In Favor of Abortion

The US Supreme Court has declared abortion to be a "fundamental right" guaranteed by the US Constitution. The landmark abortion case Roe v. Wade, decided on Jan. 22, 1973 in favor of abortion rights, remains the law of the land. The 7-2 decision stated that the Constitution gives "a guarantee of certain areas or zones of privacy," and that "This right of privacy... is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy." [49]

Reproductive choice empowers women by giving them control over their own bodies. The choice over when and whether to have children is central to a woman's independence and ability to determine her future. [134] Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote in the 1992 decision in Planned Parenthood v. Casey, "The ability of women to participate equally in the economic and social life of the Nation has been facilitated by their ability to control their reproductive lives." [8] Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote in her dissenting opinion in Gonzales v. Carhart (2007) that undue restrictions on abortion infringe upon "a woman's autonomy to determine her life's course, and thus to enjoy equal citizenship stature." [59] CNN senior legal analyst Jeffrey Toobin, JD, stated that Roe v. Wade was "a landmark of what is, in the truest sense, women's liberation." [113]

Personhood begins after a fetus becomes "viable" (able to survive outside the womb) or after birth, not at conception. [31] [32] Embryos and fetuses are not independent, self-determining beings, and abortion is the termination of a pregnancy, not a baby. A person's age is calculated from birth date, not conception, and fetuses are not counted in the US Census. The majority opinion in Roe v. Wade states that "the word 'person,' as used in the Fourteenth Amendment [of the US Constitution], does not include the unborn." [49]

Fetuses are incapable of feeling pain when most abortions are performed. According to a 2010 review by Britain's Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, "most neuroscientists believe that the cortex is necessary for pain perception." The cortex does not become functional until at least the 26th week of a fetus' development, long after most abortions are performed. This finding was endorsed in 2012 by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, [1] which stated that that
there is "no legitimate scientific information that supports the statement that a fetus experiences pain." [142] A 2005 University of California at San Francisco study said fetuses probably can't feel pain until the 29th or 30th week of gestation. [166] Abortions that late into a pregnancy are extremely rare and are often restricted by state laws. [164] According to Stuart W. G. Derbyshire, PhD, Senior Lecturer at the University of Birmingham (England), "...fetuses cannot be held to experience pain. Not only has the biological development not yet occurred to support pain experience, but the environment after birth, so necessary to the development of pain experience, is also yet to occur." [10] The "flinching" and other reactions seen in fetuses when they detect pain stimuli are mere reflexes, not an indication that the fetus is perceiving or "feeling" anything. [135] [145]

Access to legal, professionally-performed abortions reduces maternal injury and death caused by unsafe, illegal abortions. According to Daniel R. Mishell, Jr., MD, Chair of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, before abortion was legalized women would frequently try to induce abortions by using coat hangers, knitting needles, or radiator flush, or by going to unsafe "back-alley" abortionists. [150] In 1972, there were 39 maternal deaths from illegal abortions. By 1976, after Roe v. Wade had legalized abortion nationwide, this number dropped to two. [7] The World Health Organization estimated in 2004 that unsafe abortions cause 68,000 maternal deaths worldwide each year, many of those in developing countries where safe and legal abortion services are difficult to access. [11]

Modern abortion procedures are safe and do not cause lasting health issues such as cancer and infertility. A peer-reviewed study published by Obstetrics & Gynecology in Jan. 2015 reported that less than one quarter of one percent of abortions lead to major health complications. [159][160] A 2012 study in Obstetrics & Gynecology found a woman's risk of dying from having an abortion is 0.6 in 100,000, while the risk of dying from giving birth is around 14 times higher (8.8 in 100,000). The study also found that "pregnancy-related complications were more common with childbirth than with abortion." [3] The American Medical Association and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists stated "Abortion is one of the safest medical procedures performed in the United States." They also said the mortality rate of a colonoscopy is more than 40 times greater than that of an abortion.[122] The National Cancer Institute (NCI), the American Cancer Society (ACS), and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists all refuted the claim that abortion can lead to a higher probability of developing breast cancer. [22] A 1993 fertility investigation of 10,767 women by the Joint Royal College of General Practitioners and the Royal College of Obstetricians and
Gynecologists found that women who had at least two abortions experienced the same future fertility as those who had at least two natural pregnancies. [14]

**Women who receive abortions are less likely to suffer mental health problems than women denied abortions.** A Sep. 2013 peer-reviewed study comparing the mental health of women who received abortions to women denied abortions found that women who were denied abortions "felt more regret and anger" and "less relief and happiness" than women who had abortions. The same study also found that 95% of women who received abortions "felt it was the right decision" a week after the procedure. [158] Studies by the American Psychological Association (APA), the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (AMRC), and researchers at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health all concluded that purported links between abortion and mental health problems are unfounded. [152]

