

CANADIAN ATTITUDES ON ABORTION: RESULTS OF THE GALLUP POLLS*

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Résumé—Une analyse de six sondages faits entre 1965 et 1974 indique que les attitudes adoptées par les Canadiens en ce qui concerne l'avortement varient considérablement selon les critères pour l'avortement et selon les caractéristiques de base des répondants. Aussi tôt que 1965 presque trois quarts des Canadiens ont favorisé l'avortement thérapeutique lorsque la santé mentale au physique de la mère est en danger. Des sondages consécutifs suggèrent qu'entre 44 et 61 pour cent des Canadiens adultes favorisent l'avortement légal dans les conditions qui sont en contradiction avec l'amendement du Code Criminel. Cependant, les effets de la façon de poser les questions nous mettent en garde contre l'usage des données du sondage pour obtenir des estimations précises du niveau de l'appui public pour l'avortement sur demande.

Abstract — An analysis of six Gallup polls conducted between 1965 and 1974 indicates the attitudes held by Canadians toward abortion vary considerably according to the criteria for abortion and according to the background characteristics of the respondents. As early as 1965 nearly three-fourths of Canadians supported therapeutic abortion when the mother's mental or physical health was endangered. Subsequent polls suggest that between 44 and 61 per cent of adult Canadians support legal abortion under conditions which are at variance with the 1969 amendment to the Criminal Code. However, the question-wording effects caution against using the poll data to obtain precise estimates of the level of public support for abortion on demand.

To demographers, the 1969 amendment to the Canadian Criminal Code is noteworthy not only because it facilitated the dissemination of birth control information and devices but also because it permitted therapeutic abortions under certain conditions. A legal abortion now may be obtained only from a qualified medical practitioner (physician) and only when a majority of three members of a therapeutic abortion committee of a hospital decide that the continuation of a pregnancy would, or would be likely to, endanger the life or the health of the woman (Canada, Department of Health and Welfare, 1971).

The consequences of the 1969 changes in abortion law were both immediate and controversial. The number of therapeutic abortions in Canada has increased nearly four times between 1970 and 1973, and by 1973 there were nearly 13 abortions for every 100 births in Canada (Canada, Statistics Canada, 1974). These increases over time in the number and ratios of legal abortion (number of abortions as a per cent of live births) have been accompanied by increases in the controversy over abortion and the nature of abortion law. In fact, six years after the 1969 amendment, abortion has emerged as one of the most intense areas of debate in Canada.

However, involvement in the public debate on abortion tends to be selective of those individuals and groups which desire to communicate their views to others. Because of the

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paucity of attitudinal research on abortion, and the difficulty of collecting data which are representative of the Canadian population, relatively little is known about the views held by most Canadians. Yet such views are important indicators of the level of support for abortion and for changing abortion laws. Thus, this paper augments the existing research by analyzing data from six Canadian Gallup polls, conducted by the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion (CIPO) between 1965 and 1974.

I Gallup Poll Data on Abortion

Before discussing Canadian attitudes toward abortion, the limitations on the use of the Gallup poll data should be noted. The Gallup poll data are obtained from a random probability cluster sample using quotas. The sample of approximately 700 adult Canadians is considered representative of the larger Canadian population in terms of age, sex, education, and province of residence. However, the sample design places several constraints on the interpretation of Gallup poll data. First, the use of a quota sample cautions against the use of statistical tests of significance. However, the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion (no date) suggests that for a sample of 700, the results will be accurate within four percentage points, in nineteen out of twenty times (95 per cent confidence level). Accordingly, in this study, differences of five or more percentage points will be considered larger than that expected by chance, without attaching any significance level to this difference.

Secondly, although the age, sex and socio-economic characteristics of the sample are representative of the larger Canadian population, it is not clear if sample sub-populations are representative of the equivalent groups in Canada. Thus, answers to abortion questions are not cross-classified by two or more characteristics of the Gallup poll respondents. Even if non-representativeness was not a problem, presentation of data in two and three way cross-classification would be problematic because of sample attenuation.

