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Bir Grup Tıp Öğrencisinin İstemli Düşük Konusundaki Algıları: Nitel Bir Analiz

Perceptions of a Group of Medical Students Regarding the Issue of Induced Abortion: A Qualitative Analysis

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Özet

Amaç: Tıp fakültesinde yürütülen tıp etiği eğitimi, mesleki kimlikleri bağlamında hekim adaylarına etik farkındalık kazandırarak, onların hekim-hasta ilişkisinin belirleyenlerini değerlendirmesini, tıbbi uygulamalarda ve araştırmalarda sık karşılaşılan etik konu ve sorunları tanımlamasını, etik değerleri koruyarak karşılaşılan etik ikilemlerde uygun çözüm yöntemlerini kullanmasını amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmada Hacettepe Üniversitesi Tıp Fakültesi'nde okuyan bir grup öğrencinin “Duvarların Dili Olsa [İng: If These Walls Could Talk]” başlıklı film üzerinden, kürtaj olgusu hakkındaki bakış açılarını ortaya konmak hedeflenmiştir. Bu makalenin yazılma amacı, Hacettepe Üniversitesi Tıp Fakültesinde lisans eğitiminin seçmeli dersleri olan, “Biyoetik ve Sinema” ile “Sinemada Hekim Temsilleri” adlı dersler kapsamında öğrencilerin kürtajla ilgili görüşlerini almak, hekimlik mesleğinin değerleri ile birlikte bu olguyu düşünerek gözden geçirmelerini sağlamak ve feminist biyoetik açısından eleştirel bakış açısı kazanıp kazanmadıklarını belirlemektir.

Anahtar sözcükler:

Kürtaj, istemli düşük, feminist biyoetik, tıp etiği eğitimi

Keywords:

induced abortion, feminist bioethics, medical ethics education.

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Yöntem: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Tıp Fakültesi Tıp Tarihi ve Etik Anabilim Dalı eğitim amaçlı film arşivinde bulunan “Duvarların Dili Olsa” filmine ait, 178 tıp fakültesi öğrenci ödevi, tematik içerikli analiz yöntemiyle değerlendirilmiştir. Öğrenci ödevleri değerlendirilmeden önce Hacettepe Üniversitesi Etik Komisyonu'ndan gerekli izinler alınmıştır (Sayı, 3861;Tarih: 26.05.2017).

Bulgular: Öğrenci ödevlerinden elde edilen veriler ana ve alt temalara ayrılmıştır. Öğrencilerin kürtaj olgusuna yaklaşımları doğrultusunda oluşturulan temalar, “İnsan hakları”, “Etik gerektendirme”, “Toplumun rolü” bağlamlarında değerlendirilmiştir.

Sonuç ve Öneriler: Bu çalışmada öğrencilerin hem kendi kişisel hem de mesleki etik değerlerine ilişkin farkındalık kazandıkları tespit edilmiştir. Biyoetiğin önemli bir tartışma konusu olan kürtaj hakkında, öğrencilerin

feminist biyoetik perspektifiyle eleştirel düşünme becerisi ile tartışma yürütebildikleri söylenebilir. Bu nedenle, dersteki film gösterimlerinin ve tartışmaların tıp etiği/biyoetik eğitiminde daha çok yer almasının önemli olduğu düşünülmektedir.

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Abstract

Aim: *The medical ethics education given at the faculty of medicine aims to help prospective physicians develop an ethics awareness as part of their professional identity so that they can evaluate the determinants of patient-physician relationship, identify the ethical issues and problems prevailing in medical practice and researches, and find appropriate solutions to the ethical dilemmas faced while protecting ethical values. The objective of this study was to set forth the perceptions of a group of medical students at Hacettepe University regarding the issue of induced abortion based on the movie *If These Walls Could Talk*. We aimed to take students' opinions on induced abortion, help them ponder on this issue within the context of professional values of physicians, and investigate whether they have gained a critical perspective in terms of feminist bioethics within the framework of the elective courses "Bioethics and Cinema" and "Representation of Physicians in Cinema", both of which were offered during undergraduate medical education at Faculty of Medicine, Hacettepe University.*

Method: *The assignments submitted by 178 medical students about the movie "If These Walls Could Talk", which is used as an educational course material at the Department of Medical History and Ethics, Hacettepe University, were evaluated using thematic analysis method. Before conducting the analyses of the assignments, the necessary permissions for the research were obtained from the Ethics Commission of Hacettepe University on 26.05.2017 with the approval numbered 3861.*

