Who Should be Allowed 1

Chapter 1

Introduction

Everyday people of the world are faced with life changing decisions that could ultimately change their futures forever. As young kids we are brought up and taught at a young age how to handle situations and circumstances to the best of our ability so that we can make admirable choices throughout our lives. Life is an ongoing test of who will be successful with these inevitable decisions, and who will fall victim to the demons and vices that are thrown at you everyday. The beauty of it all, whether that being success or failure, is that you have these choices. You are able to make a logical decision based on facts and your own cognitive abilities. Whether your decision is logical to anyone else is not the point. Every human has god given rights that enable them to live their lives as they please. What happens when someone else’s beliefs get in the way of your own decision making? The idea of pro-life or pro-choice is an on-going societal issue that has been plaguing individuals all over the world. Should women be allowed the right to terminate a pregnancy? Unfortunately answering this question and coming up with an unbiased solution is not easy. Individuals have very strong feelings both for abortion and against it. Within this paper I am going to look at both sides of this pendulum and try to determine a solution to solving this societal controversy.

 “Over time and in different places, those formulating population policy have produced widely divergent assessments of induced abortion: a murderous act that ends a human life; a treasonous act damaging to the interests of the state; an injurious act threatening the health and future fertility of a woman; an inefficient means of birth control that should be replaced by

 Who Should be Allowed 2

modern contraceptives; an efficient means of birth control that can contribute significantly to both individual and societal fertility control; a necessary option to deal with occasional contraceptive failure; a health-promoting act when provided by competent medical personnel;

and an individual woman’s right that should be protected by the state” (Hodgson, 2009). With all these different opinions at hand, how is it possible to make a plausible decision on behalf of an entire country? There are so many different circumstances that could ultimately lead to pregnancy. Who is to say whether one circumstance is more appropriate than the other? First, I am going to take a look at the reasons why abortion should be available for any woman, under any circumstance.

*Pro-Choice*

“The American Medical Women’s Association (AMWA) promotes the health and wellness of women and girls in every aspect of their lives and believes that the decision whether or not to carry a child to term is a personal decisions belonging solely to the women” (Devi, Glodowski, & Shin, 2009). This is one of the strongest opinions held on behalf of the pro-choice side of abortion. Every woman is entitled to do with her body what she pleases. Taking away those rights would be taking away a woman’s constitutional privileges as a member of society. “AMWA opposes all bills that ban specific abortion procedures, mandate waiting periods, or require parental consent for minors’ abortions. These limitations interfere with a woman’s decision and ability to obtain an abortion” (Devi, Glodowski, & Shin, 2009). When there are limitations put on something as serious as abortion then young girls and woman are forced to look for ulterior options. When they are left with little or no opportunity, that is when we see women looking for dangerous and unhealthy means of contraceptives.

 Who Should be Allowed 3

Illegal forms of abortion happen every single day in unsanitary ill-equipped settings. Women that have nowhere else to turn and simply cannot, or are opposed to the idea of following through with the pregnancy, are forced to find other means to take care of the problem. We see this a lot in underdeveloped countries where abortion is legally restricted.

 “Complications from unsafe abortion are believed to account for the largest proportion of hospital admissions for gynecological services in developing countries” (Singh, 2006). Statistics such as this are hard to come by due to the lack of information documented. It is hard to see the magnitude of this problem in many countries since there are illegal restrictions on it. Although many people argue that abortion is inhumane and would identify it as “murder,” information shows that not getting a safe abortion can very well be more detrimental to a person, society, and public health system as a whole. “The WHO (World Health Organization) estimates that one in eight pregnancy-related deaths result from unsafe abortions” (Singh, 2006). Is it better to be granted human rights and the ability to make decisions for yourself based off personal circumstance, or should those rights be taken away which in turn could be more problematic and destructive?

*Pro-Life*

Many people disagree with abortion because they feel like it is just an easy way out instead of taking responsibility for your actions. It is a common belief that young immature girls are making adult choices to have intercourse and then not handling the repercussions in an adult manner. “Women terminate these pregnancies for a variety of reasons. They most frequently mention having an abortion because they are not ready to care for a child (or another child), financial constraints, concern for or responsibility to others (especially concerns related to caring

 Who Should be Allowed 4

for other children), desire to avoid single parenthood, relationship problems, and feeling too young or immature to raise a child” (Major, Appelbaum, Beckman, Dutton, Russo, & West (2009). A lot of the time people think that after getting an abortion everything will just go back to normal and the idea of holding your very own child will just disappear. This, however, is not

always the case. Statistics show that following abortion women can sometimes fall into depression or other forms of mental health illnesses.