In addition to restrictions placed on the analysis by the sample design, the secondary analysis of the Gallup polls also limits the analysis of Canadian public opinion on abortion. As indicated above, only six questions on abortion were asked of Canadians between 1965 and 1974, and the wording is not always that which might have been used in a survey specifically designed to tap attitudes toward abortion. The limitations of the Canadian Gallup poll questions on abortion become especially obvious when questions are compared to those asked in the United States Gallup polls. In the United States, the investigation of abortion attitudes has been enriched not only by the 1965 and 1970 National Fertility Studies which probed abortion attitudes of married women (Jones and Westoff, 1973; Miller, 1974; Westoff, Moore and Ryder, 1969) but also by at least 10 Gallup polls on abortion between 1962 and 1972 (Blake, 1971; 1973; Pomeroy and Landman, 1973). Further, the United States Gallup polls investigate the conditions under which abortion might be acceptable to the American population, and repeat these questions, thus permitting an analysis of changes in attitudes over time.

II Canadian Attitudes Toward Abortion

It is well known in social science research that question-wording may influence responses. The Canadian Gallup polls are not exempt from this problem. As indicated in Table 1, there is considerable fluctuation in the proportion of Canadian respondents who approve of abortion depending on the question asked. As was found in the United States Gallup polls and National Fertility Studies (Blake, 1971; Jones and Westoff, 1973; Westoff, Moore and Ryder, 1969) and in a 1968 survey of married Toronto women (Balakrishnan et al., 1972), support for abortion is highest when the health of the mother is endangered. In 1965, four years prior to the 1969 amendment to the Criminal Code, nearly three-fourths of

Canadian Attitudes on Abortion: Results of the Gallup Polls

TABLE 1. CANADIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD ABORTION BY SEX FOR CIPO POLLS, 1965-1974

Poll, Date	Question			
Poll 312 June 1965	As you know, present Federal Law considers abortion legal only to save a mother's life. Recently a provincial medical association said abortion should be legalized to preserve a mother's physical or mental health. Do you approve of such a step?			
	N	Approve (%)	Disapprove (%)	Other ^(a) (%)
Total	692	72	17	11
Male	349	73	15	12
Female	343	70	19	11
Poll 339 January 1970	Would you approve or oppose a law which would permit a woman to go to a doctor to end pregnancy at any time during the first three months?			
	N	Approve (%)	Disapprove (%)	Other ^(a) (%)
Total	712	43	48	10
Male	356	44	45	11
Female	356	41	50	9
Poll 344 November 1970	Now thinking about the law on abortion, at the present time abortion is legal only to save a mother's life or her mental or physical health. Do you think this law should remain as is or should it be revised to permit an abortion for all who wish to have one?			
	N	Yes, revise (%)	No, do not revise (%)	Other ^(a) (%)
Total	692	44	45	11
Male	343	45	44	11
Female	349	43	46	11
Poll 355 September 1972	Will you tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements: a) the decision to have an abortion should be made solely by a woman and her physician.			
	N	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Undecided (%)
Total	741	61	31	8
Male	368	59	30	11
Female	373	62	32	6
	b) (if disagreed) would you make an exception in the case of a woman whose mental or physical health was endangered?			
	N	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not Sure (%)
Total	228	81	11	8
Male	110	82	9	9
Female	118	80	13	7

Poll, Date	Question				
Poll 363 January 1974	In your opinion, is it too easy or too hard for a woman to obtain a legal abortion today?				
	N	Too Easy (%)	Too Hard (%)	About Right (%)	Undecided (%)
Total	1037	35	26	21	21
Male	525	30	30	17	24
Female	512	40	22	21	17
Poll 368 September 1974	Do you agree or disagree with the following statements: a) the decision to have an abortion should be made solely by a woman and her physician.				
	N	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Can't Say (%)	
Total	1055	62	31	7	
Male	508	60	33	7	
Female	547	64	30	6	
	b) (if disagreed) would you make an exception in the case of a woman whose mental or physical health is in danger?				
	N	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not Sure (%)	
Total	728	81	11	8	
Male	167	82	11	7	
Female	161	80	12	8	

(a) Other is a precoded category for these questions in the Gallup polls.

the Canadians approved of legalizing abortion to preserve a mother's mental or physical health.

