

Reproductive Rights A Statement of Principle

WE BELIEVE

It should be a basic human right to decide, freely and responsibly, whether or not to have children as well as to determine their number and spacing.

Abortion should be a matter of individual conscience. A woman should have the ultimate right to choose whether or not to continue an unwanted pregnancy.

Individuals should have ready access to sex education programs, contraceptive services, problem pregnancy counselling, maternal and child care, early abortions and other necessary health, welfare and educational services.

All levels of government should give high priority to providing the programs, research funds and legislative changes necessary to achieve these objectives.

ENDORSED BY

Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada

National Action Committee
on the Status of Women

Canadian Association for Repeal
of the Abortion Laws

Young Women's Christian Association of Canada

Facing the abortion issue...

You may hear:

1. There should be no need for abortions when contraceptives are easily available.
2. Are you in favour of abortion on demand?
3. Abortion is murder of an unborn child.
4. Women use abortion as a means of birth control. Some have more than one.
5. If abortion becomes acceptable, it will lead to euthanasia.
6. Abortion harms women physiologically and psychologically.

The response is:

Contraceptives are NOT easily available, particularly to the poor, to teenagers, to single women, and to people in isolated and rural areas. Many are ignorant of their proper use. Some women cannot, for medical reasons, use some kinds of contraceptives. NO method is 100% effective. Research to find more effective and acceptable methods of contraception and public education in their use were major recommendations of the Badgley Report.

I am in favour of child-bearing by choice. If a woman faces an unwanted pregnancy she should be offered skilled, impartial counselling services which will help her to explore fully the implications of the choices open to her. She should make the final decision.

This belief is not held by the majority of Canadians. Under the Criminal Code of Canada a fetus does not become a child until it is born. In any case, freedom of choice on abortion does not infringe on the personal freedom of those who choose to regard a fetus as a person.

The Badgley Report states that ignorance of contraception and sexuality, and contraceptive failure are mainly responsible for unwanted pregnancies. No one undergoes surgery lightly. Better birth control education and contraceptives are needed.

Euthanasia is a separate issue and should not be confused with abortion.

Research evidence says no. Medically, an early abortion is many times safer than childbirth. Carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term is likely to be more damaging emotionally to a woman than an early abortion. The delay and uncertainty in the present Canadian system creates unnecessary emotional stress in the women involved.

You may hear:

7. Unwanted babies can be placed for adoption.
8. Women have abortions for convenience or for frivolous reasons.
9. She had her fun. Let her pay for it.
10. Most unwanted children become wanted.
11. Women won't bother with contraceptives if abortion is easily available.
12. Abortion destroys family life.
13. A woman, pregnant as a result of rape, should not be allowed an abortion.
14. Abortion is morally wrong.

The response is:

Isn't it immoral to force a woman to choose between an unwanted baby and an illegal abortion? Why should women be forced to have babies for others to adopt? Surrendering a child at birth can be much more traumatic for the woman than an early abortion. Furthermore, adoption is rarely seen as an alternative when an unwanted pregnancy occurs *within* a marriage.

The urgency of women's need to end an unwanted pregnancy is measured by their willingness to risk death or mutilation, spend large sums of money (if they have it!) and, if necessary, to suffer the dangers and indignities of an illegal abortion. Women take motherhood and abortion seriously.

This vindictive, self-righteous attitude reveals contempt for women.

This statement is nonsense in view of the numbers of children who are abused, neglected, starved, battered, and even killed by their parents.

In Great Britain, where ready access to abortion is combined with a thorough program for public education on contraception, the abortion rate is one of the lowest in the world.

Family life is strengthened when people can plan the number of their children and their spacing. The unwanted child of a teenager has little chance of a happy family life. According to Statistics Canada, one third of the women who obtained legal abortions in Canada during 1977 were under age 20 and 95% of these were unmarried.

Most anti-choice people hold that abortion is not acceptable even in this situation. On the contrary the double trauma of a rape and an unwanted pregnancy emphasizes the importance of giving a woman the choice of having an abortion.

This view is held by a small minority of Canadians. *My* choice should not be limited by *your* convictions.

Response to “Coalition for Life”* Questions

*The “Coalition for Life”, a group that opposes abortion in all circumstances, has said that it is going to ask all persons running for public office to answer “yes” or “no” to the following questions.

QUESTION — “If elected, will you work toward amending the Criminal Code to recognize the civil rights of children conceived but not yet born and provide them with the same legal protection as anyone else?”

ANSWER

Such an amendment would mean that abortion would no longer be legal under any circumstances in this country. A “yes” answer to this question would put you in the position of supporting a return to illegal, “back-alley” abortions.

The Criminal Code of Canada (s. 206) now states that a fetus becomes a child only after it has proceeded in a living state from the body of the mother. “Unborn child” is, therefore, a contradiction in terms. The phrase has been carefully chosen for its emotional impact, but upon examination turns out to be logically meaningless.

No country in the world endows fetuses with the full civil rights of persons. The legal rights of a fetus, where they exist, are generally conditional upon its eventual birth (as, for instance, in the case of inheritance by a child born after a parent’s death).

The practical consequences of granting the full legal rights of a person to a fetus would be horrendous. Anyone involved in procuring or performing an abortion could then be charged with murder or as an accessory to murder. This would drive abortion underground, with unscrupulous quacks making fortunes and/or women killing or maiming themselves through attempts at self-induced abortion.

Furthermore, a confirmed pregnancy would have to be recognized somehow in the nation’s vital statistics because in a law a new person would have been created. There would appear to be no logical basis on which a pregnant woman could be denied a family allowance on behalf of the fetus. A miscarriage would have to be treated as a death, with a funeral service and formal burial or cremation. Pregnant women would have to be issued with dual passports. The possible complications are endless.

The present law on abortion does not infringe on the personal freedom of those who choose to regard a fetus as a person. They are not compelled to become involved in abortions. Preventing legal abortions entirely would impose on all Canadians the moral views of a small minority. The Report of the Committee on the Operation of the Abortion Law (a 1977 federal study, also known as the “Badgley Report”) indicated that only 11.4% of women and 9.8% of men in a national survey sample would totally prohibit abortion.

A Canadian Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup) Report published in April 1978 stated that 69% of those interviewed would permit abortion in certain circumstances while only 60% held this view in 1975.

QUESTION — “If elected, would you work toward stopping government funding of any agency that directly or indirectly counsels women to have abortions or engages in abortion referrals.”

ANSWER

This question sets up a straw man to tear apart. It clearly implies that governments are funding agencies which urge women to have abortions. This is not the case. Pregnancy counselling services generally aim to ensure that women with problem pregnancies are fully informed of the implications of all the alternatives legally open to them. Appropriate referrals are made after the women have made their decisions. Anti-choice (“Pro-life”) organizations deliberately propagate the falsehood that such services are major abortion referral agencies, despite the findings of the Badgley Report. This report showed that only 20% of a sample of abortion patients interviewed by The Committee had sought counselling from such community agencies.

One would logically expect that members of the Coalition for Life would support and advocate the dissemination of information and the development of services designed to reduce the demand for abortions by preventing unwanted pregnancies. This approach was strongly advocated by the Badgley Report. Anti-choice organizations are, in fact, *either indifferent to or hostile to such programs.*

This pamphlet was co-operatively prepared
and is endorsed by the

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Additional copies and background material may be obtained
from any of the above groups.