

## Analysis of single women's experience with artificial abortion

Seong-Heui, Kim

*Assistant Professor, Dept. of Nursing, Daejin Univ., Hoguk-ro 1007, Pocheon-si,  
Gyeonggi-do, 11159, Republic of Korea  
nursingkim@daejin.ac.kr*

### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study is to explore and understand single women's experience with artificial abortion in a system and cultural background of Korean society. The informants consisted of 5 single women who experienced artificial abortion. This study collected data through interviews, observations and telephone interviews. The ethnographical analysis method, proposed by Spradley, was used to analyze these data. The study has found a common experience from the single women expressed as "feeling bitter as a scapegoat of culture and system". This cultural theme can be divided into the following 4 categories: 'struggling of conflict and distress', 'involving in crime by anger and inevitability of the system without exit', 'the mind and body that are stained by fear and pain', and 'the timing of the ambivalence between relief and anxiety'. In conclusion, this study suggests a holistic approach to nursing, social, institutional, and religious aspects to promote their physical, mental, and socio-cultural health.*

**Keywords:** *artificial abortion, single women, qualitative research*

### **1. Introduction**

Recently, the abolition of the criminal abortion is emerging as a social issue in Korean<sup>1</sup> society. Because the perception that legal sanctions on artificial abortion is not realistic is prevalent. [1] [2] [3].

It is estimated that the rate of artificial abortion of single women is rapidly increasing in Korea's social environment where the opening of sex is accelerated and the gender values change rapidly [4] [5].

Considering the findings that more than 50% of single women have sexual intercourse and 17.6% of them have experience of unwanted pregnancy and experience of criminal abortion, It is possible to predict that single women are exposed to a health threat environment due to illegal artificial abortion [6].

In Korean society where the negative perception of premarital pregnancy is still strong, single women are reluctant to expose their experience of artificial abortion. Furthermore, because it is an illegal act, they perform it secretly [7].

As a result, there is little research on their experience since access to the subjects is difficult [4] [6] [8]. Therefore, this study aims to provide a deep understanding of single women who undergone artificial abortion in the institutional and cultural backgrounds of Korean society by revealing their experience, as it is, and analyzing the meaning of the experience in their position.

---

<sup>1</sup> **Article history:**

Received (January 8, 2019), Review Result (February 11, 2019), Accepted (March 13, 2019)

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Research design**

This is a qualitative research, using case study in order to explore and understand the experiences of single women who undergone artificial abortion in the sociocultural context of Korea.

### **2.2. Informants, data collection**

The informants of this study were 5 single women who visited P hospital in Gyeonggi-do and undergone artificial abortion in order to terminate unwanted pregnancy.

The data were collected during the period of August 2017 to July 2018, using the field research method, such as informal interviews, participant observation, and telephone interviews. The main interview questions were "How are you feeling now?", "How did you choose to do this?". The data collection was done up to the saturation point, when new materials could no longer be found.

### **2.3. Data analysis**

Spradley's analysis method was used. Data analysis was simultaneously performed as the data were being collected. This approach has a series of phases to discover and interpret the category, property, and cultural theme, from the various social situations through the process of domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and theme analysis. Finding cultural themes and exploring meaning is done at the end of the study. This confirms cognitive principle repeatedly appearing in a culture and finds the relationship between each part and the whole of culture. By repeating process of disintegration, integration, comparison, modification, interpretation, and re- interpretation of participant observation and collected interview data, researcher searched for patterns in the experience of single women with selective artificial abortion and tried to discover its meanings.

## **3. Results**

As the result of exploring single women's experience with artificial abortion in Korean society, and analyzing the meanings, 'feeling bitter as a scapegoat of culture and system' was deduced as the cultural theme. This has meaning structure of 4 categories and 12 properties. The cultural theme was categorized as 'remorse for unwanted pregnancy', 'struggling of conflict and distress', 'involving in crime by anger and inevitability of the system without exit', 'the mind and body that are stained by fear and pain', and 'the timing of the ambivalence between relief and anxiety'. The identified properties in each category are as follows.

### **3.1. Struggling of conflict and distress**

This category shows the conflict situation experienced by single women have since conception. This includes 3 properties of 'the Momentary conflict between abortion and childbirth', 'conflict about future relationship with sex partner', 'the conflict of help requests for resources around'.

