

## Right to abortion in the students 'opinion

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The study was aimed at getting to know students' opinions on abortion, the circumstances that authorize it, and analysis of factors that may influence the views of the studied group.

**Materials and methods:** The study was conducted among 687 students from various regions of Poland. The respondents answered questions about the abortion law and circumstances entitling them to terminate the pregnancy.

**Results:** The majority of respondents (42.1%) are of the opinion that the current law protects the mother and the child well enough. 58.5% of respondents said that abortion in cases permitted by law is not a sin. Referring to the church's prohibition of abortion, 44.5% of respondents voted for its abolition.

Considering the answer to this question in terms of religiosity, it turns out that 31.7% of believers taking part in the study would like this ban to be lifted.

**Conclusions:** Factors such as gender, place of residence, having or willingness to have children influence abortion views. Factors such as the field of study and having a permanent partner do not affect abortion views. Faith has a big impact on abortion views, and believers are more likely than non-believers to forbid abortion or restrict the right to abortion, while much less often advocate unrestricted rights to abortion.

**Keywords:** Abortion, opinions about abortion, termination of pregnancy, removal of pregnancy

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Abortion is an intentional termination of pregnancy in a period when the fetus is unable to survive in an ectopic environment [1,2]. In Poland, termination of pregnancy is regulated by the Act on Family Planning, protection of the human fetus and the conditions for the admissibility of termination of pregnancy of January 7, 1993 [3]. Under current law, abortion is only allowed in justified cases, including [4-7]:

- Pregnancy threatening the life or health of a pregnant woman,
- Pregnancy resulting from a criminal act,
- High probability of severe and irreversible impairment or incurable lethal disease.

Methods of terminating pregnancy vary depending on the age of the fetus. Both pharmacological and instrumental methods are used [8]. Currently, pharmacological methods are most often used, and instrumental methods, especially curettage of the uterine cavity, are used primarily in the abortion underground [9]. Abortion can be fraught with certain complications, including among others, ascending infections, cervical injuries, puncture of the uterus, infertility, depression and bleeding [10]. The percentage of complications is higher in the case of abortions performed in the underground than those carried out legally.

Abortion has always aroused strong emotions due to the diversity of views prevailing in society [11]. During public debates, it is impossible not to notice only extreme views, on the one hand talking about murdering children and pushing for zero tolerance, and on the other, proclaiming the right of women to decide about their bodies and pressing for an unlimited right to abortion [12-16]. The social debate about abortion is largely mediated through social media, which allows extreme environments to influence a huge number of people, especially young people [17-20].

Currently, in most European countries, abortion is legal until a specific week of pregnancy (different for different countries) and is one of the methods of birth control [21,22].

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research was based on the method of sounding. The applied research technique was the author's questionnaire, which consisted of 20 single and multiple-choice closed questions.

Collectivity taking part in the study were students from Polish.

The study was attended by students from Biała Podlaska, Lublin, Warsaw, Łódź, Poznań, Wrocław and Gdańsk.

The survey was conducted in March 2018 through an online form made available to students of various universities from the above-mentioned cities.

A total of 687 responses were obtained. The study involved 560 women and 127 men. The largest age group were people aged 20-25 (593 people), 29 people were under 20, 56 people aged 26-30 and 9 people over 30.

The data was analyzed from a specially created Microsoft Office Excel database, statistical analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics 23.

## **RESULTS**

Almost half of the respondents (47.8%) are residents of large cities over 100,000. population.

The remaining part of the respondents are residents of smaller cities (25%) and villages (27.2%). The majority of respondents study in non-medical science (77.1%). Persons studying medical faculties, such as nursing, midwifery, emergency medical services, etc. constitute 22.9% of all respondents. 62.2% are in a stable relationship, while people without a permanent partner constitute 37.8% of the group.

When it comes to having children, the largest group (68.3%) are people who do not have children but want to have them in the future.

People who do not have children and have not yet decided whether they want to have them constitute 17.2% of all respondents. 7.9% of the group are people who do not have children and do not want to have them.

The smallest group (6.6%) are people who already have children. Another issue raised in the study was religion, due to its unquestionable influence on views on abortion.

Most of the respondents (64.7%) declare that they are believers, non-believers account for 21% of all respondents, and undecided persons - 14.3%.

Among the believers, the vast majority are Catholics, only 7% of respondents declare belonging to another religious group (Orthodoxy, Protestantism, Islam and others). Believers responded to a question intended only for them, regarding abortion as a sin. The question concerned only abortions allowed under the law.

The largest part (58.5%) of respondents recognized that abortion in the cases permitted by law is not a sin, 5.8% think that only the mother commits a sin, while 35.7% think that the sin is committed by both the mother and the doctor performing treatment.

