Alvargonzález, David
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Psicothema, vol. 29, núm. 4, 2017, pp. 520-526
Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos del Principado de Asturias
Oviedo, España

Available in: http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=72753218014
Knowledge and attitudes about abortion among undergraduate students

David Alvargonzález
University of Oviedo

Abstract

Background: This study examined attitudes towards and knowledge about abortion among undergraduate students doing eleven different subjects. The differences in attitudes and knowledge about abortion according to gender, religious and political affiliation, religiosity, sexual orientation, number of sex partners and previous sexual experience were also considered. Method: 1,025 undergraduate students (58.34% women and 41.66% men; mean age 20.18) completed the following instruments: an adaptation of the Abortion Attitudes Scale by Hill, and an adaptation of the Abortion Knowledge Test by Esposito and Basow. Results: With attitudes ranging from 0 to 100, medicine, psychology and nursing students were in the anti-abortion range (55.93, 54.19 and 53.62, respectively) while history, philology and physics students were in the pro-abortion rights range (48.44, 48.49 and 50.12, respectively). Law, medicine and nursing students showed greater theoretical knowledge about abortion, while physics, engineering and philology students proved to be the least knowledgeable. Conclusions: Differences were found in students’ attitudes towards abortion and in knowledge about abortion depending on their degree subject. As in previous reports, differences were found in students’ attitudes towards abortion which reflected differences in religious affiliation, religiosity, political affiliation, and previous sexual experience.

Keywords: attitudes, abortion, university students, knowledge.

Resumen

Conocimientos y actitudes de los estudiantes universitarios hacia el aborto. Antecedentes: se estudian las actitudes hacia el aborto provocado y el conocimiento sobre el aborto de alumnos pertenecientes a once carreras universitarias teniendo, además, en cuenta el género, la afiliación política y religiosa, la orientación sexual y la experiencia sexual previa. Método: 1,025 estudiantes (58.34% mujeres, 41.66% hombres; edad media 20.18 años) de once carreras de la Universidad de Oviedo cumplimentaron dos instrumentos: una adaptación de la Abortion Attitudes Scale de Hill y una adaptación del Abortion Knowledge Test de Esposito y Basow. Resultados: en una escala de actitudes del 0 al 100, los estudiantes de medicina, psicología y enfermería se situaron en posiciones más antiabortistas (55.93, 54.19 y 53.62, respectivamente), mientras que los estudiantes de historia, filología y físicas se mostraron más favorables al aborto (48.44, 48.49 y 50.12, respectivamente). Los estudiantes de derecho, medicina y enfermería mostraron tener más conocimientos acerca del aborto; los de física, ingeniería y filología resultaron ser los más ignorantes. Conclusiones: se encontraron diferencias en las actitudes hacia el aborto y en el conocimiento sobre el aborto dependiendo del itinerario académico. Se encontraron diferencias en las actitudes frente al aborto según la afiliación religiosa, la religiosidad, la orientación política y la experiencia sexual previa.

Palabras clave: actitudes, aborto, estudiantes de Universidad, conocimientos.

Although the issue of abortion generates a great deal of public interest, and university students represent a large and well-informed segment of public opinion, remarkably little work has been done to examine the attitudes towards abortion among undergraduate students. In fact, the data available only covers nursing and medicine (Barret, 1980; Buga, 2002; Carlton, Nelson, & Coleman, 2000; Finlay, 1981; Gleeson, Forde, Bates, Powell, Eadon-Jones, & Draper, 2008; Jones, 2006; Shortorban, Zimmenman, & Bell, 2004; Rosenblatt, 1999; Ruiz, Pascual, Colomer, Sánchez, & Álvarez-Durdet, 1991; Steele, 2009). The survey conducted by Rodríguez-Calvo, Martínez-Silva, Soto, Concheiro, & Muñoz-Barús (2012) provides some data in regard to law students; nonetheless, there is a complete dearth of studies on attitudes of undergraduates studying other subjects such as psychology, physics, biology, engineering, childhood education, philology, philosophy and history. This lack of research is even more striking since the professional practice of certain studies (such as law and psychology) may even come into close contact with the issue of abortion.