Survey analysts will correctly observe that the 1965 level of approval of abortion for health reasons may have been inflated by the wording of the 1965 Gallup poll question. The reference to a provincial medical association statement may have favourably influenced responses, and the liberalizing impact of including mental criterion in an abortion law may have been overlooked by the respondents. Nonetheless, given differences in samples and years, the response level is compatible with that observed in the 1968 study of 1,632 married Toronto women (Balakrishnan et al., 1972) in which abortion was approved by 87 per cent when the mother's life was in danger.

As shown in Table 1, subsequent Canadian polls on abortion show a decline in the proportion of Canadians who approve of abortion. However, this decline does not necessarily represent a growing disapproval of abortion. Rather, the decline reflects the alteration in the type of questions asked of Canadians after 1969. In two polls taken in 1970, approximately 44 per cent of Canadians indicate approval of a law which either would permit a woman to go to a doctor to end pregnancy any time during the first three months (poll 339) or would permit an abortion for all who wish to have one (poll 344). Two

subsequent polls (polls 355 and 368) in 1972 and 1974 specifically ask Canadians their opinions on abortion as a matter of a decision between a woman and her physician. Over sixty per cent of the Canadian respondents indicate agreement with the statement that an abortion should be decided between a woman and her doctor. These two polls also show that most of those Canadians who disapprove of abortion as a matter of decision between a woman and her doctor would make an exception in the case of a woman whose mental or physical health was endangered.

While four of the five polls on abortion probe Canadian reactions to various aspects of obtaining abortions, the fifth poll, which was conducted in January 1974, asks Canadians to give their opinion concerning the ease or difficulty of obtaining a legal abortion. Over one-third of the respondents indicate that obtaining a legal abortion is too easy; one-quarter indicate it is too hard, and one-fifth indicate access to a legal abortion is just about right.

Although these responses have been used by pro-life advocates to justify preservation of current abortion laws, the question-wording and the relative high proportion of undecided responses suggest considerable ambiguity as to what is being measured in poll 363. Very few respondents are likely to have first hand knowledge as to the ease or difficulty of obtaining an abortion. Yet they are asked to respond to a question which assumes such knowledge. What poll 363 probably taps is a combination of (1) awareness of the rise in the incidence of abortion in Canada; (2) concern with promiscuity; and (3) the strength of the mother role.

III *Socio-Demographic Variations in Abortion Attitudes*

In addition to variations by questions asked, Canadian attitudes toward abortion also vary by sex, age, education, religion, mother tongue and region of residence. With the exception of the two polls which probe the acceptability of abortion as a matter of decision between a woman and her doctor, Canadian males were more likely than females to approve of abortion (Table 1). But, as in the United States polls, the differences in attitudes by gender are generally small, and according to the guidelines of the CIPO (no date) could be expected by chance. However, women are much more likely than men to say that legal abortion in Canada is too easy to obtain (poll 363). Possibly these attitudes of Canadian women reflect the investment which women have in the motherhood role. In commenting upon the tendency of women in the United States polls to be more disapproving of abortion than men, Blake (1971:545-546) notes that motherhood is the principal occupation of most women. She suggests that the abortion attitudes of women reflect the tendency to reaffirm the importance of this social role.

Because Canadian men and women generally do not differ greatly in their attitudes toward abortion, subsequent discussion is directed to the variations in attitudes by the socio-demographic characteristics of the total sample population in four of the recent Gallup polls. Because of space limitations, data are not presented for polls 312 and 363 although they are available from the authors. With the exception of age, the variations in these polls follow the pattern discussed below.

