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# Does religious faith have different impact on women and men's attitudes towards abortion?

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## **Abstract**

The public's attitudes toward abortion have been of great interest since the women's liberation movement began in the late 1960s (Hess & Rueb, 2005). Several studies have shown that religious affiliation has a special influence towards abortion. Controversy over the legal status of abortion has been an important feature of politics over the world. This study has administrated a 17-item abortion attitude survey, to determine potential factors correlated with abortion. Several factors such as religiosity, one's definition as to when life begins have been the measurements of abortion attitudes. The main purpose of the survey was to investigate the attitude of religious and non-religious Ethiopian immigrants towards abortion. The survey was conducted through questionnaires. The total participants were 40 men and women. The respondents for this survey were chosen from the Ethiopian community in Stockholm. The result of the study has shown firstly, there was no attitude difference between women and men towards abortion. Secondly, the result has shown that most of religious people were against the practice of abortion and finally, the survey has revealed that there was no significant interaction between gender and belief.

## **1. Introduction**

### **Gender and abortion attitude**

Gender is one of the possible correlates of abortion attitudes that have been investigated. Abortion is commonly framed as a women's issue, and access to legal abortion has long been a major goal of the contemporary women's movement (Stetson, 2003). Because pregnancy, childbirth, child-rearing, and therefore abortion are presumably much more salient experiences for women than for men, women would be expected from an interest-group perspective to be more likely than men to favor legal abortion (Barkan, 2014).

Like abortion attitudes generally, the gender similarity in approval for legal abortion has both theoretical and pragmatic implications. Theoretically, it reinforces the idea that gender matters little or not at all for public opinion on many issues and points to the need to understand why is this so. Pragmatically, the similarity allows abortion rights opponents to argue that legal abortion cannot be very important to women if they are not more likely than men to favor it. (Barkan, 2014)

Scholars of abortion attitudes have been somewhat at pains to explain the lack of a gender difference. Some scholars speculate that women as the bearers of children have a special sensitivity to the fate of a fetus and that this sensitivity counteracts their interest-group reasons for wanting abortion to be legal (Jelen & Wilcox, 1992; Hertel & Russell, 1999). Other scholars think the null relationship might reflect false consciousness on the part of women who are isolated from the contemporary women's movement (Figueira, 1989). Still other scholars concede the null relationship but note certain nuanced ways in which gender does matter; they find that women are more likely than men to consider abortion an important issue (Scott & Schuman, 1988), to hold more polarized views than men on the legality of abortion (Ladd & Bowman, 1997), and to favor legal abortion during the first trimester if not more generally (Zigerell & Barker, 2011)

Although these nuanced findings are welcome, they still raise the question of why gender is not related to support for legal abortion generally and why, in particular, women are not more likely than men to favor legal abortion. Perhaps abortion is just one of the many

issue for which expected gender differences in opinion simply do not exist. Still, the lack of a gender difference in abortion attitudes remains puzzling.

Women's levels of support for legalized abortion have been found to vary by whether or not they are fulltime house wives. The lives of house wife may reflect religious beliefs about natural roles for women. Homemaker's economic dependence also makes them the vulnerable should reproduction and other women functions become a choice, but not absolute principle. (Walzer, 1994).

Furthermore, Walzer (1994) asserted that recent studies have not analyzed other sociodemographic location variable by gender, although these variables might exert differential effects, given men's and women's differing paid work and family experiences. In pool samples of men and women, higher educational level has been a consistent a predictor of support for reproductive choice. Walzer stated that marital status is a significant factor in studies of women who obtain abortions, but less predictive in studies of attitude determinants.

The result of Walzer's study has shown that being black, having higher level of education, and living I a nonrural region have positive effect on women's support for legalized abortion. Being a full-time house keeper has a significant negative effect on levels of support for reproductive choice. On the other hand men shows that as was the case in women, having higher level of education and living in nonrural area have positive effects on men's for support legalized abortion. Unlike for women, race does not have a significant effect on men's attitude, and although full-time housekeeping is as significant predictor for women, having a spouse who is a housekeeper is not significant for men.

### **Belief and Abortion**

Tamney & Johnson (1992) studied reasons why people do or do not support legalized abortions, paying close attention to cultural and ideological moderators of abortion attitudes. They reported a belief in privacy, feminism, life begins at conception, social traditionalism, political conservatism, and all life is worth preserving as major factors determining attitudes toward abortion. Participants voiced such attitudes in comments, such as, a person has the right to control their own body, and nature should follow God's rules and should remain undisturbed. Religious beliefs contributed strongly to the belief that all life is sacred. Therefore, many people believe abortion goes against God's rules, devaluing human life.

Religious beliefs play an important role in determining abortion attitudes. No wonder, abortion is one of the largest moral issues of modern society. Accordingly, church influences should play a significant variable in attitudes towards abortion.