On the other hand, the absence of literature examining university students’ knowledge about abortion is similarly remarkable (Espósito & Basow, 1995; Pace, Sandahl, Backus, Silveira, & Steinauer, 2008).

This research pursues two objectives. The first objective is to determine the differences of attitudes and knowledge about abortion between undergraduate students following different academic paths. Secondly, it seeks to study the differences of attitudes towards abortion and knowledge about abortion according to gender, religious and political affiliation, religiosity, sexual orientation, number of sex partners and previous sexual experience.
Method

Participants

In the 2014-2015 academic year at the University of Oviedo, 18,013 students (9,768 women and 8,245 men) were enrolled in all the subjects covered in this survey. The final sample used in this survey comprised 1,025 students (5.7%), 598 women (6.12%) and 427 men (5.18%), proportionally distributed among the various areas of study (E = +/- 2.97, p = q = 0.5, with a confidence level of 95%).

Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics based on gender, current studies, religion, religiosity, church attendance, political affiliation, sexual orientation and practice, and prior direct and indirect experience of abortion.

Instruments

The questionnaire was designed to ensure complete respondent anonymity, which was found to be relevant given the extreme sensitivity of the topic under research. The questionnaire on attitudes was an adaptation of the Abortion Attitudes Scale of Hill (2004) including different medical and social circumstances surrounding abortion. Other previous studies have been revised in order to confirm and complete Hill's Attitudes Scale (Abel-Aziz, Arch, & Al-Taher, 2004; Barret, 1980; Benin, 1985; Boga, 2002; Combs & Welch, 1982; Dans, 1992; Ebaugh & Haney, 1980; Espósito & Basow, 1995; Finlay, 1981; Fuente-Fonnest, Sondegaard, Fonnest, & Vedsted-Jacobsen, 2000; Gleesson et al., 2008; Hall & Freeze, 1986; Harris & Mills, 1985; Hess & Rued, 2005; Jones & Westoff, 1978; Marshall, Gould, & Roberts, 1994; McIntosh, Alston, & Alston, 1979; Pace et al., 2008; Rodríguez-Calvo et al., 2012; Ruiz et al., 1991; Steele 2009)). The reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) for the questionnaire on attitudes was 0.93.

The questionnaire on knowledge was an adaptation of Abortion Knowledge Test by Espósito and Basow (1995): I selected ten items relating to the legal (three items), sociological (two items) and medical (five items) aspects of abortion. Legal aspects of the original questionnaire were adapted to Spanish legislation.

Prior to definitively handing out the questionnaire, it was tested on a pilot sample of 77 students: feedback was received regarding the questions’ clarity and the survey’s layout. The pilot group’s comprehension of the survey questions was found to be good, so only minor changes were made.

Procedure

Data was collected in September and October 2015 from students in 11 different majors. Questionnaires were distributed at the beginning of lectures and were voluntarily and anonymously completed immediately thereafter. Participants were informed of the researcher’s objectives. Absolute anonymity was promised and maintained. Participation was voluntary and neither course credit nor compensation was provided. Delivering the questionnaire to be filled out on-site on request yielded a very high response rate of nearly 100%.

Demographic data on gender, current studies, religious and political affiliation, previous sexual experience, sexual orientation and (direct and indirect) abortion experience was obtained from the survey.