Findings: *The data obtained from student assignments were categorized into main and sub themes. The themes determined upon evaluating the students' perceptions on induced abortion were "Human Rights", "Ethical Justification", and "The Role of Society".*

Conclusion and Suggestions: *Our findings have demonstrated that the students have gained awareness on both personal values and professional ethical values. It can be said that the students could discuss induced abortion – which is an important issue of debate in bioethics – with a feminist bioethics perspective and using their critical thinking skills. Therefore, we suggest that film screenings and follow-up film debates be utilized more often in medical ethics/bioethics education..*

*This study comprises data retrieved from the results obtained in a project titled "Assessment of the Perceptions of Medical Students Regarding the Issues of Euthanasia and Abortion Based on Students' Feedbacks on Two Thematic Films Screened within the Framework of the Elective Courses Offered at Faculty of Medicine, Hacettepe University". The data on euthanasia obtained out of the project were presented in a study published in the 55th issue of *Tip Eğitimi Dünyası* with the title "A Thematic Assessment of Medical Students' Approaches to the Phenomenon of Euthanasia." The obtained results pertaining to the issue of induced abortion were delivered as an oral presentation at International Hippocrates Congress on Medical and Health Sciences on 1-3 March 2019 with the title "If These Walls Could Talk: Perceptions of a Group of Medical Students Regarding the Issue of Abortion."

INTRODUCTION

Dating back to the beginning of humanity, medical profession was employed through master-apprentice relationship for ages, and this method has survived to this day. The rapid advances in technology and knowledge have been reflected in community life; and as an inevitable result of these advances, education has also been affected and the educational methods used today have become diversified.

Medical education has a lengthy and loaded curriculum content. A variety of educational tools are used in medical education such as theoretical courses including lectures, seminars, symposiums or workshops, case discussions held with small or large groups, simulation laboratories where standard patients are used, clinical education that allows for practicing on actual patients, and the use of social media (1). Although medical ethics has been a significant component of medical profession since the time of Hippocrates, it has been included in the medicine curricula as a special field very recently. The general objectives of medical ethics education include;

- i) teaching physicians to recognize the humanistic and ethical aspects of medical profession,
- ii) enabling physicians to review their own moral stance and professional ethical values,
- iii) equipping physicians with a foundation of philosophical, social and legal knowledge,
- iv) enabling physicians to employ this knowledge in clinical reasoning,
- v) equipping physicians with the skills necessary to apply this insight, knowledge and reasoning in clinical care (2).

In order to attain these goals, visual material such as videos and movies are also frequently utilized along with the other methods already in use (3 - 5). Especially the movies that highlight a specific theme and tally with the learning objectives of the related academic field are considered to be a part of educational tools in medical ethics education (6). In this respect, educators in the field of health make use of movies that are closely related to their study topics and prepare their students for the medical profession (3, 7 -10).

The use of films as an educational tool has both benefits and drawbacks. It's advantageous in that films create the opportunity to become familiar with the environmental factors, they

depict a vivid picture of the sample cases, and the narrative is supported with audio and visual elements. On the other hand, it has some drawbacks such as being subjective or portraying a certain point of view while ignoring the others. Also, using films segments instead of showing the whole film might obstruct comprehension of the theme of the film as a whole. Therefore, the educators' active involvement throughout this process is significant in order to obtain the learning objectives (11).

In the compulsory and elective courses offered in the undergraduate curriculum of the Department of Medical History and Ethics, Faculty of Medicine, Hacettepe University, films/documentaries are used as educational tools to draw attention to the ethical problems (12). After those film screenings, follow-up discussions are held with the active participation of students. Students are expected to write an essay discussing the themes dealt with in the film, and their essays are then used for assessment.

Induced abortion, which is the main theme of the film *If These Walls Could Talk*, has been a subject of debate in the field of ethics for a long time. Broadcast in the year 1996 as a TV film, *If These Walls Could Talk* presents stories about the lives of three women living in the same house in different eras, namely in 1952, 1974, and 1996. The film comprises three segments. In the first segment, which takes place in 1952, a recently widowed woman becomes pregnant by her deceased husband's brother unintentionally. The woman wants to terminate pregnancy; however, induced abortion is illegal at that time. The second segment deals with the story of another woman living in the same house in 1974. Having been married for a long time, she has got 4 children. She discovers that she is pregnant when she is about to graduate from the college which she left in the past. Induced abortion at

that time is legal, and she struggles to decide whether she wants the baby or not. The last segment tells the story of a Catholic college student that gets pregnant from the affair with her professor, who is married to another woman. Under the influence of the people opposing induced abortion – which is legal at that time – on religious grounds, the woman tries to make a decision as to whether she wants the baby or not. Due to the fact that it covers the stories of three women of different ages and in different conditions and having to decide on induced abortion for different reasons, this film offers a good playground for the debates on induced abortion.

