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**CROSS-CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF ABORTION:  
A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY IN THREE SELECTED ETHNIC  
COMMUNITIES IN SRI LANKA**

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Even though abortions are illegal under the prevailing legal conditions of Sri Lanka, they have been taking place, performed by quacks secretly under highly unhygienic conditions. Approximately, 125,000 to 175,000 induced abortions have been reported to take place annually in Sri Lanka. The number of illegal abortions is increasing dramatically despite the fact that many contraceptive methods are already available for free in Sri Lanka. Considering this context, the present study is basically focused on examining the ethnic dynamics of abortion among married women in different communities in three selected villages in the Trincomalee district.

The present research was carried out in 2011. Methodologically, the key informant method and in-depth interviews were employed for data collection. Overall, 25 case studies were conducted including 11 Sinhalese, 08 Tamil and 06 Muslim women.

The findings of this study imply that unintended pregnancy has been the major reason for abortions. The study revealed further that factors such as the lack of reproductive and sexual health related knowledge and awareness, the lack of knowledge on contraceptive methods and issues of accessing such services, the lack of negotiation skills and bargaining power in male-dominated sexual relationships, the alcohol addiction of husbands, and certain socio cultural practices have made significant impacts on the increase of unintended pregnancy. It should be noted that some Muslim women do not practice contraceptive methods due to their religious beliefs. Further, it was commonly observed during the study that there were a higher number of incidences of self-practiced abortions among the communities under consideration. Another significant fact is that the attempts of performing self-practiced abortions are relatively high among Sinhala and Tamil women than among Muslim women. Apart from these ethnic dynamics, the findings suggest that some married women believe in myths related to contraceptive use: *i.e.* that it reduces the sexual urge and leads to sexual disabilities, another factor which increases unintended pregnancies. There were no major differences among ethnic groups with regard to seeking abortions. Health complications such as bleeding, haemorrhage, defective infants, menstrual disturbance, inflammation of the reproductive organs, and serious infection are severe health issues related to abortion.

Hence, the findings of this research suggest that it is important to update the existing knowledge on contraceptive methods and sex education to decrease the negative consequences of illegal and unsystematic abortions which result from unintended pregnancy.