Attitudes towards abortion were extrapolated from a 20-item Abortion Attitudes Scale: each item could be assessed on a 5-point

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Characteristics of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current studies</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Engineering</td>
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Religion and religiosity

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<th>Other</th>
<th>None</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>389</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>556</td>
</tr>
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Degree of religious belief

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<th>Strong</th>
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<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
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<td>71</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>456</td>
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</tbody>
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Frequency of religious attendance

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<tr>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>From time to time</th>
<th>Regularly</th>
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<tr>
<td>535</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>44</td>
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Political affiliation

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<tr>
<th>Left</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Right</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>20</td>
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Sexual orientation and practice

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<th>Homosexual</th>
<th>Bisexual</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>947</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sexual experience

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<tr>
<th>Coitally-experienced</th>
<th>Coitally-unexperienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>734</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of sex partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>None</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three</th>
<th>Four or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Practical knowledge about abortion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you (or your partner) any direct abortion experience?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>965</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Do you know someone who has had an abortion? | 392 | 627 |
attitude pro and anti-abortion has been stated relatively: There
Following the procedure of Hill's Abortion Attitude Scale, the
0 to 100, the lower score meaning more pro-abortion rights).
overall score of the participant's attitude towards abortion (from
disagree). The sum of the scores of each questionnaire yields an
Lickert scale (strongly agree; agree; undecided; disagree; strongly
such cases, a p-value of 5% or lower was considered signi
the Wilconson's test.  The same procedure was followed to assess
distribution-free test, the Fligner-Killeen test, the Student's tests, and
the Kruskal-Wallis H test, the Shapiro-Wilk test, the Ansari-Bradley
unequal variance t-test), Bartlett's test (to check homoscedasticity),
of attitude towards abortion was evaluated using Welch's t-test (or
report attitudes and knowledge by participant characteristics. The
study the pattern of responses and bivariate descriptive analysis to
2015). Univariate analysis and frequency distributions were used to
Data analysis
The data was analyzed with R, version 3.2.3 (R Core Team,
Current major studies and attitudes towards abortion
Table 2 summarizes participants' attitudes and knowledge
about abortion based on their current studies. The scale used to
determine the general attitude towards abortion ranged from 0
(pro-abortion rights) to 100 (anti-abortion). The main values of
the various groups fell in a range between 46.22 (the mean score
obtained by philosophy students) and 56.33 (the mean score
obtained by most childhood education). Medicine, psychology
and nursing students fell in the anti-abortion range (55.93, 54.19
and 53.62, respectively) while history, philosophy and physics
students tended to support abortion rights (48.44, 48.49 and 50.12,
respectively). Law, engineering and biology students exhibited an
intermediate and less clearly defined attitude towards abortion.
(Shapiro-Wilk’s test p < 0.001 for all alternatives; Fligner-Killeen’s
test p = 0.24; Kruskal-Wallis’ test p < 0.001).
Current major studies and theoretical knowledge about abortion
The scale of the adapted Abortion Knowledge Test used to state
theoretical knowledge about abortion ranged from 0 to 10, from less
to more knowledge. Students of law, medicine and nursing were
the most knowledgeable, while physics, engineering and philosophy
students proved to be the most ignorant regarding the theoretical
aspects of abortion (Shapiro-Wilk’s test p < 0.001 for all alternatives;
Fligner-Killeen’s test p = 0.12; Kruskal-Wallis’ test p < 0.001).
Abortion attitudes and other variables
The scores of attitudes towards abortion, religious beliefs and
religiosity, political affiliation, sexual orientation, number of sex
partners, previous sexual experience and prior abortion experience
(direct or indirect) are summarized in Table 3. I did not found
gender-based differences. I found differences in attitudes by
religion: non-religious students average nearly 11 points more in
favor of abortion rights than Catholic students. (Shapiro-Wilk’s
test p, catholic = 0.35, none < 0.001 and other = 0.68; Fligner-
Killeen’s and Kruskal-Wallis’ tests p < 0.001). The difference is
even greater (average of nearly 20 points) when based on the degree
of religiosity and church attendance (Shapiro-Wilk’s test p, weak
= 0.12, medium = 0.71 and strong = 0.95; Bartlett’s test p = 0.17).
Self-perceived political affiliation is associated with a
substantial difference in attitudes: the difference between the
extreme left and the extreme right exceeds 20 points, and the
difference between position 2 (left) and 4 (right) on the 5-point
Lickert scale is 11 points, with students on the left leaning more in
favor of abortion rights. (Shapiro-Wilk’s test p, left = 0, 2 = 0.13,
3 = 0.52, 4 = 0.6, 5 (right) = 0.38; Fligner-Killeen’s test p = 0.42;
Kruskal-Wallis’ test p < 0.001).
Heterosexual and homosexual students hold a broadly similar
attitude towards abortion (average of 52.39 and 54.07, respectively),
while bisexual students score lower (46.61), meaning they are more

