

SUPPORT FOR DECRIMINALISATION OF ABORTION AMONG RESPONDENTS OF A COMMUNITY SURVEY OF KNOWLEDGE AND VIEWS ON ABORTION LAW IN NSW

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Background: Abortion remains a crime in the NSW Crimes Act 1900, punishable by up to 10 years jail. As a result of case law, abortion can be provided legally only to protect the life or health of the woman. Abortion laws have been reformed in almost all other Australian jurisdictions; only NSW and Queensland have abortion laws still based on 19th century English law leaving women and practitioners in these states vulnerable to prosecution.

Analysis/argument: Contemporary community knowledge and views about abortion law were unknown in NSW. A community survey to inform development of an abortion law reform bill was commissioned by The Greens NSW, and summary results were reported in the lay media. We reanalysed the data to verify the results and provide a more in-depth analysis. The survey was conducted anonymously online in Sept 2015 by a market research company. Questions were developed based on key components of recent abortion law reform in Victoria and Tasmania. The data were provided to the research team for this analysis.

Outcome results: 1015 male and female adult residents of NSW participated. 76% were unaware that abortion is a crime, and 73% thought it should be decriminalised and regulated as a healthcare service. Support for decriminalisation was consistent across gender, all age groups, residents of metropolitan/regional and rural areas, and all levels of educational achievement. There was strong support for women seeking abortion to be protected from harassment (89%) and for protest exclusion zones around abortion clinics (81%). Support for these measures was stronger among regional/rural residents than Sydney respondents. The sample was generally representative of the NSW population but more highly educated.

Conclusions: This survey of knowledge and views on abortion law shows most residents believe abortion should be decriminalised in NSW and women seeking abortion should be protected from harassment.