Additionally, Petersen (2001) found education and religious rank to be two of the most reliable sociodemographic predictors of abortion attitudes. As a person attends church more frequently, their view of legalized abortion becomes more restrictive. While investigating this theory, Petersen measured church attendance on a nine-point scale that ranged from never to several times per week. Peterson found that frequent church attendance, especially of Catholic and Protestant religions, resulted in a generally conservative stance. A conservative stance is generally associated with social traditionalism, the belief that society should return to its past values and behaviors. In the past, society did not accept abortion. However, Tamney & Johnson (1992) found the relationship between conservatism and anti-abortion beliefs was only significant in the highly educated population. Their findings suggest that underlying characteristics, for example being upper class and political philosophy are the motivators of conservatism and anti-abort belief.

### **Pro-life Argument**

Lee (1996) argued that abortion is wrong because the fetus is identical to an entity that, at some time later in her development. Here come the five steps of Lee's pro-life arguments:

1. You and I are intrinsically valuable (in the sense that makes us subjects of rights).
2. We are intrinsically valuable because of what we are (what we are essentially).
3. What we are, is each a human, physical organism.
4. Human physical organisms come to be at conception. (A biological proposition: a new and distinct human organism is generated by the fusion of a spermatozoon and an oocyte.)
5. Therefore, what is intrinsically valuable (as a subject of rights) comes to be at conception.

Lee asserted that what makes it wrong to kill human now would also have been present in the killing of human when a person existed as adolescents, as toddlers, as infants, but also

when human existed as fetuses or embryos. Furthermore Lee argued that a living thing that performs bodily actions is an organism, a bodily entity. But it is clear in the case of the human individual that it is the same subject that perceives, walks and talks (which are bodily actions), and that understands and makes choices (what everyone, including anyone who denies he is an organism, refers to as 'I'). It must be the same thing that perceives these words on a page, for example, and understands them. Thus, what each of us refers to as 'I' is identically the physical organism which is the subject both of bodily actions such as perceiving and walking, and of non-physical actions, such as understanding and choosing. Therefore, we are essentially physical organisms, rather than consciousness's merely associated with physical organisms. And so we came to be at conception, we once were embryos, then fetuses, then infants, and so on (Patrick Lee, 1996).

### **Pro-choice Argument**

Reiman (2007) argued that human life is only valuable in the way needed (to account for how bad we think that the taking of human life is) once that life is cared about and counted on by the one whose life it is. Since fetuses don't yet have the rational capacity to think about their lives as the continuation of the same self over time, they cannot care about their continuing lives as such. This implies that their lives are not valuable in the way in which we hold human life to be valuable when we hold it much worse to kill a person than to fail to produce another one. Thus the argument leads to the conclusion that abortion is not anything like murder. It is, at worst, as evil as voluntarily refusing to procreate, which is not very evil at all

Furthermore Reiman suggested that the Pro-choice argument from asymmetric value comports with the distinction between being the same thing and being the same identical substance that I set out earlier and, as such, can be stated in the terms of the substance-and-essence language. Persons' refers to the substances we are, not the things we are. And thus persons begin when physical organisms gain the essential trait of rationality, not when the physical organisms come into existence. Fetuses are not rational, not substantially identical to persons, and thus it is not wrong to end fetus's lives for the reasons it is wrong to end the lives of human adults.

Similarly, Ogland & Verona (2001) study has shown that there is an association between religion and attitudes toward of abortion in Brazil. The result has shown that frequently attending in Pentecostal churches demonstrated the strongest opposition to the practice of abortion.

Based on the understanding of religious factors underpinning abortion issues, the earlier studies have shown that there is an association between religion and the practice of abortion. Given to these considerations, the purpose of my study is to investigate the attitude of abortion among Ethiopians immigrants (religious and non- religious men and women) that live in Stockholm.

My review of literature, and the precedent of abortion attitudes research, leads me to put forth the following hypotheses:

*H: 1 There is an attitude difference between men and women towards abortion such that women support Pro-Choice.*

*H: 2 Religious women and men, have a more restrictive view on abortion than secular group*

*H: 3 There is an interaction between religion and gender such that being religious will lead to stronger opposition to the practice of abortion in men than women.*

**Purpose:** The main purpose of the study was to investigate the attitude of religious and non-religious Ethiopian immigrants towards abortion since there was no abort related survey conducted in Sweden.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Sampling**

Sampling procedure has been used in order to find data to the study. I identified people who were convenient to take part in this investigation. The target participants were religious and non-religious (men and women) Ethiopian Immigrants.

## **2.2 Participant**

The total numbers of respondents were (n=40). 21 of the participants were religious and the rest of 19 were non-religious. In both cases 20 were women and 20 were men. The religious group participants affiliate at the protestant church. These participants were contacted their willingness via e-mail and telephone, if they would be agreed to participate the questionnaire has been sent to them. The respondent's ages were between 18 and 55 years.