| Attitudes towards abortion given current studies (from more (0) to less (100) pro-
abortion) | n | mean | med. | SD |
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46.22</td>
<td>44.00</td>
<td>13.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>48.44</td>
<td>47.00</td>
<td>13.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philology</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>48.49</td>
<td>47.00</td>
<td>12.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>50.12</td>
<td>49.50</td>
<td>15.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>51.59</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>15.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>52.07</td>
<td>53.50</td>
<td>13.73</td>
</tr>
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<td>76</td>
<td>52.78</td>
<td>53.50</td>
<td>12.82</td>
</tr>
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<td>Nursing</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>53.62</td>
<td>52.00</td>
<td>14.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>54.19</td>
<td>54.00</td>
<td>13.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>55.93</td>
<td>56.00</td>
<td>13.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child &amp; Edu.</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>56.33</td>
<td>55.00</td>
<td>13.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| (Kruskal-Wallis p < 0.001; Fligner-Killeen p = 0.24; Shapiro-Wilk p < 0.001 for all
alternatives) |

| Knowledge about abortion given current studies (from less (0) to more (10) pro-
abortion) | n | mean | med. | SD |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.24</td>
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<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.43</td>
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<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.41</td>
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<td>History</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.47</td>
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<td>Biology</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child &amp; Edu.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.44</td>
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<td>Nursing</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.50</td>
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<td>Medicine</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
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</table>
| (Kruskal-Wallis p < 0.001; Fligner-Killeen p = 0.12; Shapiro-Wilk p < 0.001 for all
alternatives) |
in favor of abortion rights. Pro-abortion rights attitudes increase with the number of sex partners (from zero to three: 56.49, 52.02, 50.43 and 41.71, respectively) but they recede with four or more partners (50.19). (Shapiro-Wilk’s test p < 0.001 for all alternatives; Fligner-Killeen’s test p = 0.04; Kruskal-Wallis’ test p < 0.001).

Previous sexual experience correlates with a pro-abortion rights score of nearly six points higher than unexperienced counterparts. The difference between those students who have either direct or indirect abortion experience and those lacking such experience is considerable and reaches nearly six points on the attitudes scale, with the former being more supportive of abortion rights. (Shapiro-Wilk’s test p, no < 0.001, and yes = 0.65; Ansari-Bradley’s test p = 0.44; Student’s t test p < 0.001; the Wilconson’s tests p = 0.02).

The influence of other variables on abortion theoretical knowledge

Table 4 summarizes participants’ theoretical knowledge of abortion based on other variables. Religious beliefs, religiosity,
and sexual orientation bear no influence on theoretical knowledge about abortion. Women proved to be more theoretically knowledgeable about abortion than men, scoring 0.63 points higher on a 10-point scale (Shapiro-Wilk’s test p < 0.001 for both alternatives; Ansary-Bradley’s test p = 0.15; Student’s t test p < 0.001). Political affiliation presents the following pattern: extreme left and extreme right positions (one and five) score higher than the middle positions (two, three and four), although the largest difference scarcely reaches 0.43 points. The higher the number of sexual partners, the greater the knowledge about abortion, with a range of difference of 0.98 between the lowest and the highest score. Coitally-experienced students prove to be more theoretically knowledgeable than unexperienced counterparts (Shapiro-Wilk, Ansary-Bradley and Welch’s test p < 0.001). Students with direct abortion experience score more than one point higher than unexperienced students, and students who know someone who has had an abortion scored 0.68 points higher than those who do not know anybody (Shapiro-Wilk’s test p, no < 0.001, yes = 0.02; Ansari-Bradley’s test, Welch’s test and the Wilconson’s tests p < 0.001).

