

## Abortion and Ethics

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### Introduction

Abortion is a serious issue and ethical dilemma [1], there is a debate going on whether abortion should be legalized or not. Women of every social class or creed seek termination of pregnancy for various reasons such as financial instability, pregnancy as a result of rape or incest, when fetus have congenital abnormality such as congenital heart defects, orofacial clefts, down syndrome, neural tube defects [2], when the continuation of pregnancy have harmful effects on mother or when mother is suffering from diseases like hepatitis [3]. Sometimes a mother goes for abortion without even paying attention to future consequences, and if abortion is not legalized then the women utilizes the unsafe services provided by the quacks [2]. Hence, there are many devastating effects of illegalization of abortion. Most of the people in our society use abortion as their family planning method which gives opponent a point to illegalize the abortion.

### Description of Issue

In the outpatient department, a female client came to the nurse and asked the question, "Do they abort the fetus here?" History was taken which revealed she was a 24 years old female, having first pregnancy and four month had occurred. The reason which was shared is that her husband is leaving the country and she alone doesn't want to be sole responsible and care taker of the baby. This situation was important as in Eastern culture where they considered baby as a gift of God and mother as a symbol of care and love.

### Analysis

As a health care professional, several questions were asked related to fetus. As a four-month fetus, do I have any right to breath? To whom I belong? Is it right to kill the fetus for the fear of poverty? Does fetus should be aborted in case of many children? Is abortion a murder and to what extent does the client abortion would be legal? Does religion permit abortion? Is abortion legalized in various countries? By keeping myself in place of mother, I asked does she has a right to take any decision on the behalf of fetus. Why she wanted to abort the fetus? What are the factors that cause mother to abort the fetus? Why family members aren't stopping her as this is her first pregnancy? Both couples decide together and when she was aware about her husband's departure then why they went for conception?

### Autonomy of Mother vs. Fetus

According to Vaknin [4], "When a woman engages in voluntary sex, doesn't use contraceptives and gets pregnant-one can say that she signed a contract with her fetus. Moreover they supports that the fetus has the right to live and mother should not decide on behalf of the fetus. Well, the woman has the right to decide for her own self and her body. Fetus is part of the mother's body and every human being holds

the right to decide for his or her own self as stated by Burkhardt and Nathaniel [5], mother has a right to decide on behalf of fetus but it should be for the best interest of the fetus. Proponents supports that every women should be able to decide for her pregnancy.

### Non-maleficence

Abortion has lifelong complications and devastating physiological and psychological effects as stated by Bartter [1]. On the other hand safe abortions are not injurious to women's health. While it is said by the advocates of abortion, that like other invasive and operative procedures abortion is also a procedure, which if done in a proper manner by following all surgical principles and aseptic techniques do not produce dangerous effects on health. While illegal abortion has harmful effects on women's health [1].

### Debate on Soul Insertion

If a woman engages in sexual intercourse for the purpose of having a child then the resulting fertilized egg has a right to mature and be born. It means right to born crystallizes at the moment of voluntary and intentional fertilization. Opponents supports the idea that from conception the soul enters the fetus and thus after that abortion is more of killing. Different literature supports different time of entrance of soul in the fetus. The pro-life group insists that the fetus is an individual itself and no one should violate the rights of the fetus [6].

### Legal Provisions

Abortion can be therapeutic or non-therapeutic but some scholars have considered non-therapeutic as murder. Muslim regard abortion as wrong and forbidden but it may be permitted if mother's life is in danger. The Quran states: "Whosoever has spared the life of a soul, it is as though he has spared the life of all people. Whosoever has killed a soul, it is as though he has murdered all of mankind" (5:32). Islam forbids the termination of pregnancy after soul is given to the fetus and duration is 120 days. In some of the Asian countries, there are specific laws related to abortion and isn't legalized. However, late termination of pregnancy for congenital abnormality is allowed on different grounds in different countries [2]. In eastern culture, abortion is considered an antisocial act but there are different circumstance where this abortion became necessary such as after rape or incest, when mother's life is in danger, when fetus life is in danger, when financially the parents are incapable to bear a child and many other reasons. Abortion should be legalized to help mothers and maternal health.

### Couple Counseling Services

As a health care professional, we should respect patient values and shouldn't impose religious beliefs on client. ANA code for nurses [7] states, "The registered professional nurse has professional obligations

that must be maintained while provide care to woman who choose to have abortions” (pp. 3). In addition, abortion is not based on single partner decision so we should emphasize couple counseling. Fetus is basically the genetic makeup of both husband and wife so both of them should make the decision together for the benefit of fetus.

It is our responsibility to teach such clients regarding antenatal care in order to prevent mother and fetus from harm. Be neutral but also on other side perform the role of advocator to save the life of fetus and teach them the future consequences of aborting the first child as it gives rise to uterine synechia. Sometimes there is tubal blockage and cervical incompetence. Therefore, proper counselling by expert gynecologist can avoid such cases [2].

### Conclusion

In a nutshell, respect for autonomy of pregnant woman, embryo and justification to terminate pregnancy is an obligation of health care professionals [1]. Abortion is an issue that focuses the autonomy and dignity of the pregnant woman. Abortion involves killing of a fetus. Although diagnosing antenatal through recent technology and prenatal counseling is important. Alaiyan and Alfalah [8] highlighted the termination rates followed by antenatal diagnosis of congenital

malformation such as Down’s syndrome (92%), spina bifida (64%), anencephaly (84%), turner syndrome (72%) and klinefelter syndrome (58%). If it is justified to prevent or terminate the fetus with abnormalities then society should support the promotion of freedom and prevention of sufferings, which should be the fundamental goals.

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