



Phenomenological study of the reasons for abortion in women with abortion experience in Hamedan (Iran)

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Along with the economic and social developments of the last few decades, the number of intentional abortions in the country has increased significantly. There are no official statistics in this field. Some unofficial sources state that there are up to one million intentional abortions annually. It is important to investigate and identify the reasons for this phenomenon and provide solutions to reduce it. This study sought to phenomenologically examine the reasons for intentional abortions in women who have experienced it in the city of Hamedan (Iran).

Methodology: Qualitative and phenomenological method was used. For this purpose, 36 married women who had experienced a spontaneous abortion and were living in Hamedan at the time of the interview were selected purposively (by snowball sampling). The information for this study was obtained through semi-in-depth interviews with the women. Maxqda software version 2020 was used for analysis and code extraction.

Results: The findings from the data analysis showed that abortion in most cases occurs due to a combination of factors. With this description, it can be classified into biomedical, family, social and individual categories. What is important and noteworthy among these are social and family reasons that require serious attention. For example, paying attention to social stigmas associated with pregnancy during engagement, parental concerns regarding the upcoming social and economic conditions, social gender preferences (son preference), addiction, divorce and unemployment of parents and in some cases non-religious views on intentional abortion are among the important and significant issues.

Conclusions: According to the findings of this qualitative study, in a final analysis, it can be said that rational choice models seem to provide the best analysis of intentional abortion. Unwanted or untimely pregnancy is a common definition of women's reasons for abortion.

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Introduction

Fertility is the biological capacity of women to reproduce. Women have always been the embodiment of productive and reproductive powers (Friedman, 2009: 37). For centuries, a woman's social status and position within the family were determined based on her fertility, and

children in the family were considered an important source of economic and social support for parents. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the traditional family model has gradually changed with the acceleration of economic and social developments, and these developments have had important effects on the traditional family structure. Factors such as: educational and training opportunities for women, increased access to contraceptives and new employment, and women's economic activity had inhibitory effects on fertility (Abbasi-Shvazi and Asgari-Nadoshan, 2005: 33-34).

According to statistics, 370,000 to 530,000 abortions are performed in the country annually; some unofficial sources also report the number of abortions in Iran as up to one million annually. On average, each Iranian woman experiences slightly less than one intentional abortion by the end of her reproductive period, assuming that natural fertility is prevalent. The fact that Iran is in a demographic transition period in recent years, in which abortion is used as a last resort to control fertility, especially unwanted ones, when contraceptive methods fail, is a reason for experiencing a high rate of intentional abortion in the country (Aghayari, 2005:85).

According to a study conducted by Masoumi et al. (2014) in Hamedan, 1.9% of people have had an induced abortion. Given the high prevalence of this issue in Iran and the secrecy and informality of this type of abortion, the question of this study is why women resort to this.

Methodology

This research has a qualitative method, In the qualitative methods category, it is also a subgroup of the phenomenological method. Phenomenology is the study of phenomena that are understood by humans at a deeper level of understanding in a specific situation by describing and interpreting lived experiences in detail, and this is done by suspending self-evident assumptions by researchers. The unit of analysis in this study is married women who have experienced at least one abortion. According to Newman, the unit of analysis is: "The units, cases, or parts of social life that are being studied. The unit of analysis can be individuals, couples, groups, or organizations (Khan, 2014). Also, purposeful snowball sampling with maximum diversity was used to select the women interviewed.

The duration of each interview was between 30 and 45 minutes, depending on the participants' interest and tolerance. Before conducting the interview, informed consent was obtained from the interviewees by explaining the purpose of the study, the manner of cooperation, the methods of data collection and recording, the role of the researcher and participants in the research, and the confidentiality of the interviewees' information and characteristics (including names, interview files, writings) and the use of pseudonyms. The interviews continued until theoretical saturation, and a total of 26 women were interviewed.

In order to determine the validity of the data in the research, continuous data review, data analysis at the same time as it was collected, review of extracted codes by participants, review of the data analysis process with two qualitative researchers, and continuous and long-term engagement with the data were used. Data coding was also done using Maxqda software version 2020

Experimental study

Various studies have been conducted on abortion, each examining its causes from different angles. Tawafian and Ramezanzadeh (2007) have listed unwanted pregnancy, an increase in the number of previous births, middle and higher income, non-family marriages, the woman's age, and an increase in the length of time since marriage as among the causes of abortion. According to Schuster. (2005) economic and social conditions prevail over fear of the law, fear of losing educational opportunities, denial of responsibility for pregnancy by the partner, insufficient financial resources, premarital relationships are abortion reasons. Hassanzadeh (2022) has pointed out factors such as illegitimate relationships, family disputes, successive pregnancies, advances in

medical science, mothers' job status, hot climate, improper nutrition, maternal and fetal age, maternal and fetal disease, unwanted pregnancy, addiction, economic problems, low level of education, and the country's economic situation. Purcell (2015) point out factors related to sexual or relationship partners; financial concerns; not being ready to become parents; age; concern for existing children; desire to continue future plans (complete education and create a career); desire to increase the interval between pregnancies; and stigma of pregnancy outside of socially approved contexts, desire for independence, changes in life circumstances such as ending relationships and abandoning partner support as factors related to abortion.

Theoretical Frame work

According to Michell's economic model, the behavior associated with the decision to control fertility can be analyzed in terms of comparing the costs and benefits associated with an additional child over time. The net cost associated with an additional child, which is itself related to income levels, prices, and so on, represents the household's decision to demand additional children. (Meoff, 1988).