## **2.3 Material**

The questionnaire was formulated with an introductory text which describes the purpose of the survey, instructions for answering the questions, as well as information about the voluntary participation and confidential handling of the personal information. The questionnaire was divided in two to sections; the first section was demographic questions which the respondents first choose sex, age, religion, and marriage status. The second part was inquiries which measure attitude towards abortion. Questions regarding attitude are measured on a five-point scale (Likert scale) and 3 universal questions at the end. Before the questionnaire was formally circulated, a pilot test was sent to 5 persons from the target group to improve it. The final questionnaires were sent by electronic means with an enclosed link via the web to the participants e-mail addresses. The main parts of the questionnaires were previously used by (Hess & Rueb, 2005).

## **2.4 Analysis**

To analyze the data which was collected from the questionnaire, a composite score of all the Questionnaire items were calculated following (Hess & Rueb, 2005). All pro-life slanted questions (5, 9, 16 and 17) were reversed scaled to reflect a pro-choice slant. The revised scores and the original pro-choice scores for items 6, 7, 8, 10-15 combined to form a person's total pro-choice score ranging from 13- 65. Hence, a high score indicates Pro-Choice beliefs and a low score indicates Pro-Life beliefs. Finally, data were analyzed by a factorial analysis of variance, a 2 (gender: woman, man) x 2(belief; religious; non-religious) ANOVA.

## 2.5 Ethical considerations

The participants were informed that all handling of the data was confidential, informed that the participation was voluntary.

## 3. Result

The ANOVA revealed a main effect of Belief  $F(1, 37) = 47.72, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .57$ , indicating that non-religious participants were more pro-choice ( $M = 4.0, SD = 0.52$ ) compared to religious ( $M = 2.35, SD = 0.91$ ) participants confirming H2. There was no main effect of Gender and no Gender - Belief interaction (Table 1 and 2). Hence, H1 and H3 received no support.

**Table 1:** SPSS output, the Mean of religious and non-religious Men and Women attitudes towards abortion

Gender	Belief	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Female	No	4,00	,52	9
	Yes	2,35	,91	11
Male	No	3,59	,65	10
	Yes	2,10	,68	10
Total	No	3,79	,61	19
	Yes	2,23	,78	21

**Table 2:** Factorial analysis of variance between two subjects Gender (Female and Male) and Belief (religious and non-religious).

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Gender		1	1,10	2,14	,152	,056
Belief		1	24,44	47,72	,000	,570
Gender * Belief		1,07	0.67	,130	,721	,004
Error		36,5				

#### 4. Discussion

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the attitude of religious and non-religious Ethiopian immigrants towards abortion since there was no abort related survey conducted in Sweden. The hypothesis were H.1, There is an attitude difference between men and women towards abortion such that women support Pro-Choice, H.2 Religious women and men have a more restrictive view on abortion than secular group, and H.3 There is an interaction between religion and gender such that being religious will lead to stronger opposition to the practice of abortion in men than women.

Firstly, the finding of the study has shown that there was no support to attitude difference between female and male towards abortion, not confirming the previous study (Walzer, 1994). One of the reasons why the result didn't show as I have hypothesized was, my study did not consider some vital gender predictors. The result of Walzer's study has shown that being black, having higher level of education, and living In a nonrural region have positive effect on women's support for legalized abortion, On the other hand men shows that as was the case in women, having higher level of education and living in nonrural area have positive effects on men's for support legalized abortion. May be I need to build a measurement (questionaries') which embrace level of education. The weakness of my method was I didn't use all the measurements (questionaries') which used by (Hess & Rueb, 2005).

Secondly, the finding of the survey has indicated that most of religious people were against to the practice of Abortion, which supported my second hypothesis. The result was consistent with the earlier study (Tamney & Johnson, 1992). Tamnely argued that religious beliefs contributed strongly to the belief that all life is sacred. Therefore, many people believe abortion goes against God's rules, devaluing human life further he suggested that religious beliefs play an important role in determining abortion attitudes. Additionally, the result was agreed with (Petersen, 2001) survey, education and religious rank to be two of the most reliable sociodemographic predictors of abortion attitudes. As a person attends church more frequently, their view of legalized abortion becomes more restrictive.

The study has shown that there is a positive correlation between the dependent variables Pro-life (Abortion is Illegal) and Life begins at conception  $0.617^{**}$  which agreed with the argument of (Lee, 1996). One of the major factors to their attitude towards abortion was their understanding on when Life Begins. (Table 4), revealed that there is a positive significant correlation between Abortion is Illegal (Pro-life) and Abortion is Murder  $395^*$  (Table 5) Indicated that there is a significant negative correlation between variables “Life begins at birth” and “Abortion is Murder” -,  $361^*$  this indicated that religious people who agreed life begins at conception believe that fetus should be preserved because they believe that the practice of abortion is killing the child which agreed with (Lee, 1996).