Discussion

Attitudes towards abortion and theoretical knowledge about abortion and different student’s academic paths (Table 2)

I found differences of participant’s attitudes about abortion based on major studies: Medicine, psychology and nursing students showed relatively anti-abortion scores (55.93, 54.19 and 53.62, respectively) while history, philology and physics students were relatively more prone to support abortion rights (48.44, 48.49 and 50.12, respectively). Law, engineering and biology students exhibited an intermediate and less clearly defined attitude towards abortion. There are no previous studies to contrast these results.

With regard to theoretical knowledge about abortion, I found that students of law, medicine and nursing were the most knowledgeable, while physics, engineering and philology students proved to be the most ignorant. The low mean score of all participants gives pause for thought, since no group scored higher than 2.6 of 10. There are no previous studies to contrast these results.

The influence of other variables on abortion attitudes (Table 3)

Gender has proven to be an inconsistent predictor of attitudes towards abortion, since the conclusions of different analyses seem contradictory. Several studies have found no correlation between attitudes towards abortion and gender (Betzig & Lombardo, 1992; Buga, 2002; Corenblum, 1973; Espósito & Basow, 1995; Marshall et al., 1994; Rodríguez-Calvo et al., 2012; Ruiz et al., 1991; Steele, 2009; Szafran & Clagett, 1988). In the present study, no gender-based differences were found.

Differences in attitudes by religion are considerable, since non-religious students average nearly 10 points more in approval of abortion than Catholics. The difference is even greater (average of nearly 20 points) when based on the degree of religiosity and church attendance. Many surveys have found that Catholics were less approving of abortion than people of other religions and even less approving than agnostic or atheists (Abel-Aziz et al., 2004; Adebayo, 1990; Barret, 1980; Buga, 2002; Ebaugh & Haney, 1980; Espósito & Basow, 1995; Hess & Rueb, 2005; Krishnan, 1991; Marshall et al., 1994; McIntosh et al., 1979; Szafran et al., 1988; Walzer, 1994; Wright & Rogers, 1987). Gleeson et al. and Steele also found that religious affiliation is a reliable predictor of attitudes towards abortion (Gleeson et al., 2008; Steele, 2009). In the present study, Catholics are clearly more anti-abortion than non-religious people, and they are as anti-abortion as students of “other religions”. Nevertheless, this result should be carefully contextualized: our sample of students belonging to a non-Catholic religion is exiguous (and the “other” religion is indeterminate) since non-Catholic religions are infrequent in Spain.

In previous studies, religious service attendance has proven to be a reliable predictor of abortion attitudes, especially on the attitudes concerning the soft circumstances surrounding abortion (Benin, 1985; Ebaugh & Haney, 1980; Hess & Rueb, 2005; Szafran et al., 1988; Walzer, 1994). Esposito and Basow found that religiosity was the strongest predictor of abortion attitudes, followed by religion and age (Espósito & Basow, 1995, 2009). The results obtained are compatible with those previous studies.

The difference in attitude towards abortion between the extreme left and the extreme right exceeds 20 points, and the difference between position 2 (left) and 4 (right) on the 5-point Lickert scale is 11 points, with students on the left leaning more in favor of abortion rights. In their study of medicine students in two Spanish universities, Ruiz et al. reported that students supporting left-wing parties tend to be more pro-choice than their conservative counterparts (1991). Hess and Rueb have found that Democrat and liberal students at the University of Wisconsin are likely to report pro-choice opinions while Republican and conservative students harbor pro-life attitudes (2005). The results obtained here are compatible with this relationship between left-wing political affiliation and pro-abortion attitudes.