Kumar, Hessini, and Michel (2009) recently theorized that women who seek abortions challenge indigenous cultural norms about the "essential nature" of women. By their definition, stigma is a negative attribute attributed to women who seek termination of pregnancy that marks them as intrinsically or extrinsically inferior to ideals of femininity. As with some other types of stigma, a woman who terminates a pregnancy may challenge a moral order. In the case of abortion, the challenge may be women's moral capacity to make judgments about life or death.

Proponents of the conservative view believe that the fetus has the same moral status as other human beings (Allan, 2015). This theory claims that life is inherently dignified and we are not allowed to destroy it. Consequently, regardless of the degree of life, the type of pain, the high or low probability of death, and the like, human life should be protected. (Rasekh, 2003: 171).

In contrast to the conservative approach, advocates of the liberal view believe that the fetus is not a human being and therefore has either no moral standing or little value (Allan, 2015). The liberal view, also called "pro-choice," refers to a woman's right to choose between legal abortion and childbirth. It argues that access to legal abortion allows women to abandon their traditional role and choose not to be mothers.

Results and discussion

Data analysis showed that the reasons for abortion can be divided into four categories. These reasons include biomedical, family, personal, and social reasons. In some abortions, social reasons are more prominent, in others, personal reasons, etc. Of course, separating these reasons does not mean that every abortion is done only for personal reasons or social reasons, etc. In most cases, a combination of personal, family, and social reasons, etc. together cause abortion.

The overall storyline of the narratives of women who had abortions and their lived experiences of the procedure suggests that in the majority of cases there is a combination of reasons for having an abortion. This does not mean, of course, that there were not individual narratives of abortion that were not shared by other women. The decision to have an abortion occurs in a process of ongoing evaluation. This evaluation involves logical challenges with oneself and others, dialogue with oneself and others, the outcome of which is either positive or negative or ambivalent. These logical challenges have innumerable if-then.

It seems that a combination of consequences and reasons leads a woman to conclude that the problems and challenges after an abortion will be less than the stress of caring for and raising a child. However, there is also evidence that some women, who are mainly seeking relief from the stresses of an unwanted pregnancy (in terms of time and circumstances), make mistakes in this assessment, and regret, guilt, shame, etc., indicate their assessment of the mistake of this action.

The findings of this study show that the main reasons for women's voluntary abortions include the importance of fitness, parents' comfort, raising children, looking ahead to their children, pregnancy interfering with employment and education, knowing their spouse better, sexual preference (son preference), pregnancy and health risks for women. The reasons include financial problems, lack of child support, lack of housing, unemployment, family issues including addiction, divorce, and spouse infidelity. Insistence of those around them, having a small child, not enough children, the weakness of the methods used in birth control, lack of active participation of men in birth control, non-religious view of abortion, fear of reputation, and lack of support. The findings show that economic factors such as the spouse's unemployment and lack of sufficient income have caused some women to have abortions. Undoubtedly, the instability of the economic system of society affects the economic conditions within the family. With the increase in living costs, if they are not able to provide for them in life, it not only leads to a decrease in living standards, a decrease in purchases and a decrease in the level of family welfare, and these economic pressures affect all aspects of life, including reproductive behavior. In this study, the concerns of many women were lack of housing, lack of provision for children, financial problems and unemployment. They saw themselves as incapable of raising and caring for children, and the quality of their children and the current and future status of the children they had were of great importance to them. Unwanted pregnancies in women were also the result of not using contraceptive methods, ineffective use of error-prone methods such as irregular use of contraceptive pills or the failure of other contraceptive methods. The women in the study sample did not have correct information about contraceptive methods. A large number of women used contraceptive pills, and because they faced the side effects of taking the pills (such as headaches, nausea and obesity), they stopped using them regularly and eventually faced unwanted pregnancies.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it can be said that the decision to have an abortion can be better interpreted in a rational choice model. Of course, this does not mean that all the reasons examined in this study fit into the rational interpretation, but most of the reasons mentioned can be included in the rational choice models. In rational choice models, decisions are made through individuals' evaluation of the costs and benefits of an individual action. According to this approach, parents behave in a rational manner when deciding about the children they want to have. A fundamental element in this theory is the motivation or logic of wanting a large or small family. And cost-benefit analysis plays a fundamental role in reproductive decisions. In this approach, individuals are considered as rational agents. They have the ability to evaluate their circumstances and try to maximize their benefits. In this view, increasing costs of raising children, unfavorable economic conditions, provide rational reasons for changing individuals' reproductive behaviors and intentions. Also, according to some interview participants, when the head of the family becomes addicted, many problems arise, including economic issues, the husband's moral deviations, and his irresponsibility. Therefore, women do not assess the family's conditions as suitable for the birth of another child and consider abortion to be the right decision to help the unborn child. Also, the type of costs varies among different groups of women; some consider the loss of a job or educational position as the cost of continuing the pregnancy and giving birth to a child.

Although women are considered the perpetrators of abortion, pregnancy is a two-way process in which both men and women are involved and both are responsible for its occurrence. If pregnancy prevention is carried out with the cooperation of both parties and with proper education and sufficient knowledge of safe methods of pregnancy prevention, the rate of unwanted pregnancy will be greatly reduced. On the other hand, if hygienic and safe methods of abortion are provided, the number of deaths and injuries to women can be reduced. This will not be possible without planning and realism of legislators and government officials.

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Authors' contributions

The first author developed the theory and performed the software analysis, verified the analytical methods, encouraged second author to investigate the subject and supervised the findings of this work. All authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript The second author was responsible for collecting data from women and conducting interviews with them. The second author also prepared the initial version of the article. Then, the first author edited and made corrections to it. The final version of the article and the writing of the research literature were done by the first author.

Conflicts of interest

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose. All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.