Referring to the church's prohibition of abortion, 44.5% of respondents voted for its abolition.

Considering the answer to this question in terms of religiosity, it turns out that 31.7% of believers taking part in the study would like this ban to be lifted.

As for the current abortion law, the majority of respondents (42.1%) are of the opinion that it protects the mother and the child well enough. People who think that abortion should always be available to everyone, "on demand", constitute 25.8% of all respondents, 20.6% of respondents think that the right to abortion should be narrowed, and 11.5% think that abortion should not be allowed under any circumstances. The people who were in favor of limiting the right to abortion were directed to one additional question regarding the circumstances that entitle them to perform an abortion. Almost all respondents (87.5%) responding to this question considered that the threat to mother's life is a circumstance entitling to an abortion. Other important reasons according to people who are in favor of limiting the right to abortion are fetal lethality (47.5%), pregnancy resulting from rape (43.3%), pregnancy posing a threat to maternal health (29.2%) and pregnancy resulting incest (28.3%). The least accepted reason (13.3%) of terminating pregnancy according to people who believe that abortion law should be more restrictive is the impairment of the child.

The next question concerned abortion as a procedure that should only be decided by the woman who is being treated. The vast majority of respondents, as many as 70.6% are of the opinion that abortion is not a matter in which a decision should belong only to a woman. 25.5% of respondents believe that this is a decision only for women. Only 3.9% of the respondents did not express their opinion on the subject. Another issue raised was the question about the possibility of abortion by the respondents in case of unwanted pregnancy of their partner. More than half of the respondents (56.8%) would not decide to remove

unwanted pregnancy, 19.5% of respondents would decide to have an abortion, 23.7% of people participating in the study do not know what decision they would take. The next question concerned the most common reasons for illegal abortions. According to the respondents, these are emotional immaturity (31%) and inadequate time per child (27.5%). Subsequently, the respondents mentioned bad financial situation (16.2%) and lack of a permanent partner or lack of support on his part (15.3%). According to the surveyed, professional career is the rarest (6.1%) cause of illegal abortions. No opinion on this subject was found by 3.9% of respondents. The last question concerned the impact of sex education at school on the number of illegal abortions. The majority of respondents (62.2%) believe that improving the level of education in this area could result in a reduction in the number of illegal abortions, 24.6% of respondents believe that the level of sex education does not affect the number of illegal abortions, while 13.2% of respondents has no opinion about it.

Statistical analyzes show that gender is related to views on abortion rights. This relationship is weak, as indicated by V Kramer's score = 0.145, but it is statistically significant because p (significance) = 0.002. The difference in views concerns the ban of abortion and narrowing the right to abortion. 22.8% of men and 19.2% of women are in favor of limiting the right to abortion. 18.9% of men and 9.86% of women are in favor of a complete ban on abortion. Unrestricted access to abortion would be preferred by 26.9% women and 21.2% men. Women therefore have more liberal views on abortion (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Statistical relationship between gender and abortion views

	Views on abortion				All
	I believe that the current abortion law protects the interests of mother and child enough	I believe that abortion should be available on demand	I believe that the right to abortion should be more restricted	I believe that abortion should be banned	
gender woman	246	150	107	55	558
man	42	27	34	24	127
All	288	177	141	79	685
		Value	Standardized asymptotic error	Approximate T	Significant approximation
N valid observations	V ramer's	.145 685			.002

The place of residence is connected with views on the subject of abortion law.

This relationship is weak, as indicated by V Kramer's score = 0.160, but it is statistically significant because  $p = 0.000$ .

Considering the results obtained in the order of the village - a small city - a big city, there is a downward trend for the number of people claiming that the current law is right (47.3% - 44.8% - 37.6%) and for those who advocate total prohibition of abortion (17.2% - 11.6% - 8.3%).

In turn, a significant upward trend is observed for people who are in favor of unrestricted availability of abortion (11.8% - 25.6% - 33.9%).

The data indicate that the villagers more often have conservative views on abortion than the inhabitants of cities, and this dependence is also conditioned by the size of the city (Table 2).

Having and the desire to have children are related to views on the subject of abortion rights. The relationship is weak, as indicated by V Kramer's score = 0.162, but it is statistically significant because  $p = 0.000$ .

People who have children and plan to have them in the future have very similar views.

Persons claiming that they do not want to have children and not determined definitely more often opt for unrestricted access to abortion (50% and 44.1% respectively) than those who have or want to have children (20% and 19% respectively).

Differences are also visible in the case of narrowing the right to abortion, which is supported by 28.9% of people with children, 22.6% of those wanting to have them, 15.3% of undecided people and only 7.4% of people who do not want to have children.