Generally, the variation in Canadian attitudes toward abortion by socio-demographic characteristics parallels the findings observed in the United States Gallup polls and in the 1965 and 1970 United States National Fertility Studies. With respect to age, analyses of both Canadian and United States fertility surveys in 1968 and 1965 respectively suggest that younger respondents are less likely to approve of abortion than older respondents (Balakrishnan et al., 1972; Westoff, Moore and Ryder, 1969). While this tendency is attributed to the fact that older respondents have more pressure upon them to control fertility (Westoff, Moore, and Ryder, 1969), these age differentials are virtually absent in the 1970 United States National Fertility Study (Jones and Westoff, 1973; Miller, 1974) and are

TABLE 2. ATTITUDES TOWARD ABORTION LAWS AND TOWARD ABORTION AS A MATTER BETWEEN A WOMAN AND HER PHYSICIAN, BY RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS, CIPO POLLS, 1970-1974

Respondent Characteristics			Polls and Responses			
Poll 339 January 1970	Would you approve or oppose a law which would permit a woman to go to a doctor to end pregnancy at any time during the first three months?		Poll 344 November 1970	Now thinking about the law on abortion: at the present time abortion is legal only to save a mother's life, or her mental or physical health. Do you think this law should remain as it is or should it be revised to permit an abortion for all who wish to have one?		
				N	Revise (%)	No Revision (%)
Total (a)	712	43	48	692	44	45
Age:						
21-29	182	47	48	162	51	44
30-39	150	45	47	156	51	44
40-49	158	39	51	147	37	47
50+	222	40	46	227	39	47
Education:						
0-8	201	27	61	182	33	53
High School	361	44	47	363	43	46
Technical	46	59	26	47	51	43
University	101	59	33	96	64	32
Religion:						
Catholic	289	31	62	297	41	50
Non-Catholic	423	50	38	395	46	42
Protestant	363	49	39	341	46	43
Other	60	57	33	54	50	37
Mother Tongue:						
English	422	49	40	400	45	45
French	195	29	66	188	42	48
Other	95	44	43	104	45	42
Province:						
Maritimes	65	35	54	61	41	46
Quebec	200	28	64	188	41	48

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Poll 355		Would you tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements: a) the decision to have an abortion should be made solely by a woman and her physician?			
September 1972					
		N	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	
Ontario	255	48	40		
Prairies	121	46	48		
B.C.	71	65	24		
Total (a)					
Age: 18-20	59	73	20	31	
21-29	157	70	24		
30-39	160	61	34		
40-49	137	61	32		
50+	228	50	35		
Education:					
0-8	193	50	35		
High School	402	64	30		
Technical	38	82	16	28	
University	106	62	32		
Religion:					
Catholic	317	55	34		
Non-Catholic	424	65	28		
Protestant	345	67	27		
Other	79	56	34		
Mother Tongue:					
English	442	65	29		
French	203	57	33		
Other	96	48	33		
Province:					
Maritimes	68	60	32		
Quebec	210	60	29		
Ontario	265	64	29		
Prairies	125	49	39		
B.C.	73	71	27		

Poll 368		Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the decision to have an abortion should be made solely by a woman and her physician?			
September 1974					
		N	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	
Ontario	250	50	41		
Prairies	121	41	47		
B.C.	72	39	50		
Total (a)					
Age: 18-19	63	71	22		
20-29	254	61	34		
30-39	228	60	37		
40-49	207	64	27		
50+	295	60	31		
Education:					
0-8	206	59	32		
High School	597	63	31		
Technical	82	61	32	32	
University	155	64	33		
Religion:					
Catholic	456	53	40		
Non-Catholic	593	69	24		
Protestant	477	67	25		
Other	116	75	22		
Mother Tongue:					
English	637	66	27		
French	307	57	39		
Other	109	54	36		
Province:					
Maritimes	104	51	39		
Quebec	308	51	39		
Ontario	364	65	25		
Prairies	170	59	36		
B.C.	109	80	17		

(a) Because of non-response, N's for respondents characteristics may not sum to total N.

reversed in several United States Gallup polls conducted during the 1970s (Blake, 1973). In Canada, Table 2 shows that approval toward abortion varies inversely with age. However, unpublished data for poll 312 indicates that in the 1965 Canadian poll age varies directly with the proportion approving abortion. Thus, the Canadian Gallup poll data also indicate a change in the variation of abortion attitudes by age between 1965 and the early 1970s. By the 1970s youthful Canadians are more likely to give approval for abortion under the conditions specified in the Gallup poll questions than are older Canadians.