Gender-related vulnerability is a kind of vulnerability specific to women and girls. Recently, one of the most commonly studied subjects in the field of bioethics has been the moral problems that vulnerable groups face. It's been acknowledged that the individuals in such groups are more prone to abuse and maltreatment than others. The problems that the individuals who cannot defend their rights face in the field of medicine and healthcare form the major axis of feminist bioethics. Whether an individual belongs to a vulnerable group or not is determined by looking at their ethnicity, gender, age, economic status, education level, and freedom status. Ethical problems stemming especially from gender inequality and faced in the health, economic, sociocultural, political and educational fields are evaluated within a feminist bioethics framework (13). Women are more disadvantageous than men with respect to reproductive health; they suffer three times greater disease burden than men and are more likely to be victims of sexual assault and abuse. Besides, violence against women is a serious and persisting problem in Turkey. The vulnerability of women is a huge barrier against their equal access to reproductive healthcare services (14). For all these reasons, the movie *If These Walls*

Could Talk, which provides a platform for discussing the basic arguments of feminist bioethics, was included in the undergraduate medical education curriculum.

One of the objectives of medical ethics education is to enable students to gain professional identity and raise their ethics awareness. In this respect, they are expected to evaluate the determinants of patient-physician relationship, identify the ethical issues and problems frequently faced in medical practice and researches, and find appropriate solutions to those problems while protecting ethical values. In this study, the papers prepared by a group of 1st and 2nd year medical students on the film *If These Walls Could Talk* were analyzed thematically, and the students' perspectives on the issue of induced abortion were set forth. The aim of this article was to enable students review their perceptions on induced abortion in terms of their professional identities and to determine whether the students developed an awareness on feminist bioethics within the framework of the elective courses "Bioethics and Cinema" and "Representation of Physicians in Cinema", both of which are offered at Faculty of Medicine, Hacettepe University.

METHOD

Within the scope of this study, 178 papers submitted by 1st and 2nd year medical students about the film *If These Walls Could Talk* as a requirement of the elective courses "Bioethics and Cinema" (for 1st year students) and "Representation of Physicians in Cinema" (for 2nd year students) were analyzed thematically. Analysis of Student Assignments

Thematic content analysis method enables comprehension and explanation of the research question while evaluating the data obtained in qualitative studies. This method provides conceptual relation patterns and interpretation of those relations as well as categorization of the

themes defined in a study. In the present work, the students' statements that involved ethical value judgements were examined, the repetitive concepts were identified by the researchers individually, and the themes, sub-themes and contexts that those concepts represent were determined. Thematic tables were generated with the themes upon which the researchers agreed, and the patterns of relations between these tables were explained.

The sub-themes, main themes and the contexts determined upon the analysis of the assignments were structured in seven stages as follows (15, 16):

I. Stage – Rough reading: Students' papers were rough-read, and the prominent discursive concepts were evaluated and determined.

II. Stage – Construction of the raw data: The students' expressions were sorted roughly and the prominent concepts were determined.

III. Stage – Identification of a thematic framework: The thematic framework was determined based on the repetitive concepts in students' papers.

IV. Stage - Determining the content: Students' papers were evaluated by the research team individually and then subjected to cross-analysis in which the thematic tables having been created by each researcher were compared with each other. The repetitive expressions in the papers were clustered based on their semantic content. The main themes of the study were discussed and set by the research team at this stage.

V. Stage – Creating tables for contexts, main themes, and sub-themes: All data obtained from students' papers were categorized into contexts, main themes, and sub-themes.

VI. Stage – Defining the pattern of relations between the contexts, main themes, and sub-themes: Main themes, sub-themes, and contexts were associated with each other in order to express the obtained data more clearly.

VII. Stage - Reaching an understanding and insight: The obtained data were evaluated in order to attain a comprehensive and in-depth insight.

In the assessment of students' papers, their identity information was kept confidential and each student paper was assigned a protocol number which comprised the student's year of study (Y1 for 1st year and Y2 for 2nd year medical students), the academic year that the paper was submitted (e.g. 13-14 for 2013-2014 academic year), the sequence number of the paper, and student's gender (F for female and M for male students). For example, a 1st year female student submitting her assignment in 2014-2015 academic year was coded as Y1-14-15-1-K.

