

Doing What is Best for Women: Beyond the Pro-Choice vs Pro-Life Debate

To do what is best for women is an objective overwhelmingly shared by pro-choice and pro-life views. Yet both sides often unwittingly undermine this goal. At one extreme, those with the strongest pro-choice views *tend* to want to silence women who regret having had abortions, especially if they speak up about it. They implicitly (if not explicitly) regard such women as weak, or even as traitors to the feminist cause. At the other extreme, *some* of those with the strongest pro-life views treat all women who have experienced a termination as heartless killers, failing to recognise that many women are pushed into such a tough decision by those around them, and that they have little or no choice in the matter. Thus we see both sides of the debate undermining what is perhaps the only precious shared objective. Surely we can do better in Queensland!

Hearing the Otherwise Silent Voice of Many Women on their Abortion

In a society where pro-choice views are largely accepted there is a very large group of women who are compelled to be silent about abortion – and in such a way that is harmful to many of those that easy abortion is designed to help. It is most especially those women who have been negatively affected by their abortion(s) who are most inclined to silence – for numerous reasons. Some are bewildered because the relief found in abortion is *supposed* to be overwhelmingly positive, and with no side effects. Others unequivocally know that they regret having had an abortion but are ashamed to speak about it, or worse, are afraid of what their pro-choice friends will say or think. Others, having been pushed into a largely unwanted abortion by their parents, boyfriends or others never had a voice in the first place to oppose the abortion they didn't desire. The tragic result of this silence is ultimately a lack of real choice, or at least a lack of informed choice. We have an increasing number of women who feel harmed by their abortion. In particular this silence aids those who mistakenly think that abortion is always the best option in an unplanned or otherwise awkward pregnancy. Of course, real choice, coupled with real support in very many cases will result in fewer harmful abortions. Yes – I am saying that abortion is often harmful to women, and those that deny this are simply ignorant of the truth. Clearly they've hardly met anyone who speaks freely about abortion.

Some Personal Examples

I increasingly encounter women who are bewildered or even traumatised by the horrible feelings they have following an abortion. Here are a couple of examples salient to me from personal experience.

Just a few weeks ago a former colleague came into work and we ended up talking about Rob Pyne's latest bill. After noticing that I was very open about the issue she revealed to me that she and her daughter had together chosen for her daughter to have an abortion at 9 weeks' gestation four years ago. She confided that the daughter had found the experience traumatic and four years on is receiving professional counselling as a result.

When I was a teenager my saxophone teacher confided that she had had an abortion. I will never forget the sense of self-loathing that she expressed at the time.

Do we really want this for the women of Queensland? Will Rob Pyne's bill in its current form make life better for the majority of women?

The Problem with Rob Pyne's Bill

While Rob Pyne's bill is perhaps laudable in its aspiration to avoid the possibility of women being jailed, it has many unintended consequences that will end up harming women. Abortion in Queensland is already very easy to access, and a lack of regulation means that far too many are already having abortions that they very soon regret.

Even if you lack first-hand knowledge and experience of the frequently harmful effects of abortion on women, taking an hour or two to view the recent apolitical HUSH documentary by pro-choice advocate Punam Kumar Gill is overwhelmingly compelling. (I recently visited the Australian premiere screening of the Hush documentary at New Farm Cinemas, as sponsored by Women's Forum Australia.)

Some Conclusions

Some conclusions that are truly good for the majority of women are:

1. Ensure women are fully informed about abortion, including possible side-effects. Viewing the HUSH documentary would be an excellent way to inform women from an apolitical perspective that doesn't push women one way or the other, but that provides a lot of information essential to a woman's health and well-being. I certainly wish that all women could see this documentary before having an abortion.
2. Ensure women are fully supported if they have an inclination to continue their unexpected pregnancy, especially if those around them are pushing them to have an abortion that they don't desire to have.
3. Legislate to protect **women** instead of legislating to satisfy those politicians who unwittingly harm many women by failing to realise that abortion is often harmful to women. The easier abortion is the more women will feel pressured into abortions that they frequently don't want. The easier abortion is without any kind of fully informed choice presented the more women will have abortions only to regret it later. Make no mistake: easy access to abortion as it exists right now in Queensland is already causing a lot of harm to women. Moreover the benefit of easy access to abortion is almost certainly outweighed in the view of a silent many by the harm being done.
4. Create an environment where women who have had abortions are able to speak more freely about their experiences - including when their experience is negative, and to access counselling support where necessary. Certainly if organisations such as Children by Choice were forced to deal with the negative impact on women after termination they might be much less inclined to refer for abortion, and more inclined to present women with a real, fully informed choice.

In attempting to minimise the harmful effects of abortion I have deliberately written this submission without sharing my own view on whether abortion is right or wrong.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Timothy Rushbrook