In addition to age, attitudes to abortion in Canada vary by education. Canadians with higher levels of education are more likely to approve of abortion and less likely to disapprove compared to less educated Canadians. Because the data for respondents with a technical or university education are likely to be confounded by age and/or sample attenuation, Table 2 also presents data aggregated into post-secondary schooling. When post-secondary schooling is aggregated, approval for abortion varies positively with level of education again with the exception of poll 312 where the relation is curvilinear. This positive relation of education to favourable attitudes toward abortion is observed not only in Canadian Gallup polls, but also in Toronto (Balakrishnan et al., 1972), and in the United States National Fertility Studies and Gallup polls. It should be noted that while the experience of school is important in influencing attitudes toward abortion, the influence of education also is partially explained by its association with other determinants of attitudes toward abortion such as income, perceived role of women in society, and control over reproduction. In particular, Miller (1974) has shown that sex role definitions seem to determine the opportunity costs of children and mediate the effect of socio-economic status on attitudes toward abortion. Contraceptive attitudes and usage also are shown to be positively related to education and to attitudes toward abortion (Balakrishnan et al., 1972; Westoff, Moore and Ryder, 1969).

Along with education, religion is a major source of variation in North American attitudes toward abortion. In both the Canadian and the United States studies of attitudes toward abortion (Balakrishnan et al., 1972; Blake, 1971; Greenglass, 1972; Jones and Westoff, 1973; Miller, 1974; Westoff, Moore and Ryder, 1969), Catholic respondents are most likely to disapprove of abortion. Indeed, religion was the most powerful indicator of attitudes of married women in Toronto (Balakrishnan et al., 1972). Table 2 shows that Catholic respondents to the Canadian Gallup polls are less likely to approve and more likely to disapprove of abortion than are Protestant respondents.

No doubt, reflecting the association of religion and mother tongue in Canada, French mother tongue respondents are less likely to give approval to abortion compared to the English mother tongue group. It should be noted that the "other" mother tongue and "other" religious categories appearing in the Canadian Gallup polls are very heterogeneous in their respective linguistic and religious composition, and these responses and variations from poll to poll are not easily analyzed. Accordingly responses for "other" linguistic and religious groups are presented only for the interested reader and not discussed here.

In addition to religious and mother tongue differentials in attitudes toward abortion, Table 2 reveals variations in abortion attitudes by region. Generally, respondents who live in Ontario or British Columbia are more likely than other respondents to approve of abortion under the conditions specified in the questions. As revealed by 1973 abortion data (Canada, Statistics Canada, 1974), these provinces have the highest therapeutic abortion ratios for all Canadian geographical areas. Thus, the regional variation in approval toward abortion is paralleled by similar variations in the incidence of abortions obtained by residents. Compared to residents of Ontario and British Columbia, a higher proportion of Canadians in the Maritimes, Quebec and Prairie areas disapprove of abortion under conditions specified in the Gallup polls.

IV Public Opinion and Unrestricted Abortion

Data presented in Table 2 suggest that support for abortion under a number of specified conditions comes most strongly from Canadians who are young, non-Catholic or Protestant, English mother tongue, better educated or living in Ontario or British Columbia. Canadians who are Catholic, less well educated, French mother tongue, or from the Maritimes or Quebec are least likely to support abortion. However, in addition to indicating how socio-economic characteristics and attitudes toward abortion covary, data in Table 2 also indicate the degree and locus of support for changes in abortion regulations. In the 1970s, four Gallup polls have included questions on abortion which probe Canadian attitudes toward termination of pregnancy under conditions which are at variance with those specified in the 1969 amendment to the Criminal Code.

Five months after the 1969 amendment became effective, poll 339 asked Canadians if they would approve of or oppose a law which would permit a woman to go to a doctor to end a pregnancy at any time during the first three months. As revealed in Table 2, opinion was nearly equally divided. Approval of such a law was most likely to come from Canadians who were young, or well educated, non-Catholic or Protestant, English mother tongue or residing in Ontario, the Prairies, and British Columbia. The disapproval of such a law was most evident in the Catholic or French Canadian sectors of society. Nearly two-thirds of Canadians who were residing in Quebec, or were Catholic or had a French mother tongue disapproved of a law which would permit a woman to go to a doctor in order to terminate a pregnancy at any time during the first three months.