 “Controversy exists about whether abortion or childbirth is associated with greater psychological risks” (Reardon, Cougle, Rue, Shuping, Coleman, Ney (2003). Postpartum depression is a known psychological problem in women after they give birth to a child. Not a lot of information is known about psychological problems that happen to women who abort a pregnancy. One study was done to try and see whether psychiatric admissions of low-income women following abortion or childbirth were higher. Statistics show that low-income women are more likely to become impregnated and are more likely to be single family households. The study found that, “Women who had abortions had a significantly higher inpatient admission rate than women who delivered during each time period analyzed. The highest odds ratio was found for the first 90 days after the pregnancy event, with women who had had an abortion being 2.6 times more likely to be admitted for psychiatric treatment than women who had delivered” (Reardon, Cougle, Rue, Shuping, Coleman, Ney (2003). With low-income women having higher pregnancy rates in general, and higher psychiatric problems related to the abortion, should there be a better solution to pregnancy other than abortion? “One perspective argues that abortion is a uniquely traumatic experience because it involves a human death experience, specifically, the intentional destruction of one’s unborn child and the witnessing of a violent death, as well as a

 Who Should be Allowed 5

violation of parental instinct and responsibility, the severing of maternal attachments to the unborn child, and unacknowledged grief” (Major, Appelbaum, Beckman, Dutton, Russo, & West (2009). Obviously abortion is causing psychiatric problems to women, and the highest percentage of impregnated women at that. Maybe abortion is not the answer.

One of the biggest debates over abortion is the idea that abortion is murder. It is taking someone’s life away from them. According to an estimate done in 2003, “Of the 210 million pregnancies in the world each year, approximately 130 million result in live births, 38 million in spontaneous abortions and still births, 22 million in legal abortions, and 20 million in illegal abortions. About 80 million of these annual pregnancies are estimated to be unintended, so induced abortion, legal and illegal, currently is being used to end somewhat more than half the world’s unintended pregnancies” (Hodgson, 2009). When you take a step back and take a look at just how many people are getting abortions each year and taking away that potential life, is it ok?

*What can Sociologists do?*

These are the questions people need to ask themselves before laws are passed or rights are taken away. Of those legal and illegal abortions, how many were caused by rape or incest? Should those people be allowed an abortion but not someone that chose to be sexually active and accidentally got pregnant? Is it better to go ahead and have a baby you cannot provide for or is it better to have an abortion and deal with the possibility of becoming mentally unstable? Is the option of having an abortion a basic woman’s right that should not be taken away? “AMWA believes that the ability to control fertility is an essential and basic need of girls and women and a

 Who Should be Allowed 6

crucial component of their health and wellness. Access to abortion and to the proper education and means to control fertility should be a birthright of every girl and woman” (Devi, Glodowski, & Shin, (2009). I believe sociologists should keep this in mind when they are looking for a solution to end this societal problem. There are so many different components you need to factor in when deciding whether or not an abortion is the right route to take. I believe sociologists first and foremost should take the time to set up a better educational way to get this information out

into the world. Abortion is not just in the US. I think a lot of people do not know their options when it comes to abortion. I also believe many of them are not educated enough to know that they have rights or that there are ways of avoiding pregnancy. However, in cases such as rape or incest when the intercourse is not mutual it becomes a much trickier subject. If anything I believe that sociologists should educate those that are against abortion the most about occurrences such as these. I believe it so easy to tell someone that they should keep their child, but when you are not put in that situation yourself nor do you know the circumstances one is under can you really place judgment upon them. The hardcore pro-life activists should be more educated on the fact that abortion is not only due to the fact that people are irresponsible and accidentally get pregnant. In some cases having a child just is not an option.

*What can we do?*

For citizens of a society I think education is the best tool to use to eliminate any problem. I think children should be taught about all different forms of contraceptives. They should be taught that pregnancy does not happen to only people that are ready to have a family. They should know that they do have choices in the matter and it is not simply black and white in all cases.

Who Should be Allowed 7

*Conclusion*

 Who should be allowed to have an abortion is an ongoing controversy. I do not know that it will ever be completely resolved. I think all people can hope for is that they have options available to them if need be. If your heart is not in abortion then that is your god given right to believe that. I think more importantly people need to remember that it is also their god given right to do with their body as they please.

 Who Should be Allowed 8

Running Head: Who Should be Allowed

Who Should be Allowed to have an Abortion?

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 Who Should be Allowed 9

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