**Abortion gives pregnant women the option to choose not to bring fetuses with profound abnormalities to full term.** Some fetuses have such severe disorders that death is guaranteed before or shortly after birth. These include anencephaly, in which the brain is missing, and limb-body wall complex, in which organs develop outside the body cavity. [12] It would be cruel to force women to carry fetuses with fatal congenital defects to term. Even in the case of nonfatal conditions, such as Down syndrome, parents may be unable to care for a severely disabled child. Deborah Anne Driscoll, MD, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Pennsylvania, said "many couples... don’t have the resources, don’t have the emotional stamina, don’t have the family support [to raise a child with Down syndrome]." [9]

**Women who are denied abortions are more likely to become unemployed, to be on public welfare, to be below the poverty line, and to become victims of domestic violence.** A University of California at San Francisco study found that women who were turned away from abortion clinics (because they had passed the gestational limit imposed by the clinic) were three times more likely to be below the poverty level two years later than women who were able to obtain abortions. 76% of the "turnaways" ended up on unemployment benefits, compared with 44% of the women who had abortions. The same study found that women unable to obtain abortions were more likely to stay in a relationship with an abusive partner than women who had an abortion, and were more than twice as likely to become victims of domestic violence. [114] [73]
Reproductive choice protects women from financial disadvantage. Many women who choose abortion don’t have the financial resources to support a child. 42% of women having abortions are below the federal poverty level. [13] A Sep. 2005 survey in the peer-reviewed *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* asking women why they had an abortion found that 73% of respondents said they could not afford to have a baby, and 38% said giving birth would interfere with their education and career goals. [19] An Oct. 2010 University of Massachusetts at Amherst study published in the peer-reviewed *American Sociological Review* found that women at all income levels earn less when they have children, with low-wage workers being most affected, suffering a 15% earnings penalty. [136]

A baby should not come into the world unwanted. Having a child is an important decision that requires consideration, preparation, and planning. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment stated that unintended pregnancies are associated with birth defects, low birth weight, maternal depression, increased risk of child abuse, lower educational attainment, delayed entry into prenatal care, a high risk of physical violence during pregnancy, and reduced rates of breastfeeding. [75] 49% of all pregnancies among American women are unintended. [50]

Abortion reduces welfare costs to taxpayers. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO), a nonpartisan federal agency, evaluated a proposed anti-abortion bill that would ban all abortions nationwide after 20 weeks of pregnancy, and found that the resulting additional births would increase the federal deficit by $225 million over nine years, due to the increased need for Medicaid coverage. Also, since many women seeking late-term abortions are economically disadvantaged, their children are likely to require welfare assistance. [129] [130]

Abortion reduces crime. According to a study co-written by *Freakonomics* co-author Steven D. Levitt, PhD, and published in the peer-reviewed *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, "legalized abortion has contributed significantly to recent crime reductions." Around 18 years after abortion was legalized, crime rates began to drop abruptly, and crime rates dropped earlier in states that allowed abortion earlier. Because "women who have abortions are those most at risk to give birth to children who would engage in criminal activity," and women who had control over the timing of childbearing were more likely to raise children in optimal environments, crime is reduced when there is access to legal abortion. [20]
Abortion is justified as a means of population control. Philosopher Peter Singer, MA, Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, defended abortion as a way to curb overpopulation.[137] The United Nations estimated that the world's population will increase to 9.3 billion by 2050, which would be "the equivalent of adding another India and China to the world," according to the Los Angeles Times. [131] Malnutrition, starvation, poverty, lack of medical and educational services, pollution, underdevelopment, and conflict over resources are all consequences of overpopulation. [21] With 43.8 million abortions performed worldwide in 2008 [74], the population increase if abortion were unavailable could be substantial. [132]

Many religious organizations and people of faith support women's reproductive choice. Although many religious groups oppose abortion, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations are all officially pro-choice. [139] [140][141] The Bible, despite interpretations to the contrary, contains no explicit condemnation of abortion, and does not portray the killing of a fetus as equivalent to the killing of a human being. In Exodus 21:22-25, the crime of causing a woman to miscarry is treated as a property crime, whereas killing the woman is considered murder and is punished with the death penalty. [33] While the Catholic and Lutheran churches oppose abortion, more of their members believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases versus illegal in all or most cases (51% vs. 45%, Lutheran; 48% vs. 45%, Catholic). [15] Joe Biden, 47th US Vice President, stated in Oct. 2012 that "I accept my church’s position on abortion... But I refuse to impose it on equally devout Christians and Muslims and Jews, and I just refuse to impose that on others..."