Informed Consent

The student papers were assessed and graded within the academic year in which they were submitted. Since the data on students' personal information was kept confidential by using codes, we didn't deem it necessary to obtain informed consent from the students. However, administrative permissions to retrieve the assignments from the educational archive of the department were obtained from the head of the department and dean's office.

Approval of the Ethics Commission

Before evaluating the students' papers available in the educational archive of the Department of Medical History and Ethics, the necessary permissions for the research were obtained from the Ethics Commission of Hacettepe University on 26.05.2017 with the approval numbered 3861.

The Limitations of the Study

Since the texts analyzed within the framework of this study were submitted as assignments, we speculate that the participant students may not have expressed their actual views and underlying values. To give an example, some of them developed a negative attitude towards induced

abortion advocating “the right to live”, while some others supported it as a human right. It’s possible that the reason behind this discrepancy lies in the students’ religious, ideological, and ethical values. In other words, they might have concealed their underlying religious motives by asserting more acceptable reasons such as the right to live or the child’s rights, or they might have dealt with the issue in the context of women’s rights so as not to reveal their materialistic attitudes. However, the present design of the study didn’t allow for the detection of such attitudes. On the other hand, given that the participant students are still at the beginning of their medical education and that they might be holding an idealistic position, the expressions in the assignments might be reflecting their actual views. Nevertheless, validating such a presumption by using the present method was not possible.

In addition, since we didn’t use any pre- and post-assessment tools in this study, a probable change to have occurred in the participant students’ perceptions and views wasn’t evaluated. Also, the obtained data do not represent the entire group since they pertain only to the students taking the elective course.

FINDINGS

The students were expected to submit a paper of 300-350 words about the film that they watched within the scope of the elective courses “Bioethics and Cinema” and “Representation of Physicians in Cinema”. The total number of the papers prepared about the movie *If These Walls Could Talk* and submitted from 2013 to 2017 academic years was given in Table 1. The students submitted their papers in hard copy in 2013-2014 academic year and in digital form via Turnitin software in the following years..

Table 1: The academic year, the number and year of students submitting papers about *If These Walls Could Talk*

Academic Year (Fall Term)	Number of 1 st year students (n=25)	Number of 2 nd year students (n=153)
2016-2017	-	39
2015-2016	-	32
2014-2015	25	37
2013-2014*	-	45
Total	25	153
Grand Total	178	

The students’ papers were collected in hard copy in 2013-2014 fall semester.

The three main contexts determined by the researchers individually and then agreed upon by all members of the research the team were “human rights”, “ethical justification (of induced

abortion)” and “the role of society”. The students’ expressions related to the context of “human rights” and found to be consistent with each other in terms of their semantic content were given in Table 2.

Table 2: The Context of Human Rights and Related Themes

Context	Themes	
	Main Theme	Sub-themes
Human rights	The rights of the parties	Mother’s right to decide over her body
		Fetus’ right to live
		Father’s right to take part in decision-making
		Physician’s right to choose to perform or not to perform induced abortion

“The rights of the parties” were defined as the main theme within the context of “human rights”, and the sub-themes determined in this context were “mother’s right to decide about her own body”, “fetus’ right to live”, “father’s right to take part in decision-making” and “physician’s right to choose to perform or not to perform induced abortion”.

Within the context of human rights, the majority of the students laid emphasis on the importance of the mother’s right to decide over her own body, and their statements in this regard were as follows:

“Abortion is a right; no specific reason should be sought to benefit from this right. After all, it’s ‘women’s body, women’s choice’...” Y1-13-14-22-M

“It’s already a difficult decision to make in both ways; and we make it even more difficult for women and families with our social taboos, fears, and our tendency to exclude the ones different from us. Contraception is important, of course, but there are cases in which it cannot be ensured. In such cases, giving birth shouldn’t be the only option for women. Whatever the case is, it’s the woman who has the right to choose.” Y1-14-15-4-F

Some statements of the students who argued that the fetus has the right to live were as follows:

“(…) In brief, I think abortion is a right, yet the right to live is more important than that.” Y1-14-15-16-M

“I’m not a pro-abortionist. There is a living creature, and you have no the right to decide on terminating its life just because it has to live inside your body.” Y2-14-15-3-F

