

# Terminology and Talking Points Regarding the Harms of Abortion<sup>1</sup>

## *Definition of Abortion*

There are two widely used concepts of “abortion”:

- Abortion is the premature termination of a pregnancy, intending or foreseeing the inevitable death of the child/embryo/fetus (in most medical and legal contexts).
- Abortion is the intentional killing of an unborn child (in some contexts, particularly in advocacy).

These definitions are broadly similar, except that according to the latter definition, procedures done as a last resort to save the life of the mother are **not** abortions, while according to the former definition, these **are** still abortions (but are permissible as a last resort). Either way, **every country in the world** (and every state in federal countries) permits removal of the child in pregnancy to save the mother’s life, even if the child inevitably dies as a result. **No country needs to legislate for this situation.**

Miscarriage is sometimes referred to as “spontaneous abortion”. “Induced abortion” is therefore a more specific term for a human actor killing the child. Contrary to recent media claims in the US, treating a woman who has already had a miscarriage (i.e. the baby has already died) is **not** an abortion and is not illegal anywhere in the world.

- In general, where abortion is legal on demand, <1% are for saving the life of the mother. Around 1-2% are for fetal disabilities, and <1% are for situations of rape/incest. 98% are for social or economic reasons – “abortion on demand” or “elective abortion”.
- Only 63 countries around the world permit abortion on demand. The large majority of countries allow abortion only in extreme situations.
- Avoid terminology that euphemizes abortion, such as “termination of pregnancy”, “induced miscarriage” or “menstrual regulation”.
- Also avoid terminology that dehumanizes the child, such as “product of conception”. Referring to the embryo or fetus as a “baby” or a “child” is **perfectly accurate language** that is frequently used in medicine, while the Convention on the Rights of the Child specifically refers to the need for “children” to be protected “before... birth”.

## *Harms of Abortion Talking Points*

- Abortion rates [increase enormously](#) after abortion is legalized (more evidence available on request), leading to massive violations of the fundamental right to life.
  - o The [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) states that “Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law.” The [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) states that “the child... needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth”. The ICCPR also

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prohibits capital punishment for pregnant women, because of the need to protect the innocent unborn child.

- Risky sex in general (more partners, less contraception, less commitment) also [increases dramatically](#) when abortion is legalized, leading to i) more unwanted pregnancies (and so more healthcare costs); ii) more sexually transmitted diseases (approximately 60% increase in gonorrhea, for example); iii) more family breakdown as well as iv) more abortions.
- The [best evidence](#) from the world's leading pro-choice researcher indicates that women who have abortions are more likely to have anxiety, suicidal behavior, drug abuse and alcohol abuse, compared to similar women who continue unwanted pregnancies. These mental health problems have a subsequent impact on the whole family and the whole community.
- [Evidence](#) from a Nobel-prize winning economist indicates that the legalization of abortion leads to less paternal commitment, more family breakdown, and consequently more poverty for women and children, since women are usually the primary caregivers. This affects the whole community and multiple generations in multiple ways:
  - o In family breakdown, the [mother](#), [father](#) and [children](#) are all more likely to have mental health problems.
  - o The [father](#) and the [children](#) are more likely to be involved in crime, especially violent crime.
  - o The [mother and children](#) are more likely to be in poverty.
- Countries legalizing abortion also see a [large decrease in the birth rate](#), causing more serious economic problems from underpopulation.
- Abortion on demand can lead to sex-selective abortion, abortions carried out because the baby is female. This has caused serious [sex imbalances and trafficking industries](#) in countries like China, and perpetuates stigma against women and girls.
- Abortion on demand leads to high eugenic abortion rates, for example the [90% abortion rate](#) for babies with Down Syndrome in the UK and the [100% rate in Iceland](#). This perpetuates stigma against disabled people.
- [Maternal mortality can increase](#) when abortion is legalized, because of higher pregnancy rates and more abortions, both "safe" and unsafe.
- An estimated [one quarter of abortions](#) are due to pressure from the woman's partner, causing significant trauma to women and girls.