

Liberalizing Abortion Laws in Sri Lanka: Prospects and Challenges.

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Abortion is legally defined as the removal of the fetus from the uterus any time before its gestation is completed. The law governing abortions in Sri Lanka is contained in the Penal Code Ordinance No 02 of 1883. According to section 303 of the code, abortion is only permitted when carried out for saving the mother's life. Sri Lanka is found as one of the countries with the most restrictive laws on abortions in south Asian region along with Afghanistan. However, even with these restrictions it is estimated that, Sri Lanka has one of the highest abortion rates in the world. The penal laws enacted in the colonial times and those relating to abortions were tried to be reformed several times including the most recent initiative taken by the law commission of Sri Lanka in 2013 when they proposed rape and foetal impairment as two further grounds for obtaining a legal abortion. However, no actions have been taken still regarding the liberalization of the provisions pertaining to abortions and this has resulted in women who are living with low income levels being unable access public medical care facilities for obtaining an abortion on permitted grounds due to the restrictiveness of the law. Using a qualitative method this research is formulated to find out the respective prospects and challenges that lie ahead in liberalizing the laws relating to abortions. At the initial inquiry it is found that, the religious and cultural structure of the country has strictly opposed any liberalization and this has negatively affected the political will of the rulers in bringing these changes. The biggest fear has been that, the liberalization will result in a sudden increase in the number of abortions. However, results elsewhere have shown that, liberalization does not increase the abortion rates but helps to reduce the number of fatalities which results from unsafe illegal abortions. The liberalization of the abortion laws has become both a contemporary and a necessary change for the protection and enhancement of the rights of women and their autonomy.

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