



Abortion Rights  
Coalition of Canada

Coalition pour le droit à  
l'avortement au Canada

*Your  
Voice for Choice*

*Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group*

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## **Position Paper #26**

### **Why Do Women Have Abortions?**

Often when we talk about abortion or when we hear about it in the media, it is either in a political or moral context. Thus, when we think about women and transgender people<sup>1</sup> making the decision to have an abortion, it is easy to get caught in the idea that their decision is based on a moral stand or that it is a reflection of their values and belief system. While this may be a factor in the decision-making process, for most women trying to decide what to do when faced with an unplanned pregnancy, their decision is based on everyday practicalities (such as finances). The circumstances of their lives are often a crucial part of the decision to choose abortion. It is also imperative to remember that women take their decision to abort very seriously.

The main considerations that women report as the reasons they chose abortion include (but are not exclusive to) the following.

#### **Relationship Issues**

The reaction of her partner, after being told about the pregnancy, is often a key component in a woman's decision to end a pregnancy. (For a teen, the reaction or anticipated reaction of her family members, can lead to the decision to abort.)

A partner may not support the woman in continuing the pregnancy but will support her to have an abortion (or vice versa). If she continues the pregnancy, she risks losing the relationship and faces the prospect of being a single parent. Also, women might not see their relationship as a long term one.

The woman may be in an abusive relationship. Studies have shown that in such relationships, violence often escalates when women are pregnancy. For other women (40% of those abused), this may be the first time that they are physically abused. Some women have planned pregnancies but once the cycle of violence begins, they decide that their safety is at stake and decide not to continue the pregnancy.<sup>1</sup>

For some women the relationship has ended prior to the discovery of pregnancy, or the partner leaves once told of the pregnancy.

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<sup>1</sup> All subsequent references to women include trans men and non-binary people.

Pregnancy can also result from sexual assault, whether by a stranger, an acquaintance, or by a partner, prompting the woman to have an abortion.

## ***Financial and Practical Reasons***

Many women choose abortion for financial considerations. Many women state they “have no real choice” as they do not have the financial resources to support themselves and a child. Single mothers continue to be the largest group of people living below the poverty line (21%), as financial resources are not available to women in Canada who choose to parent on their own.<sup>2</sup> This larger context, including day care issues, minimum wage, and the lack of community support, is a common theme affecting women seeking abortion.

## ***Not Ready***

Even women who have support and resources still choose abortion, as they feel “not ready” to provide for and meet the physical and emotional needs of a child. In counseling, women talk about circumstances such as financial security, marriage, school, work, and messages that they receive from society that impact their decision. Also, if women already have children, the consideration of being ready to add to their family is a factor. At the other end of the spectrum, women in their 30s and 40s may have adult children and don’t wish to go back to raising a baby. Finally, some women decide they don’t want to be a mother at all.<sup>3</sup>

## ***Birth Control Failure***

Most women are using some method of birth control when they discover they are pregnant. No birth control method, even sterilization, is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy. Most women “do everything right” but happen to be in the 1 out of every 100 women who becomes pregnancy despite using some form of birth control.<sup>4</sup>

## ***Genetic Reasons***

There are many categories of women who fall under this reason, including those who:

- Use alcohol and drugs (both illegal and prescribed) prior to finding out they are pregnant
- Are receiving cancer treatments who discover a pregnancy
- Have pregnancies with genetic birth defects (no brain development, lack of limbs, Down Syndrome)
- Suffer from severe nausea and vomiting
- Have crisis pregnancies that put her life at risk
- Have mental health diagnoses who see themselves unable to parent
- Went through years of fertility testing/trials and resigned themselves to the fact that they were infertile and then years later are faced with an unplanned pregnancy

Although this is by not means a complete list of the reasons women choose abortion, it does outline the major reasons that women report why they choose abortion. Further information can be found in

the 2017 paper “Reasons why women have induced abortions: a synthesis of findings from 14 countries”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3490644/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cwp-csp.ca/poverty/just-the-facts/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cihi.ca/> “Induced Abortions Reported in Canada in 2015”. The number of scans and screenings varies based on the province (though in provinces where it is not covered, a woman can pay a private company for the screening). In Ontario, for example, screening in the form of an Integrated prenatal screen (IPS) is a blood test and ultrasound between weeks 11-13, then another blood test between week 16-20, with results provided by 18 weeks. Other options are the non-invasive prenatal test (NIPT or Harmony). The latter is only provided under Ontario OHIP for women who screen positive for IPS or if they are over 40 years old. These screenings are elective.

Though this report does not provide specific reasons, numbers such as how 28.1% of abortions were performed on women or transgender people who already had children (and 9.1% of which were by those who had more than three previous deliveries) shows that abortion affects women in all walks of life. See *ARCC Position Paper #52 - Canadian Statistics and Demographics on Abortion*.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the Pill is 99% effective. <http://www.ppt.on.ca/ppt/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Pill.pdf>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0010782417301889>