Finally, the result of this study showed that there was no significant interaction between Gender and belief which didn't support my third hypothesis. The result didn't support the previous study (Barkan, 2014). Barkan argued that gender is one of the possible correlates of abortion attitudes that have been investigated. One of the reasons in which my result is inconsistent with the previous study was, may be the numbers of participants in this study were very few and at same time the study was focused only in one ethnic group. So that it needs a new investigation which include the above mentioned variables.

**Table 3.** SPSS output the means of key questions

Belief		life begins at conception	life begins at birth	abortion is legal	abortion is illegal	Abortion is murder	Abortion is morally wrong
No	Mean	2,3158	3,6316	2,7368	1,3158	2,0526	2,2105
	% of Total Sum	30,8%	61,6%	58,4%	27,2%	32,8%	32,6%
Yes	Mean	4,7143	2,0476	1,7619	3,1905	3,8095	4,1429
	% of Total Sum	69,2%	38,4%	41,6%	72,8%	67,2%	67,4%
Total	Mean	3,5750	2,8000	2,2250	2,3000	2,9750	3,2250
	% of Total Sum	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

**Table 4.** SPSS output Correlations of key questions

		Life begins at Conception	Life begins at Birth	Abortion is Legal	Abortion is Murder	Abortion is Illegal	Abortion is Legal if the mother life is at risk
Life begins at Conception	Pearson Correlation	1	-,560**	-,254	,395*	,617**	-,042
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000	,114	,012	,000	,799
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40
Life begins at Birth	Pearson Correlation	-,560**	1	-,002	-,361*	-,300	,159
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,990	,022	,060	,327
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40
Abortion is Legal	Pearson Correlation	-,254	-,002	1	-,450**	-,506**	,439**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,114	,990		,004	,001	,005
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40
Abortion is Murder	Pearson Correlation	,395*	-,361*	-,450**	1	,483**	-,536**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,012	,022	,004		,002	,000
	N	40	40	40	41	40	41
Abortion is Illegal	Pearson Correlation	,617**	-,300	-,506**	,483**	1	-,275
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,060	,001	,002		,086
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40
Abortion is Legal if the mother life is at risk	Pearson Correlation	-,042	,159	,439**	-,536**	-,275	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,799	,327	,005	,000	,086	
	N	40	40	40	41	40	41

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## **Conclusion:**

This study proposed that there is an attitude difference between men and women such that women support Pro-choice, and the finding revealed that there is no attitude difference between women and men towards abortion, which does not support the previous study (Walzer, 1994). Furthermore, this study hypothesized that religious women and men have a more restrictive view on abortion than secular group, and the result indicated that most of religious people were against to the practice of Abortion, which supported my second hypothesis, and was consistent with the earlier study (Tamney & Johnson, 1992). Finally, this study proposed that there is an interaction between religion and gender such that being religious will lead to stronger opposition to the practice of abortion in men than women, and the result showed that there was no significant interaction between Gender and belief which didn't support the previous study (Barkan, 2014).

## **5. Future research**

The limitation of this study could lead to ideas for the future research since the participants were few. A sample from different religious group, socioeconomic status, political, education level and cultural involvement would have been benefited to this investigation.

## **Acknowledgement**

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## 7. Appendix

*Here comes the questionnaire which measures the attitude of religious people towards abortion*

\*Required

### 1. Gender\*Obligatory

- Male
- Female

### 2. Age

### 3. Marital status \*

- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Not married

### 4. Are you the member of any religious group?

Yes

No

1= Strongly Disagree 2= disagree 3= Neutral 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

**5. Life begins at conception\***

1 2 3 4 5  
Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

**6. Life Begins at birth\***

1 2 3 4 5  
Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

**7. I might abort a fetus I did not intend to create\***

1 2 3 4 5  
Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

**8. Abortion should be legal in all situations\***

1 2 3 4 5  
Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

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**9. Abortion should be illegal in all situations\***

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

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**10. Abortion should be legal in the cases of rape or incest\***

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

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**11. Abortion should be legal if the fetus has a birth defect\***

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

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**12. Abortion should be legal if the mother's life or long-term health is at risk \***

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

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**13. Abortion should be legal if the parents cannot afford the baby\***

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

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**14. Abortion should be legal if the parents do not want that particular sex of the child\***

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

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**15. Abortion should be legal if the parents do not want the child\***

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1 2 3 4 5

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Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

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**16. Abortion is morally wrong\***

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1 2 3 4 5

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Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

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**17. Abortion is Murder\***

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1 2 3 4 5

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Strongly Disagree      Strongly Agree

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