“I believe adults must take the responsibility of their mistakes. Just as they are adult and free enough to have sex, they should be equally adult and responsible when it comes to facing the consequences of it because every act of freedom brings along responsibilities. It’s clear that babies are not such creatures that can be

produced and exterminated in this way.” Y2-14-15-15-M

“I do support abortion only in the case when a female is raped and the doctor confirms about the signs of such thing. In other cases, I do not support it. Concluding, I want to say a message: ‘It’s a CHILD not a CHOICE.’” Y2-16-17-12-M

The students’ views as to the father’s right to take part in decision-making were as follows:

“(…) The father’s decision about abortion is as equally important as the mother’s. Yes, it’s the mother who will carry the baby for 9 months and look after it for at least 9 months, but the father should have equal rights over the baby as the mother.” Y2-16-17-3-M

“I think the father’s opinion should also be sought if there is no judiciary or health-related obstacle that hinder it. It will probably be even much healthier if this procedure is performed within the family; I mean as a dialogue between the father and the mother, rather than by a physician or authorities. Here, a “monarchy” in which the mother is in charge might be more appropriate than an absolute democracy between the mother and the father because the fetus-mother relationship would be much stronger than the fetus-father relationship and pregnancy would have much more influence on mother than on father in terms of mental and health aspects.” Y2-15-16-25-M

“I don’t think fathers should have an equal say as mothers on the issue of abortion unless the medical technologies have become advanced enough to enable them to carry the baby in their wombs. By no means should men decide about a women’s body against her own will. It might sound like a utopia in today’s conditions, but that’s what should and have to be done.” Y2-16-17-33-F

Some students argued that physicians should have the right to choose to perform or not to perform induced abortion in the cases where induced abortion was sought due to non-medical

reasons, and they expressed their opinions in this regard as follows:

“(…) the physician’s choice to perform or not to perform abortion is something that s/he decides based on his/her moral judgements and religious beliefs.” Y2-14-15-4-M

“If it has to be performed, it is more important to perform it under medical supervision for the sake of community health and mother’s health. However, if it’s possible for the physician to refer the case to somewhere else or etc., he/she should have the right to refuse it. Just as we cannot force an individual to be a mother, we cannot force a physician, whose primary duty is to save lives, to perform abortion” Y2-14-15-15-M

“Irrespective of our religious, political, cultural views etc., we, as physicians, should have a professional opinion about abortion or other similar issues.” Y2-14-15-1-M

“(…) I felt that physicians should act free of any prejudices and the dominant values prevailing in the society they live in, and that they betray their profession by acting like this.” Y1-13-14-22-M

“As physicians, we should put aside our own views and emotions, and inform women who come to us with a demand of abortion and give them time to think until the time that babies are

medically deemed as individuals in accordance with the current legislations, and do it free of any pressure and biases.” Y2-14-15-22-F

“Physicians are primarily responsible for a patient’s health, and any intervention to a patient’s social life or any judgmental acts are beyond our responsibilities. If a pregnant woman has thought about all aspects of her decision to have an abortion and believes that this is the best decision for herself, her baby, and her family, the physician’s duty is to implement it.” Y2-14-15-21-F

In their papers, the students argued that induced abortion can be acceptable or unacceptable in certain cases. Their arguments in this regard were given within the context of “ethical justification”. The theme “acceptable reasons for induced abortion” comprised the sub-themes “conditions that threaten mother’s life”, “being a victim of criminal conducts such as rape or incest” and “conditions that threaten baby’s life”. Some students asserted that “socio-economic reasons” cannot constitute a valid ground for induced abortion, and their statements in this regard were given under the theme “unacceptable reasons for induced abortion” (See Table 3).

Table 3: The Context of Ethical Justification and Related Themes

Context	Themes	
	Main Themes	Sub-themes
Ethical justification	Acceptable reasons for induced abortion	Conditions that threaten the mother’s life
		Being a victim of criminal conducts such as rape or incest
		Conditions that threaten the baby’s life
	Unacceptable reasons for induced abortion	Socio-economic reasons

Some of the students argued that unwanted pregnancies or the possible risks to the baby’s and mother’s health constitute an ethically

justifiable reason for induced abortion, and their statements in this direction were as follows:

“I think abortion should be performed only when

giving birth to the baby might cause physical or psychological harm to the mother.” Y1-14-15-6-F

“I think abortion should be performed only in certain cases, which are (i) when there is possible harm to the mother’s health, (ii) in case of pregnancy due to rape, and (iii) when serious congenital malformations are seen in the fetus. Only under these three circumstances I support abortion.” Y2-16-17-14-M

