

Modeling lay people's ethical views on abortion: A Q-methodology study

Muhammad Hammami  | Rakad Hammami | Suraya Kawadry | Syed Alvi

Correspondence

Muhammad Hammami, MD, PhD, King Faisal Specialist Hospital and Research Center, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
Email: muhammad@kfshrc.edu.sa

ABSTRACT

Background: It isn't clear how lay people balance the various ethical interests when addressing medical issues. We explored lay people's ethical resolution models in relation to abortion.

Methods: In a tertiary healthcare setting, 196 respondents rank-ordered 42 opinion-statements on abortion following a 9-category symmetrical distribution. Statements' scores were analyzed by averaging-analysis and Q-methodology.

Results: Respondents' mean (SD) age was 34.5(10.5) years, 53% were women, 68% Muslims (31% Christians), 28% Saudis (26% Filipinos), and 38% healthcare-related. The most-agreeable statements were "Acceptable if health-benefit to woman large," "Acceptable if congenital disease risk large," and "Woman's right if fetus has congenital disease." The most-disagreeable statements were "State's right even if woman disagrees," "Acceptable even with no congenital disease risk," and "Father's right even if woman disagrees." Q-methodology identified several resolution models that were multi-principled, consequentialism-dominated, and associated with respondents' demographics. The majority of Christian women and men identified with and supported a relatively "fetus rights plus State authority-oriented" model. The majority of Muslim women and men identified with and supported a "conception-oriented" model and "consequentialism plus virtue-oriented" model, respectively. One or more of three motives-related statements received extreme ranks on averaging-analysis and in 33% of the models.

Conclusions: 1) On average, consequentialism, focusing on a woman's health-benefit and congenital disease risk, was the predominant approach. This was followed by the rights approach, favoring a woman's interest but taking context into account. 2) Q-methodology identified various ethical resolution models that were multi-principled and partially associated with respondents' demographics. 3) Motives were important to some respondents, providing empirical evidence against adequacy of principlism.