

Peruvian Scientific Production on Abortion in Scopus

Dear Editor,

Unsafe abortion causes a large number of complications and maternal deaths worldwide, and especially in countries where abortion is penalized, and therefore performed almost exclusively under clandestine circumstances, such as in Peru^[1] where abortion is only legal when performed by a physician with the approval of the woman when it is “the only measure to save the woman’s life or to avoid a severe or permanent damage.” Any other situation is considered as a criminal abortion.

In this context, accurate information is needed by policy makers to see the whole picture, which includes the possible consequences of the penalization of abortion. To identify available scientific information in Peru, we performed a search of papers published by Peruvian authors on induced abortion until 2015 in Scopus (one of the most extensive database, which contains scientific journals that have passed certain quality standards, including those that are indexed in Medline), with the terms “aborto” and “abortion,” obtaining 138 results. We reviewed these papers and found that 13 of them had induced abortion as main topic. We excluded two papers because they were performed exclusively in Colombia and Mexico, and one for being a letter. Finally, we analyzed 10 papers.

This low production can be due to the difficulty of conducting primary studies (because women are often not willing to admit having induced the abortion as they fear legal consequences and stigma associated with the topic^[1,2]) and secondary studies (due to the underreporting of these events within the official records^[3]). In addition, the Peruvian legislation states that “The physician (...) when there is evidence of criminal abortion, is obliged to bring the matter to the attention of the competent authority,” which can frighten researchers’ sponsors about the potential legal consequences to collect this data.

Out of these 10 papers, seven were original studies (four qualitative studies, two quantitative studies, and one mixed study), and out of the two original quantitative studies, one identified the incidence of clandestine abortion and the other assessed abortion prevalence. No study evaluated complications, mortality, or effectiveness of interventions in this regard.

Moreover, out of the seven original articles, five were only conducted in the city of Lima (capital of Peru), one was conducted in 20 cities of Peru, and another does not

mention the location in Peru where it was conducted; which reflects the lack of information out of the city of Lima.

Considering that our objective was to evaluate the scientific production in indexed journals, our search was limited to Scopus. However, some Peruvian studies are published in nonindexed journals or other repositories.^[4]

In conclusion, countries where abortion is illegal require the generation of information regarding the possible consequences of the penalization of abortion. Nevertheless, we found that scientific production on induced abortion in Peru is low, probably because legal frame prevents from collecting abortion data. This situation is probably shared with other countries where abortion is penalized, making it necessary to establish policies to promote research in this area.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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