The statements of the students who were in the opinion that abortion due to socio-economic reasons is unacceptable were as follows:

“(…) having so many children might bring about an extra burden for the family, yet I don’t think this should be considered as a valid ground for

Table 4: The Context of the Role of Society and Related Themes

Context	Themes	
	Main Theme	Sub-themes
The role of society	Supportive attitude of society	Abortion’s being legal. *it should have certain restrictions. *it should be supervised
		Community education
		Providing family planning services
		Taking the baby under state care
		Providing financial support to the family
		Providing psychological support to the mother

The majority of the students argued that induced abortion must be a legally recognized right, yet it should have certain restrictions and be supervised. There statements in this direction were as follows:

“As for my opinions on abortion, I think it should definitely be deemed a right. The moral and ethical dimensions of abortion should be taken into consideration by the individuals themselves. Neither the authorities nor another individual has the right to decide on their behalf or to prohibit it.” Y1-14-15-5-F

“And finally, if everyone has awareness on abortion, making it a legal procedure will not cause any undesired consequences…” Y1-14-

abortion” Y1-13-14-3-F

“Although it will make the life standards a little harder, I don’t think it is right for a woman to terminate a pregnancy at her own will. After all, being a family requires devotion” Y2-14-15-15-M

The students were in the opinion that the society should also have a role in induced abortion. The analysis of their papers revealed varying views about the role of society. The majority of the students asserted that certain restrictions with regard to induced abortion should be imposed by law, and they put forward their recommendations about it. The themes determined based on students’ such views were presented in Table 4.

15-7-M

“When the fetus is 8 weeks old, its heart starts to beat, its vital signs and general characteristics starts to resemble that of a human being. So once past the 8th week, abortion is prohibited” Y2-15-16-16-M

“It is never a good thing but we cannot say it should be banned because it is "the evil necessity". I think it should be allowed for specific cases such as if there were raping or other inconvenient reasons, but not for everyone because if so, people will be less responsible and would think it is easy to get rid of an unwanted pregnancy, and that would lead us to a whole other problems in the society....I'm still against

abortion generally but on the other hand I can't agree with banning it completely for the reasons I mentioned before." Y2-15-16-26-F

"In the past, I was very sure in my opinion that abortion should be banned. Now I understand that my insight into the topic was very shallow. ...There is no clear beginning of life of fetus. It is like a gradual transition from black to white, there is a wide spectrum of tones of grey in between and you cannot tell where the change happened. I think that the most acceptable solution would be to make the ability to feel pain the clear border after which abortions should not be allowed." Y2-15-16-29-M

The students' views on the role of society in abortion practices were handled under the sub-themes "community education", "family planning services", "taking the baby under state care", "providing financial support to the family" and "providing psychological support to the mother". The students' statements in this respect were as follows:

"Before discussing abortion, public awareness on the issue should be raised and contraceptive methods should be taught. The expectant mothers who cannot take on child-care responsibilities and their babies should be offered support." Y1-13-14-38-F

"The most crucial action that the government should take in this regard will be preventing sexual relationship without marriage and protecting the children born out of such relationships." Y1-13-14-29-M

"Actually, it's the government that has the biggest responsibility here. It's the government's duty to raise people's awareness and provide the optimum psychological and physical support to the ones having decided to have an abortion..." Y2-14-15-24-M

"Proper education about contraception should be given in schools and all education centers, free contraceptives should be provided to low income families, and the best conditions should be

provided by the government in order to take care of babies refused by their parents." Y2-15-16-16-M

"It's clear that this problem cannot be solved by simply saying that abortion is legal. Considering that the conceptions prevailing in the society might restrict the use of this right, we can say that it is crucial for the government to educate the public and provide a peaceful atmosphere. All in all, I think abortion decision should be made by the mother and father together, and healthcare professionals should help them in this process. Also, I think it's essential that the authorities respect this decision and create awareness in the community so that they respect it, too." Y2-14-15-7-F

"I think that a very important measurement to be taken in this topic is to provide teenagers with proper education regarding sexual relationships, birth control and parent responsibilities. Moral education would also be very useful to make us more sensitive and mature regarding the importance of life." Y2-15-16-29-M

In the present study, we thematically reviewed the medical students' views on induced abortion. The themes determined based on students' statements were categorized into contexts, main themes, and sub-themes and were presented in this section. The effect of the use of films in medical ethics education and the positive impact of film debates on education in terms of feminist bioethics is discussed in the following section.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the students' perspectives on induced abortion were examined based on the assignments they submitted within the framework of the elective courses "Cinema and Bioethics" and "Representation of Physicians in Cinema". Dealing with its human rights dimension, they expressed their opinions on acceptable and unacceptable reasons for induced abortion. In addition, they made suggestions as to what kind of a supportive role the society

should play.