First, the property of 'the Momentary conflict between abortion and childbirth' is to have a moment of conflict between the maintenance and discontinuation of pregnancy after the

subjects confirm the pregnancy. However, this was not because of the awe of life, but because of the fact that artificial abortion was illegal. In other words, all the subjects in the case judged that their lives, which were already born and live, are a priority value over the unborn life. Moreover, because they thought that not giving birth when considering the life of a child to be born in the future was a wiser decision and a responsible act for the child, they immediately discarded the birth card. This is somewhat different from previous studies that reported that women experienced conflicts on artificial abortions due to 'guilt for life'. Indeed, in this study, the feelings of guilt felt by single women were about illegal acts, not about life. Furthermore, through the whole process of artificial abortions, 'the feelings of guilt' experienced by single women were found to be insignificant or not present. Therefore, the guilty consciousness reported in previous studies can be interpreted as a result of the dominant values of the group who are not likely to undergo such experience, rather than being 'perceived' by actual experienced women.

Second, the property of 'conflict about future relationship with sex partner' is to worry about whether women will notify their sex partners about the pregnancy or whether they will continue to trust and meet their partner. In particular, the women in the case were most concerned about the sexual partner's reaction to the pregnancy news. This fear was the biggest factor that made it worrying that the sex partner will be confidential. On the other hand, they worried about the need to ask for physical, psychological, and economic support to friends and family in the circumstance where the artificial abortion should be kept secret.

### **3.2. Involving in crime by anger and inevitability of the system without exit**

This category shows the experiences that women who inevitably choose the method of artificial abortion encounter in a social institutional situation where they can't legally be treated. This includes 4 properties of 'the anger against society that can't but become a criminal', 'exploring information about the termination of pregnancy', 'struggling to raise expensive treatment costs for abortion', 'the irony of visiting a hospital that operates illegal manner in a fearsome'.

First, the property of 'the anger against society that can't but become a criminal' is to realize the contradiction of laws and institutions that do not provide any exit for single women to stop unwanted pregnancy. They thought that giving birth to a child in a Korean society where a unmarried mother was a stigma gave up his future. When they tried to stop pregnancy, they found that there was no way for them to be allowed. In a situation where the fertility rate became the competitiveness of a country, Korea defines methods such as selective abortion and abortion-inducing drugs to be illegal. South Korea defines all methods of interrupting pregnancy abortion as illegal such as selective abortion and abortion-inducing drugs. Because the government wants to rise the fertility rate. As women became aware of these facts, they became anger about the situation in which they became criminals only by the birth control policy for national interests. In other words, women felt unfair to the fact that they were deprived of autonomy for their bodies and that their bodies were under institutional control.

Second, the property of 'exploring information about the termination of pregnancy' is for single women to seek information in secret because they can't publicly inquire how to stop pregnancy. For the most part, they have sought out information through the Internet sites. All of the participants in the case firstly tried to access the internet sales site considering purchasing and taking an abortion-inducing drugs. The reasons why women tried to buy these medicines were as follows: 'anonymity is guaranteed', 'cost burden is low', 'it is difficult to find a medical institution that can be operated', and 'it is feared to have a procedure of abortion'. But for this

reason, while buying an inducer. However, despite these reasons, they experienced another anxiety due to the 'illegal nature of purchase', 'uncertainty about success of abortion', and 'burden on purchase cost'. Above all, it was found that women were most afraid of the side effects of drugs.

Eventually, all of the subjects in this study decided to choose artificial abortion procedure instead of taking the induction agent to ensure certainty and safety. And then, they also used the internet with guaranteed anonymity to find hospitals that can be operated. In this process, too, women became aware that they could not have any legitimate medical benefits. They had to pay large sums of money in cash and had to abandon assurance of appropriate treatment for possible side effects. Women were struggling to make a lot of cash and felt an irony in the reality that they had to go to the hospital operating illegally. Because they had to look for a hospital to completely cover up themselves.

### **3.3. The mind and body are stained by fear and pain**

This category shows the process in which single women directly experience physical, psychological, and social unhealthy conditions during the visits to hospitals having illegal operations. This includes 3 properties of 'Enduring physical pain', 'anxiety about illegal operations', 'fear of social stigma and exposure'

Before the procedure, the subjects expressed the most fear of how painful the procedure would be, but after completing the procedure, they expressed in a puzzling way it was so simple and ended in a short time. However, the subjects expressed anxiety and fear of complications, that may arise during illegal procedures, was continued. In particular, the most anxious thing was that they might not receive appropriate treatment for the infection or during an emergency of illegal operations. What women were most afraid of during the intervention was not physical pain or possible complications, but their pregnancy and abortion procedures were informed. They found that it is viewed that pregnant women before marriage are sexually promiscuous or reproachful look on them are still prevalent in whole society.

