To the Editors:

Reducing abortions is a public health issue

We read with interest the letter (1) written in response to our article with the above heading in the Ceylon Medical Journal (2). Jayasuriya has stated the pro-life view and claims that human life starts at conception, and that emergency contraception (EC) which prevents implantation is tantamount to an abortion. The recent judgment by the United Kingdom High Court (3) on EC is here pertinent. In this case the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children claimed that EC was a method of early abortion. They further suggested that supply of EC was a criminal offence under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act, which prohibits the supply of any “poison or any other noxious thing” with intent to cause miscarriage.

The UK high court rejecting these claims argued: “Up until the attachment stage, the embryo is not attached in any way to the woman herself” and added: “Current medical definitions support the view that pregnancy begins once the blastocyst has implanted in the endometrium and, more particularly, that miscarriage is the termination of such a post-implantation pregnancy”.

In terms of how EC works, the judge pointed out that once an embryo had implanted, or had begun to implant “the morning after pill cannot act to cause it to de-implant”.

References

P S Wijesinghe, Senior Lecturer, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Faculty of Medicine, Ragama. (Tel: 0717 39685, email: pswijesinghe@lycos.com), and Prasanna Gunasekera, Specialist, Reproductive Health Services, UNFPA Country Technical Service Team for South and West Asia, P O Box 5940, Kathmandu, Nepal (Tel: 977 1 523880, Fax: 977 1 527257, email: pgunasekera@unfpa.org.np).

To the Editors:

Psychological distress among university students

We write in response to the paper titled “Psychological distress among students from five universities” (1). It has weaknesses in its design, statistics, analysis and interpretation.

Design
The study population of 350 comes from 5 universities, but the selection of the sample is not adequately described. Were the random sample stratified according to the university or the year of entry, and did they calculate the desirable sample size?

Selection of the control sample is also unclear. Does the “respective communities” (mentioned only in the abstract) mean that each student was matched for the area they hail from? This is important as the authors use a variable rural, sub-urban and urban sample in their analysis and conclusions.

Analysis of General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) scores
Analysis of GHQ scores only by dichotomising them to psychologically distressed and non-distressed by a cutoff score is misleading, because the GHQ is a screening questionnaire, higher the GHQ scores, higher the probability of underlying distress or common mental disorder. Therefore, mean scores and difference between the means with their...