While responses to poll 339 may be indicative of a nearly equal level of support and disapproval for abortion on demand, the question-wording also may have influenced responses. Specifically, the time reference for the occurrence of an abortion is three months. This three-month interval is long enough to make the issue of taking a human life salient even for those persons who usually would not believe that the human life begins at conception. Thus, in poll 339 the proportion of Canadians approving of the suggested law may be depressed and the proportion disapproving inflated relative to a question which either did not specify the interval for the abortion or specified a shorter time span.

The biases induced by specifying the occurrence of an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy are removed in a poll taken ten months later. As indicated in Table 2, poll 344 summarized the 1969 abortion amendment, albeit somewhat incorrectly, by referring to mental and physical health as the criteria for legal abortion (the 1969 amendment permits a therapeutic abortion only when the health of the mother is endangered). Following this summary, respondents were asked if they thought the law should remain, or if it should be revised to permit an abortion for all who wish to have one. Unfortunately, the wording of the question also appears to affect responses. Specifically, soliciting an opinion after presenting the existing law may bias respondents toward giving a status quo answer. As discussed by Blake (1974:456) in her analysis of the United States polls, respondents to any opinion poll will tend to agree with that which is presented as a legislative or judicial *fait accompli*.

The responses to the November 1970 poll on revising the current Canadian abortion law to permit abortion on demand are quite similar to those observed in the January 1970 poll. Thus, the data from two 1970 polls suggest that Canadian opinion is equally divided on laws which would permit abortion under conditions of demand. Slightly less than half of the respondents approve and disapprove of such laws, respectively. The discussion further suggests that the proportion of Canadians approving of such new abortion regulations was probably depressed and the proportion disapproving was inflated by the question-wording in the two polls. This contention is initially supported by the results of two subsequent polls conducted in 1972 and 1974. These two polls (355 and 368) asked respondents if they agree or

disagree with the statement that the decision to have an abortion should be made solely by a woman and her physician.

As shown in Table 2, responses over the two-year period are stable, with over sixty per cent of Canadians agreeing that the decision to have an abortion should be made by a woman and her doctor. Advocates of legal abortion on demand are likely to be encouraged by the data in Table 2 which show that the majority of Catholic or French mother tongue respondents in the 1972 and 1974 polls agree that abortion is a matter of decision between a woman and her doctor. However, these responses as well as those of the larger sample need not indicate a considerable level of support for abortion where a woman and her physician agree upon it (Pomeroy and Landman, 1973:485). As suggested by several United States studies (Blake, 1973; Jones and Westoff, 1973) the wording of the question alone may be responsible for the relatively high level of agreement.

First, and most obviously, asking Canadians to respond to an abortion-decision as a matter between a woman and her doctor may distract respondents from the abortion issue to the ethics of a doctor-patient relationship (Jones and Westoff, 1973:477). Thus respondents could have interpreted the questions asked in 1972 and 1974 as depicting a situation in which the woman would not be the sole decision-maker with respect to abortion. Rather an abortion would entail the involvement of a medical practitioner, whose professional oath is dedicated to the saving of lives. If respondents believe physicians to be dedicated to the saving of all lives, including that of the fetus, then agreement with the question asked in polls 355 and 368 would not mean agreement with the implicit issue of abortion on demand.

The ambiguity with respect to responses to the Canadian poll questions on abortion as a matter of decision between a woman and her physician arises because the question presents no alternatives and the respondents are left to imply them. The methodological defects of the implied alternative are discussed cogently by Blake (1973) with reference to the United States poll responses to similar questions. By referring to two questions appearing in two 1972 United States Gallup polls, Blake shows that the support for abortion as a matter between a woman and her doctor does not mean that individuals have repudiated the right of husbands or anyone else to participate in the decision. Nor have respondents supported a situation in which there are absolutely no legal restraints on abortion. Blake further suggests that somewhere between 29 and 39 per cent of the 1972 United States poll respondents assent to abortion without restrictions as to the circumstances of termination of pregnancy.

