary also to characterize the reasoning of proponents of pro-life and pro-choice attitudes as well as their main philosophical arguments. We present such considerations in another paper [8].

Liberal pro-choice legislation is spread over the whole European continent with very few exceptions. There are three countries with very restrictive legislation including Poland, Ireland and Malta. The overwhelming pressure from a part of Polish citizens for the implementation of yet more restrictive legislation is a surprising

phenomenon. Comprehending these social transformations also requires data on the proportion of opinions professed by the citizens of the country on the possible options of legislation on the admissibility of abortion.

Recently, multiple studies have been performed evaluating the incidence of approval of each possible option of views on the acceptability of abortion [9,10]. According to these studies, the majority of inhabitants in Poland do not want stricter legislation. According to analyzes by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS), the belief that a woman should be able to terminate the pregnancy in a situation when it threatens her life or when the conception was the result of rape or incest, is expressed by 80%, 71% and 73% of respondents. More than half of respondents (53%) deem abortion acceptable also because of damage to the fetus. An opposite opinion on the admissibility of

***Corresponding author:** Andrzej Brodziak, Institute of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health, Koscielna St. 13, 41-200 Sosnowiec, Poland. Tel: 48 32 266 08 85, Fax: 48 32 266 11 24; E-mail: andrzejbrodziak@wp.pl

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abortion in these circumstances is expressed by 30% of respondents. Working on the attempt to explain the causes of the exacerbation of the dispute, we have also carried out our own focused surveys, which we describe in detail in this short report.

Methods

The data were collected with the help of Polish, Czech and Slovak versions of the questionnaire. The questionnaire contains about 20 questions related to the sources of information used by students. At the end of the form we placed 3 questions related to opinions on the legislation of admissibility of abortion. These questions incorporated in the questionnaire used in Poland, translated into English, are presented in Table 1. The versions of these questions adapted to use in the Czech Republic and Slovakia are presented in Table 2.

The data were acquired during three focus studies, which were organized by authors of the paper, at the Department of Health Care, University of Trenčin, Slovakia, Department of Health Care Studies, Tomas Bata University, Zlin, Czech Republic and the Institute of Nursing, University of Applied Sciences, Nysa, Poland.

The questionnaires were filled out in Nysa (Poland) by 171 students, in Trenčin (Slovakia) by 139 students and in Zlin (Czech Republic) by 207 students. Because the majority of students in all three faculties are women, we took into account only the questionnaires filled out by women. We included in the examined group students of all 3 years of first degree studies (till the Bachelor examination) and also students

of the II degree (till Master of Nursing). The age of the people in these groups was almost the same and ranged from 19-26.

The statistical significance of the difference in the proportions of responses to key questions No. 25 and 26 was verified through the use of the Chi square test. We used for this purpose the software available at: <http://statpages.org/>. The difference in the proportions of answers between the Czech Republic and Slovakia is statistically significant ($p < 0.0001$).

Results

The results are presented in Table 3. These data indicate that 36% of young women in Poland think that the present legislation should be maintained and a further 34% of women have the opinion that it should be liberalized. Only approximately 5% of young women think that the present legislation should be even more stringent.

The data concluded from the survey performed in Slovakia and Czech Republic shows an interesting difference among the opinions of young women in these countries. Only a very small number of young women in the Czech Republic (5%) think that the present liberal legislation existing in their country should be tightened. In Slovakia, however, the proportion of such an opinion is much greater. There 24% of women think that the liberal laws should be tightened. The number of women in these two countries that has no opinion on this subject is similar and rather high and amounts to approximately 33%.

You are asked to put a in the appropriate column.		Yes	No	I don't know
24	The current legislation that allows the interruption of pregnancy only in three exceptional situations should be sustained.			
25	The legislation should be even more restrictive (complete ban of abortion under penalty of imprisonment).			
26	The existing legislation should be less restrictive (abortion on demand till 12 th week of pregnancy).			

Nick Date
 Female [], male [], age year of studies

Table 1: Fragment of questionnaire related to opinions on legislation of admissibility of abortion. This version of questions was presented to Polish students.

