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Levels and determinants of voluntary abortion in South Africa

Rambau, Ndivhuwo P

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Abstract

Background:

Voluntary abortion has been legal in South Africa since 1996. It is estimated that half of South Africa's pregnancies result in voluntary abortion. Though there are different attitudes and perceptions towards voluntary abortion it is evident that abortion is still a sought after practice among women of reproductive ages (15-49). The purpose of this study was to estimate the trends, differentials and determinants of voluntary abortion among South African women. The study was conducted to better understand the characteristics of South African women who wilfully terminate a pregnancy.

Methodology:

This study is a secondary data analysis of the 2010-2013 General Household Survey that was conducted by Statistics South Africa. A total of 9720 women aged 15-49 were analysed. Stata version 12 was used for the management and analysis of data. Univariate, bivariate and multivariate analysis was carried out to meet the objectives of the study. Descriptive statistics of the study population was conducted, the chi square test was utilised and lastly multivariate analysis using the Multinomial Logistic Regression producing relative risk ratios to examine whether an association was present or not.

Results:

According to the current study, the rate of voluntary abortion for 2010-2013 was 78 voluntary abortions per 10 000 pregnancies. The study went on to indicate the trend of voluntary abortion in the country, the country is characterised by fluctuating abortion numbers. Furthermore the study indicated the differentials between race and urban-rural residence in relation to voluntary abortion in the country. Women residing in rural areas were 0.4 times less likely to engage in voluntary abortion behaviour. Interestingly race, age, unemployment status, and place of residence were not found to be significantly associated with having a voluntary abortion. Having suffered any illness or injury was found to be significantly associated with voluntary abortion at a multivariate level where it was found

that women who had recently suffered from an illness were 0.09 times less likely to have a voluntary abortion.

Conclusion:

The current study has found that the determinants of voluntary abortion in South Africa include recently suffered any illness or injury. The study has found that it is important to understand the characteristics of woman who have voluntary abortion and abortion can be viewed as a form of adverse family planning in the country; the findings from the current study have further research and policy implications that can lead to the better understanding and implementation of voluntary abortion in the country. The Choice on Termination of Pregnancy act 92 of 1996 can be updated with relevant and recent information as to who is voluntarily choosing abortion. The results have further identified characteristics of women to be targeted for safe abortion to reduce incidents and risks associated with unsafe abortion practises.