Overall, other investigations of abortion attitudes (Balakrishnan et al., 1972; Blake, 1971, 1973; Westoff, Moore and Ryder, 1969) indicate that the four Gallup polls conducted during the 1970s have not adequately probed Canadian attitudes toward abortion under conditions of demand. The four polls are characterized not only by various methodological defects associated with question-wording, but also by a limited conceptualization of abortion on demand. Questions which are more specific as to the reason for abortion elicit much higher rates of disapproval than observed in the four Canadian Gallup polls. This is clearly shown in the United States Gallup polls where Blake (1973) has operationalized elective abortion by asking, "Do you think abortion operations should or should not be legal in the case where the parents simply have all the children they want although there would be no major health or financial problems involved in having another child?" Although the proportion disapproving of abortion under these circumstances declines between 1968 and 1972, over two-thirds of the United States respondents believe abortions for such reasons should not be legal. In their 1968 survey of married Toronto women, Balakrishnan et al. (1972:37) found only 28 per cent approved of abortion if a couple could afford another child but did not want one. In short, the range of Canadian acceptance noted in this study of between 44 and 61 per cent for abortion under conditions of demand might decline if more specific questions on elective abortion were asked.

Summary

In conclusion, the analysis of six Canadian Gallup polls on abortion between 1965 and 1974 indicates considerable variation in the attitudes held by Canadians toward abortion. Canadians who are older, less well educated, Catholic, of French mother tongue or residing in Quebec or the Maritimes are least likely to approve of abortion under the conditions specified in the polls. Favourable attitudes toward abortion increase with education, and decrease with the age of the respondents. More favourable attitudes also characterize Protestant, non-Catholic or English mother tongue respondents and those respondents living in Ontario or British Columbia. Generally, variations in attitudes by region of Canada parallel the distribution of therapeutic abortions obtained by Canadians. The high incidence of legal abortion and the high proportion of Canadian respondents who indicate favourable attitudes toward abortion in Ontario and British Columbia suggest that these areas are a major source of liberal abortion reform attempts in Canada.

In addition to variation by the socio-economic characteristics of respondents, approval and disapproval of abortion varies according to the criteria for abortion. As early as 1965 nearly three-fourths of the Canadians supported therapeutic abortion when the mother's mental or physical health was endangered. Subsequent polls suggest that between 44 and 61 per cent of adult Canadians support legal abortion under conditions which are at variance with the 1969 amendment to the Criminal Code, which permitted legal abortion when the mother's health was endangered. However, the observed range of 44 to 61 per cent approval and 31 to 48 per cent disapproval does not necessarily mean Canadians are more supportive of abortion on demand than their United States counterparts. Analyses of the United States polls and fertility surveys are based on different questions which are repeated over time and which investigate a greater variety of conditions under which abortion is approved by the population.

Precise estimates of the level of public support for abortion liberalization in Canada are unobtainable from the existing Canadian Gallup polls not only because of the lack of trend data and the scarcity of poll questions but also because of the biases induced by question-wording. While these difficulties suggest caution with respect to interpretation of current surveys on abortion attitudes, they also indicate ways of improving future research, particularly with reference to the Canadian Gallup polls. In the absence of national surveys on Canadian reproductive behaviour, the Canadian Gallup polls are virtually the only source of national information on attitudes toward age at marriage, ideal family size, birth control, sterilization and abortion. They could, and should, be reasonably effective vehicles with which to probe Canadian attitudes toward abortion. As such, Canadian Gallup polls on abortion have a three-fold task: (1) to give more attention to question-wording; (2) to include a wider variety of questions which probe a variety of attitudinal dimensions (see: Balakrishnan et al., 1972; Blake, 1971, 1973; and Westoff, Moore and Ryder, 1969); and (3) to repeat these questions over time to permit analysis of temporal trends in attitudes toward abortion. The resultant investigation would appear to be particularly appropriate in a country where abortion is increasingly an object of public attention and controversial debate.

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