You are asked to put a in the appropriate column.		Yes	No	I don't know
25	The current legislation in force in the Czech Republic/Slovakia, permitting abortion is appropriate and should be maintained.			
26	The legislation in the Czech Republic/ Slovakia should be more restrictive, like the legislation in Poland, Ireland and Malta.			

Nick Date
 Female [], male [], age year of studies

Table 2: Fragment of questionnaire related to opinions on legislation of admissibility of abortion. This version of questions was presented to Czech and Slovak students.

Summary of results obtained from survey performed in Poland (students of Nursing in Nysa).				
Number of examined students	Proportion of students who expressed the opinion that it is appropriate to <i>sustain</i> the current legislation in force in Poland, which permits abortion only in 3 exceptional situations.	Proportion of students who expressed the opinion that it is appropriate to <i>liberalize</i> the current legislation in Poland, on the pattern existing in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.	Proportion of students who expressed the opinion that it is appropriate to <i>tighten</i> the current legislation in Poland (complete ban of abortion under penalty of imprisonment).	Proportion of students who withheld their opinion or declare that they <i>do not know</i> the appropriate answer.
171	62 (36.2%)	59 (34.5%)	9 (5.2%)	41 (23.9%)
Summary of results obtained from survey performed in Slovakia and Czech Republic.				
Number of examined students	Proportion of students who think that the present legislation, permitting abortion is appropriate and should be maintained.	Proportion of students who expressed the opinion that the legislation should be more restrictive like in Poland, Ireland and Malta.	Proportion of students who withheld their opinion or declare that they do not know the appropriate answer	
Slovakia (139)	40 (29%)	34 (24%)	65 (33 %)	
Czech Republic (220)	138 (55%)	11 (5%)	71 (31%)	

Table 3: Results obtained in three focus studies performed in Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Discussion

We tried in the presented survey to determine the approximate data on the proportions of people advocating the attitude of the pro-choice and pro-life because we wanted to get an idea of how the proposed tightening of legislation in Poland corresponds to the real convictions of the citizens, especially in comparison with the opinions of Czech and Slovak people. The present state of legislation on abortion in these countries has been discussed by several authors [11-14]. It occurs that the prevailing opinions in all three countries are not consistent with the intentions of fundamentalist groups of citizens, who propose tighter legislation.

The differences between the frequency of opinion supporting pro-choice or pro-life attitudes between the Czech Republic and Slovakia can be probably explained by different strength of the influence of the Church. In Poland the decades of struggle for independence and maintaining national identity was supported by the Church. Anna Grzymala-Buse in an important recent book presents convincing arguments that when the activity of the church is intertwined with the struggle for sovereignty and national identity, then it acquires in a given society considerable authority [15]. This pattern of historical transformations occurred in Ireland, Malta and Poland. The mass street protests of women which occurred in Poland in October 2016 showed, however, that religious, political and social considerations no longer play a crucial role if there is a violation of the dignity of women and their safety, particularly when non-governmental organizations and feminist associations are involved.

Probably the strong, mass protest of women arose as a result of confrontation of the speculative philosophical arguments of the supporters of pro-life attitudes, with women's feelings of threat to their personal safety and an increasingly clearly perceived essence of existence of adult women.

In the days of that protest, the psychologist Paul Drozdziak in an interview with Krystyna Romanowska wrote: ["The request for stricter regulations is completely detached from the fact that a woman is a part of the whole. She has emotions, functions in a relationship, depends on other people, on what they think. What to do with the fact that often in the context of abortion is the devastating discovery that the man does not want either the woman or the child but she loves him? Or she does not love him and does not want to have baby with him. We are not entitled bring down love and its tragedy to establish rights. It's not this dimension"] [16].

Conclusions

1. The legislative initiatives of fundamentalist groups are not justified in the prevailing opinions of young Polish women.
2. Comparison of the proportion of people advocating pro-life and pro-choice attitudes in Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia is interesting because the legislation on abortion in Poland is very restrictive.
3. Both in Poland and in the Czech Republic, the proportion of people who think that it is appropriate to tighten the legislation on the admissibility of abortion is very small.

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4. The difference between the proportion of young women opting for the pro-choice attitude and pro-life stance between the Czech Republic and Slovakia may be explained by the influence of the Church.

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