The issue of induced abortion is a long-held debate upon which a complete agreement hasn't been reached. It's a multi-dimensional issue which involves fundamental questions as to the beginning of life and what or who a person is; therefore, it is an issue that it closely related with belief systems (17). Also, it's one of the main subjects of medical ethics, which urge us to ponder on the value of life (18, 19). It has been argued that while dealing with the ethical dimension of induced abortion, the social and cultural aspects of the issue should also be addressed within the context of rights and liabilities (20). On the other hand, induced abortion might be performed as a fertility regulation practice when contraceptive methods fail or cannot be used (21). Our findings have revealed that a woman's decision to terminate an unwanted pregnancy is a manifestation of her right to decide over her own body as a free and autonomous individual. The majority of students argued that women should have the autonomy to decide over their own bodies.

In Turkey, it's legal to abort an embryo until 10 weeks of pregnancy without any medical reason. Here, the woman's request is prioritized, and the procedure is performed upon her consent. Also, in accordance with a medical report prepared by at least two specialist physician, the fetus could be aborted irrespective of the week of pregnancy if the pregnancy poses any threat to mother's health. (22). Termination of pregnancy can be performed not only in conditions which pose a threat to the mother's life such as major depression and suicidal risks but also in the likelihood of serious fetal anomalies. Termination of pregnancy after 10 weeks is allowed generally when the fetus has no chance to survive or there's a risk of heavy impairment both for the child to be born and for the future generations to be descended from him/her. In line with this law, the students also pointed out

in their papers that induced abortion is legally permitted in Turkey.

In the debates as to the termination of an unwanted pregnancy, it is also argued that as a member of the human species, the fetus is a living creature with the potential to be born unless there is any intervention, and thus its right to live should be respected (19). In this respect, some of the students asserted that the fetus' right to live should be protected since nothing is ever completely black or white, and the issue of induced abortion, in particular, is at the 'gray' side. The students' opinions in this regard is parallel with Habermas' argument that the subjective rights of prenatal living creatures who cannot defend their rights must be protected (23). According to this view, prenatal living human beings have also rights, and such rights must be protected. Some of the students asserted that they are against induced abortion, and induced abortion is an unacceptable practice since the fetus is also a human. It can be seen that they deem the prenatal fetuses as human beings, which can be supported with the argument that the fetus must benefit from the same rights a person has (24). The students' statements in this regard demonstrated that they were aware of the ethical dilemma between women's right to make an autonomous decision and fetus' right to live. The legal nature of an embryo was regulated by law with the article numbered 28 of the Turkish Civil Code as "A person shall have a legal personality from the moment he/she is born fully and alive until the time of his/her death. A child acquires the capacity to have rights starting from conception with the condition of being born fully and alive" (25). Therefore, as was stated by some of the students, the fact that the prenatal embryo is not deemed a person means the mother can act on her own initiative in this regard.

However, as was stated by Keskin (26), addressing the issue of induced abortion within the context of the rights based on a masculine

discourse results in a conflict between the rights of the woman and the fetus, causes them to be perceived as two different parties, and thus drags the issue to a dead end. Giving birth to a new person, being a mother, and the sense of responsibility that the woman feel for other individuals should also be taken into account while evaluating the mothers' wish to terminate pregnancy.

Some students argued that induced abortion is acceptable under certain circumstances. They put forward the threats to lives of the mother and/or the baby and being a victim of criminal conducts such as rape or incest as the ethically justifiable reasons for induced abortion. Their thoughts in this regard were found to be in line with the attitude of the Psychiatric Association of Turkey towards induced abortion. According to the Psychiatric Association of Turkey, limiting legally permitted induced abortion to the situations where there are "risks to mother's and baby's physical health" means ignoring the psycho-social characteristics which make us human. In fact, induced abortion is permitted until 20 weeks of pregnancy in Turkey in the cases where pregnancy is caused by a criminal conduct (27). Highlighting the importance of the determinants such as the social factors including "teenage pregnancy, domestic tension, domestic violence perpetrated by the spouse, emotional abuse, pregnancy due to rape, the potential harm to the family, poverty etc.", the psychiatrists reported that it is crucial to ensure women's access to free induced abortion services easily and in healthy environments in such cases of pregnancies (28). As was declared by the Central Council of the Turkish Medical Association, "The main cause of abortion is the lack of adequate and quality reproductive healthcare services and the failure to meet the needs of the current family planning services."