For this reason, in fact, these women did not perceive negatively taking abortion in fact that they were doing abortion. But, It is shown that they were not free due to the negative social outlook on premarital pregnancy and abortion. In other words, it can be seen that there is a strong consciousness that social stigma such as pregnancy and abortion should not be taken as an unmarried woman. At the same time, these social perceptions were strengthened because the abortion was ultimately illegal. Therefore, it was believed that realistic legalization of abortion would help improving social awareness. This study is backed up the research result [4] arguing that single women tend to recognize that the government needs active measures to improve the social awareness of pregnancy and abortion.

### **3.4. The timing of the ambivalence between relief and anxiety**

This category shows the various emotions experienced by the case subjects after receiving the artificial abortion procedure. This includes 2 properties of 'Feeling completely free about solving', 'Anxiety about the future'. All of the subjects in this study were most likely to experience the relief that the rough process was over soon after the procedure. Faced with the fact that women no longer need to suffer physical and emotional suffering, they felt 'solved' and 'completely free'. This is somewhat contrary to what has been reported in previous studies on women who experienced abortion as being expressed primarily in feelings of guilt, anxiety, and emptiness. It is shown that conventional discussions on artificial abortion have remained in the actual survey using structured questionnaires and in the course of approaching with the

prejudice of guilt, it distorted and excluded women's position as a direct experience. In addition, this is consistent with the purpose of this study to show genuinely the situation and experience of women receiving artificial abortion. On the other hand, because the subjects were all single women, they had to return to work or school without being able to take their vacations in open and aboveboard manner. In addition, they cannot take good care of herself after abortion due to a feeling of hesitancy about going again to the hospital, the post-treatment not provided separately by the institution, etc. In the course of this process, the subjects mainly expressed concern about long-term complications such as infertility and infection that may occur.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study used case study to reveals the specific experiences of single women who have criminal abortion and to understand the meaning of experience from their perspective in the background of Korean society, which defines selective abortion as illegal in criminal law and has a strong expectation of traditional femininity. This theme is based on the fact that single women who has a unwanted pregnant are forced to choose illegal procedure due to the social system of criminal abortion, and that they can neither give birth to a child nor raise because of social stigma on premarital pregnancy or unwed mothers in Korean. It shows the inevitability. In addition, this means that anger, chagrin, and unfairness about the social system, which is completely excluding the position of the woman, are the main experiences for women who have criminal abortion.

Considering that there is very little research on the specific experiences of single women who have criminal abortion in Korean society, this study is significant in that the experiences of single women that have been invisible, unheard and sometimes distorted are exposed vividly from the viewpoint of the experienced person.

Based on the findings of this study, which provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of single women who have criminal abortion, it is suggested that more realistic, women - centered approach to maintaining and promoting their physical, psychological, and socio-cultural health should be done in a multidisciplinary way, including social institutional, policy, religious, and educational, etc.

#### References

- [1] J. H. Lim, An reargument on illegal abortion-solution to the problem of discrepancy between the positive law and reality-. *The Journal of Humanities and Social science*. (2018), Vol.19, No.4, pp.1249-1261.
- [2] J. J. Chung, Different abortion approaches in Europe and women's health: Implications for Korean abortion debates. *Feminism Studies*. (2010), Vol.10, No.1, pp.123-158.
- [3] S. H. Kim and E. K. Yoo, Centered on female and male adults = A study on the level of perception of the effect on women's health of the artificial abortion. *Korean Journal of Women Health Nursing*. (2000), Vol.6, No.1, pp.166-180.
- [4] D. S. Kim, J. I. Hwang and C. Y. Tong, A survey on women's perception and experience of induced abortion. *Korean Women's Development Institute*. (2017), pp.1-266.
- [5] H. A. Yang, The constitutional decision on abortion and the "women's voice" —relationship between abortion law and women's decision—*Korean journal of legal philosophy*, Vol.21 No.1, (2018), Vol.21, No.1, pp.213-260.
- [6] S. Y. Park and M. J. Hwang, Factors influencing abortion among married women. *Journal of Institute for Social Sciences*, (2017), Vol.28, No.3, pp.247-268.
- [7] Y. H. Kim, S. T. Moon and H. S. Kang, Factor influencing on sexual assertiveness of college students. *Korean Journal of Women Health Nursing*. (2013), Vol.19, No.3, pp.166-175.

- [8] Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs, Survey on artificial abortion in South Korea(2018).
- [9] J. P. Spradley, The ethnographic interview, Holt, Rinehart and Winston INC. Orlando (1979)