



Abortion Rights  
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à  
l'avortement au Canada

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## ***Position Paper #81***

### **Anti- Choice Violence vs “Pro-Choice Violence”**

The charges of violence against the pro-choice movement stem from twin lies propagated by the anti-choice religious right, who have distorted the concept of harm and the nature of motherhood. Though hypocrisy and fuzzy thinking have proven to be a powerful combination, anti-choice values and their legal consequents produce far more violence than pro-choice policies.

Though a specific definition of violence may be difficult to articulate, it centers on the notion of harm. A harmful act is considered violent especially when it has extreme consequences or does extensive damage to some entity or aspect thereof. To determine whether a situation is violent, one must consider two factors: first, whether a recipient or victim can be identified, and second, the severity and form of harm being done.

Anti-abortion advocates most often focus on the fetus as the primary victim of violence, but some also identify the pregnant woman as a victim (presumably because she is incapable of avoiding predatory doctors or is manipulated by those around her), while others go so far as to say that an entire society is victimized by legal abortion (because it must then be characterized by unfeeling selfishness). If the political agenda of the anti-choice movement was to be realized, and women could not obtain abortion under any circumstance, violence would manifest in several ways.

The most obvious victims would be the pregnant women who are denied access to abortion. These women would be forced to endure pregnancy against their will, along with the accompanying psychological trauma and host of debilitating symptoms, and to become parents contrary to their own better judgment. If they were raped, they would spend 40 weeks with the knowledge that the fetus shared the genetic material of their attacker. Or, if denied access to safe, legal abortion, women would resort to self-harm or to the ministrations of an untrained provider.

Herein lies the first myth of anti-choice rhetoric. According to the religious right, motherhood is an unequivocally desirable state replete with wonderful feelings of feminine fulfillment. The natural and divine purpose of the female is to bear offspring. She is legally little more than a walking incubator; the functioning of her reproductive organs defines her, trumps her own aspirations and goals, and determines the course of her life. This conception denies the inherent fear (of birth, pain, and death) women experience during pregnancy.

The second most obvious victims of an anti-choice society are children. Unwanted children experience hunger, neglect, the effects of drug abuse and disease, and the violence of poverty and abuse alongside their mothers.

The third and most abstract recipient of the harm done by legal restrictions on abortion is society in general. The argument put forth by anti-choice ideologues is that a society that allows for safe abortions creates uncompromisingly self-interested and self-serving individuals. This argument of course overlooks the circumstances that make abortion a loving and noble decision. The women who terminate pregnancies because they know they are not currently able to provide for a child, or for more children than they already have, are making a profoundly selfless sacrifice. This altruistic reasoning is a significant and very common motivation behind abortion decisions. It is more likely that a society that permits freedom of choice requires the development of morally responsible individuals rather than the opposite.

The harsh reality is that any society that fails to effectively control its population growth is destined for economic devastation. Until we have a failsafe method of contraception, some number of unintended, unsustainable pregnancies and corresponding demand for abortion will always exist. It is obvious that a society that refuses to respect its members' very real needs, including their rights to freedom, quality of life, and bodily integrity, is much more harmful and will sustain much more extensive damage than one that allows for individual self-determination.

Ironically, the biggest threat of violence in a pro choice world comes from the anti choice movement itself. For example, anti choice protesters outside clinics try to provoke irate reactions from pro choice individuals, and exploit incidents where their aggressiveness and harassment causes a physical altercation with a clinic visitor. The anti-choice movement adds such incidents to their poorly-sourced lists of "pro-choice violence," which consist of any "crime" allegedly committed by people who happen to be pro-choice—even including abortion complications. Meanwhile, extremist elements in the "pro-life" movement believe in the "justifiable homicide" of abortion providers and have carried out at least eight assassinations of doctors and clinic staff, and many more attempted murders. The terrorism carried out by anti-choice extremists against abortion providers has no similarity to alleged charges of "pro-abortion violence." Terrorism is pre-meditated violence, motivated by hate, specifically targeted to one group, and designed to instill fear into the targeted group. In contrast, the trumped-up lists of "pro-abortion violence" represent a weak and desperate attempt to whitewash anti-choice terrorism.

The hypocrisy in their PR-driven rhetoric is staggering. How "pro life" is the bombing of clinics and murder of health care providers? How nonviolent is it to use misinformation designed to mislead, confuse, and frighten to assail women who are already in difficult situations? The consequences of terminating pregnancy are far less violent than the consequences of the anti-choice agenda.

*by Amanda Chalmers*