

Should Abortion Be Legalized?

Posted on September 4, 2019

Abortion, Reproductive Choice, and the Legal Debate

Abortion is one of the most controversial topics in modern society. It involves medical, ethical, religious, legal, and personal questions. People who support the legalization of abortion argue that women should have the right to make decisions about their own bodies and reproductive health. People who oppose abortion argue that human life begins before birth and that the fetus should be protected. Because both sides involve deeply held values, the debate remains difficult and emotional.

The question of whether abortion should be legalized cannot be answered only through personal belief. It also requires consideration of public health, constitutional rights, medical safety, social inequality, and the circumstances in which pregnancies occur. Women may seek abortion because of health risks, rape, fetal abnormalities, financial hardship, family circumstances, or personal choice. A legal system must decide whether the government should restrict this decision or allow individuals to make it with medical guidance (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, n.d.).

One of the strongest arguments for legalized abortion is bodily autonomy. Bodily autonomy means that individuals have the right to make decisions about their own bodies. Pregnancy causes major physical, emotional, and financial changes. Supporters of abortion rights argue that the government should not force a woman to continue a pregnancy against her will. They believe that reproductive decisions should be made by the pregnant person in consultation with healthcare professionals rather than politicians.

Public Health, Medical Safety, and Access to Legal Abortion

Legalization is also connected to public health. Abortions have occurred throughout history regardless of whether they were legal. When abortion is prohibited, some women may seek unsafe procedures from unqualified individuals or attempt to end pregnancies without medical supervision. Unsafe abortion can result in severe bleeding, infection, infertility, or death. Legal abortion allows procedures to be performed by trained healthcare professionals under regulated conditions (World Health Organization, 2022).

The World Health Organization has recognized unsafe abortion as a preventable cause of maternal illness and death. Access to accurate information, contraception, reproductive healthcare, and safe

abortion services can reduce these harms. Legalization does not necessarily increase the number of abortions; it can make existing procedures safer and allow health systems to monitor care more effectively (World Health Organization, 2022).

Medical circumstances also support legal access. Some pregnancies create serious risks to the health or life of the pregnant woman. Conditions such as ectopic pregnancy, severe preeclampsia, organ failure, or certain cancers may require termination. In other cases, prenatal testing may reveal severe fetal abnormalities that are incompatible with life. A complete legal ban may prevent doctors from acting quickly or create uncertainty about when treatment is permitted (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, n.d.).

Pregnancy from Rape and the Burden of Forced Continuation

Pregnancy may also result from rape or incest. Forcing a survivor to continue such a pregnancy can intensify emotional trauma. Supporters of legal abortion argue that survivors should not be required to carry a pregnancy created through violence. The decision should remain with the survivor, who may have different emotional, religious, or personal responses.

Opponents may argue that the fetus is innocent and should not be punished for the crime of the offender. However, requiring the survivor to continue the pregnancy places the physical and psychological burden on the victim rather than the perpetrator. Legalization allows choice without requiring every survivor to make the same decision. A woman who wishes to continue the pregnancy may do so, while another may choose abortion.

Financial and social circumstances also influence reproductive decisions. Raising a child requires housing, food, healthcare, education, and emotional support. Women living in poverty may lack access to these resources. Some are already responsible for other children. Others may be students, unemployed, or in abusive relationships. Legal abortion provides an option, but it should be accompanied by social policies that support parenting, adoption, childcare, healthcare, and economic security.

Fetal Life, Religious Belief, and Arguments Against Legalization

The central argument against abortion is that it ends developing human life. Opponents believe that life begins at conception and that the fetus has a moral right to protection. From this perspective, abortion is not only a private medical choice but an act involving another human being. Religious traditions often reinforce this belief, although views differ within and between religions.

Some opponents also argue that legal abortion may weaken respect for life or encourage irresponsible sexual behavior. They believe society should promote abstinence, adoption, and support for pregnant women rather than abortion. Crisis pregnancy centers and anti-abortion organizations often provide counseling, supplies, or adoption assistance to encourage women to continue pregnancies.

These concerns should be taken seriously because abortion involves moral questions about developing life. However, disagreement over when legal personhood begins makes absolute policy difficult. Biological life begins before birth, but legal systems distinguish between embryos, fetuses, newborns, and adults in different ways. The law must balance potential life with the established rights, health, and autonomy of the pregnant person.

Legal Restrictions, Inequality, and the Consequences of Criminalization

Criminalizing abortion does not affect all women equally. Wealthier individuals may travel to places where abortion is legal or obtain private medical care. Poor women, rural residents, minors, undocumented immigrants, and those in abusive relationships may have fewer options. Therefore, restrictions can deepen social inequality (Guttmacher Institute, n.d.).

Legal bans may also create fear among doctors. Healthcare professionals may delay treatment because they are uncertain whether an emergency meets the legal standard for abortion. Such delays can worsen medical conditions. Laws that threaten doctors with imprisonment or loss of license may interfere with clinical judgment and the relationship between patient and physician.

Women who miscarry may also face investigation if authorities suspect an illegal abortion. This can turn pregnancy loss into a legal matter and cause additional trauma. A legal framework should protect patients and permit medical professionals to provide care without unnecessary criminalization.

Contraception, Education, and the Reduction of Unintended Pregnancy

Legalization should not be treated as the only reproductive policy. The most effective way to reduce abortion is to reduce unintended pregnancies. Comprehensive sex education, affordable contraception, emergency contraception, and accessible healthcare can help individuals prevent pregnancies they do not want.

Programs that provide accurate information about sexual health are more effective than policies based only on punishment or silence. Young people need to understand consent, contraception,

sexually transmitted infections, and responsible relationships. Adults also need affordable access to family-planning services.

Support for pregnant women and families is equally important. Paid parental leave, affordable childcare, healthcare coverage, housing assistance, and workplace protection can make parenting more possible. A society that seeks to reduce abortion should address the economic and social pressures that lead women to consider it.

A Balanced Legal Framework for Reproductive Decision-Making

A balanced approach recognizes that abortion is morally serious but that criminal prohibition can cause significant harm. Legal abortion allows individuals to make decisions according to their circumstances, values, and medical needs. It does not require anyone to have an abortion. People who oppose abortion for personal or religious reasons remain free to continue pregnancies and encourage alternatives.

Reasonable regulations may address medical standards, informed consent, and later stages of pregnancy while protecting emergency care and early access. However, regulations should not be designed solely to make abortion impossible. The central goal should be safety, informed choice, and respect for both moral concern and individual rights.

In conclusion, abortion should be legal because criminalization threatens public health, interferes with bodily autonomy, increases inequality, and can prevent necessary medical care. The moral value of fetal life deserves consideration, but it should not automatically eliminate the rights and health of the pregnant woman. Legalization should be combined with contraception, education, social support, and accessible healthcare. This approach respects individual choice while working to reduce unintended pregnancy and protect human well-being.

References

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