The situation is similar in the case of a total ban on abortion, 11.1% of people with children, 13.5% of those who want to have them, 6.7% of undecided people and 5.6% of people who do not want to have children (Table 3).

Religion is related to views on abortion law. This correlation is low, as indicated by V Kramer's score = 0.277, but it is statistically significant because  $p = 0.000$ . 24.6% of believers and 18.4% of those who are uncertain of their faith are in favor of limiting the right to abortion.

Among non-believers there are 9.7% of such answers.

A similar difference can be seen among people who advocate the ban of abortion.

Among believers there are 16.3% of them, and among non-believers - 3.5%, whereas only 2% of those who are undecided.

A significant difference in views is also evident when it comes to the unlimited right to abortion. 52.8% of non-believers and 36.7% of those uncertain of their faith are in favor of such a solution, while only 14.7% of believers are of the same opinion (Table 4).

**Table 2.** Statistical relation between place of residence and abortion views

		Views on abortion				All
		I believe that the current abortion law protects the interests of mother and child enough	I believe that abortion should be available on demand	I believe that the right to abortion should be more restricted	I believe that abortion should be banned	
place of residence	Village	88	22	44	32	186
	City under 100,000	77	44	31	20	172
	City over 100,000	123	111	66	27	327
All		288	177	141	79	685
		Value	Standardized asymptotic error	Approximate T	Significant approximation	
V Kramer's		.160			.000	
N valid observations		685				

**Table 3.** Statistical relationship between having children or the desire to have them and abortion views

		Views on abortion				All
		I believe that the current abortion law protects the interests of mother and child enough	I believe that abortion should be available on demand	I believe that the right to abortion should be more restricted	I believe that abortion should be banned	
Having and the desire to have children	Yes	18	9	13	5	45
	No, but I want it in the future	210	89	106	63	468
	No and I don't want it	20	27	4	3	54
	No and I don't know yet	40	52	18	8	118
All		288	177	141	79	685
		Value	Standardized asymptotic error	approximate T	Significant approximation	
N valid observations		V Kramer's .162 685			.000	

**Table 4.** Statistical relationship between religion and abortion views

		Religion					
		Yes, I am a believer		I'm not a believer		I don't know	
		quantity	%	quantity	%	quantity	%
Views on abortion	I believe that the current abortion law protects the interests of mother and child enough	197	44,5%	49	34,0%	42	42,9%
	I believe that abortion should be available on demand	65	14,7%	76	52,8%	36	36,7%
	I believe that the right to abortion should be more restricted	109	24,6%	14	9,7%	18	18,4%
	I believe that abortion should be banned	72	16,3%	5	3,5%	2	2,0%
		Value	Standardized asymptotic error	Approximate T	Significant approximation		
N valid observations		V Kramer's .277 685			.000		

## DISCUSSION

As early as 1997, Krupa published a study on men's abortion experiences. After analyzing the obtained results, the author formulated conclusions about the harmfulness of abortion in the context of the family and drew attention to the problem of the participation of a man in the process of mourning for a lost child [23].

Jarosz and Biernacka, in their study, analyzed the knowledge of nursing students about abortion, in which they showed that about 90% of respondents believe that abortion should be banned with certain exceptions such as rape [24].

In a study published in 2013 by Klimka, as a result of comparing the surveys from 1992 and 2012, it was proved that the attitude of Poles to abortion became a bit more conservative, but still, over 80% of respondents accept the lawful reasons for termination of pregnancy [25].

Similar data was given to Czerwińska-Jakimiuk in the study of students' opinions on abortion. The vast majority of the respondents were in favor of accepting the termination of pregnancy for the reasons set out in the Act, but avoided extreme views on abortion [26].

Similar conclusions were drawn based on the study of people from different age groups in 2013 [27].

In the Ostrowska et al study, the results showed that support for abortion depends on the specific situation from which the removal of pregnancy results, and the views of the respondents they are mostly dependent on their religious views [28].

Also, Wnuk drew similar conclusions by his research [29].

In the study of Choińska et al., was shown that students and the elderly consider abortion to be the killing of a human being, which was more often expressed by students than seniors [30].

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Most students think that current abortion laws do not need to be changed.
2. Factors such as gender, place of residence, having or willingness to have children influence the abortion views.
3. Factors such as the field of study and having a permanent partner do not affect abortion views.
4. Religion has a significant influence on abortion views, and believers more often than non-believers are in favor of prohibiting abortion or narrowing the right to abortion, while much less often advocate an unrestricted right to abortion.
5. Almost all students who advocate limiting the right to abortion accept the threat of the mother's life as the cause of abortion, while the vast

majority reject the impairment of the child as an acceptable cause of termination of pregnancy.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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