Heterosexual and homosexual students hold a broadly similar attitude towards abortion, while bisexual students are more in favor of abortion rights. Unfortunately, there are not previous studies to contrast these results.

Students with previous sexual experience are more prone to approval of abortion and score of nearly six points higher in the attitudes scale than unexperienced counterparts. Several authors report that coitally-experienced students were found to be more approving of abortion than their inexperienced counterparts (Barret, 1980; Dans, 1992; Klamen et al., 1996). The results of the present survey are compatible with those findings. Surprisingly, Buga did not find this pattern among medical students in South Africa (Buga, 2000, 261).

I have found that students with direct or indirect abortion experience are more supportive of abortion rights than those lacking such experience (the difference reaches nearly six points on the attitudes scale). According to several surveys, students with prior first- or second-hand abortion experience show the most liberal attitudes towards abortion (Carlton et al., 2000; Hess & Rueb, 2005; Holis & Morris, 1992; Klamen et al., 1996). The present results are compatible with this conjecture.

The influence of other variables on theoretical knowledge about abortion (Table 4)

I did not find any differences on theoretical knowledge of abortion between the groups holding different religious beliefs, religiosity and sexual orientation. This result contrasts with...
Exposito and Basow’s findings since, according to their study, less religious students scored higher on the Abortion Knowledge Test (Espósito & Basow, 1995).

Women prove to be more theoretically knowledgeable about abortion than men, against Exposito and Basow results who did not report significant gender differences (Espósito & Basow, 1995). The pattern of theoretical knowledge presented by political affiliation shows that extreme left and extreme right positions (one and five) score higher than the middle positions (two, three and four), but the largest difference scarcely reaches 0.43 points. Students with higher number of sexual partners showed greater theoretical knowledge about abortion: in this case, the range of difference between the lowest and the highest score is of 0.98 points. Theoretical knowledge about abortion consistently rises among coitally-experienced vis-á-vis the unexperienced counterpart. Students who have directly experienced an abortion (either personally or through their partner), and students who know other people who have had an abortion exhibit a higher level of theoretical knowledge about abortion. There are no previous studies to contrast these results concerning political affiliation, number of sex partners, previous sexual experience, and practical knowledge of abortion.

To conclude: Undergraduate university students following different academic paths show differences in their attitudes towards abortion. Groups showing differences in religious affiliation, religiosity, religious attendance, political affiliation and previous sexual experience show statistically significant differences in their attitudes toward abortion. No differences in attitudes were found based on gender but sexual orientation did prove to be relevant, though.

People with different religious beliefs and religiosity, political affiliation and sexual orientation show a similar theoretical knowledge about abortion. Nevertheless, students with different gender, academic path, number of sex partners and previous sexual experience show different degree of knowledge about abortion. Students who have directly experienced an abortion (either personally or through their partner), and students who know other people who have had an abortion exhibit a higher level of theoretical knowledge about abortion and show a slightly higher score in their approval of abortion.

This study has certain limitations. Firstly, limitations concerning the statistical analysis since the nature of the bivariate analysis presented in this study is merely descriptive. Secondly, limitations concerning the sample: The University of Oviedo is a medium-sized public university in an outlying region of Spain where students are predominantly middle-class white Caucasian who are either Catholic or of no religious affiliation. Consequently, the student body at the University of Oviedo is not representative of other universities around the world and might even not be representative of other Spanish private universities.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all the students who took the time to complete the questionnaire and their professors for their kind cooperation. I wish to acknowledge Professor Emilio Torres for his statistical advice. Professor Eva Álvarez-Martino collaborated in the preparation and initial piloting of the questionnaire and was of great help in its final distribution. Clara María Bueno helped me in the data processing. I am also indebted to Brendan Burke for his help in improving the English and the style of this text. Lastly, I also wish to thank the editors and the anonymous reviewers of Psychothema who made a number of insightful critiques of a previous draft.

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