Some students argued that the father should have an equal say in induced abortion decision-

making process as the mother. It was reported in the literature that reproduction is not merely a womanly matter, and as was specified in the articles of the European Convention on Human Rights and European Council concerning gender equality, both partners should bear the unwanted consequences on an equal basis (29). In this respect, the students also laid emphasis on the importance of expectant mothers' and fathers' adopting a common attitude towards induced abortion, which implies that the students have developed an awareness on gender quality.

All of the students expressed their opinions as to how physicians should approach to the issue of induced abortion. It was seen that the ways in which they expressed their arguments for and against induced abortion were shaped mainly by the professional values prevailing in the field of medicine from past to present. Some students asserted that the physician must remain impartial in the induced abortion decision-making process. Besides, prioritizing the woman's health and providing support to the woman in any case by means of properly informing her were also some of the points emphasized in their papers. Few of the students were in the opinion that physicians should be able to choose to perform or refuse induced abortion, and this should be recognized as a right. In this respect, the question as to how to make a decision when there is a conflict between a physician's personal values and professional ethical values is one of the questions that remain unanswered.

Some students argued that socioeconomic reasons cannot be considered as a justifiable reason for induced abortion, and they made some suggestions as to the role that the society might play in this regard. Addressing the issue of induced abortion in a larger context, they asserted that the society has certain responsibilities, as well. The majority of the students – either pro- or anti-abortionist – argued that induced abortion must be legally permitted

and that the society has a supportive role in voluntary termination of pregnancy. Referring people to family planning services was one of the examples suggested as a supportive attitude. In fact, family planning services have been on the public agenda of Turkey for a long time, and its ethical aspects are being discussed (30).

Although voluntary termination of pregnancy is a right in Turkey, benefiting from this right is subjected to certain conditions. For example, the Turkish Law entails that a person who aborts a baby after 10 weeks of pregnancy due to a nonmedical reason be sentenced to 2 to 4 years' imprisonment, and the woman who gave consent to her baby's abortion be sentenced up to 1 year's imprisonment and a fine (27). This article of the Turkish Criminal Law forms the basis of the students' arguments that the physicians have legal responsibilities as well as professional liabilities.

It was reported that the systematic use of films in medical education is effective in conveying the message of a subject at hand (4, 5, 7, 11). The thematic films reflecting different perspectives of the parties on controversial topics that involve ethical dilemmas have been used as a teaching material both in Turkey and in Western countries. For example, it was reported that showing a film about schizophrenia in the field of psychiatric health and psychiatric disorders, where stigma associated with such disorders is prevalent, led to a positive change in attitudes towards schizophrenic patients and a decrease in stigmas (10). Another example might be the book *Neurocinema*, in which the representation of neurological disorders in films was investigated (31). The wide-spread use of art works for educational purposes suggests that the themes addressed in those works capture learners' attention.

In the light of our findings, it can be said that the students have gained an insight as to the ethical dilemmas with regard to fundamental human

rights and patient rights within the scope of the elective courses. The students who emphasized the importance of addressing the issue of induced abortion with its all dimensions argued that the government should also have certain responsibilities just like the physicians.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In the present study, the majority of the students who were in the opinion that induced abortion should be legally permitted made suggestions as to what preconditions should be sought in voluntary termination of pregnancy. In the evaluation of students' papers, the practice of induced abortion was dealt within the framework of feminist bioethics and interpreted in line with the fundamental principles of respect for autonomy and preciousness of life. It can be said that this perspective was built on the basis of physician's identity and the value and belief systems of the society. Our findings have revealed that the personal and cultural values of the students, who had differing viewpoints, were influential on their attitude towards induced abortion. In this respect, raising students' awareness on their personal and cultural values in the early stages of their education is significant so as to assure that they could focus on professional ethical values in their clinical decision-making processes.

In the light of the obtained results, it can be said that the use of visual tools such as films along with theoretical courses is effective. On the other hand, we suggest that medical ethics education curriculum should have more practical courses that would enable medical students to become aware of their own personal values and to discuss the perspectives of all sides on a subject, and that the course contents should be enriched with new learning technologies.

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