

# ABORTION

## Whose Choice?

### Background Notes for Teachers

This video puts the case for safe, legal abortion. Education For Choice believes that a woman faced with an unwanted pregnancy should have the right to choose an abortion if that is what she decides is the best solution at that time in her life. These and other issues are dealt with in our Teaching Pack on Abortion, which contains more detailed information, activities and case studies.

#### How to Use the Video

- The video is 21 minutes long and accompanied by these notes for teachers and a set of notes for students, including useful contact addresses.
- The video can either be shown in its entirety or shown in the sections set out below, which are clearly marked in the video. This may depend on your own preferred approach or on the particular class involved.
- These teachers' notes pick out the main themes to help you prepare in advance and indicate which sections of the accompanying factsheet provide additional information.
- The students' notes pick out the main facts, arguments and statistics from the video. You may wish to photocopy and distribute these to students or to encourage them to take their own notes.

#### Video Summary

The video seeks to examine different aspects of the abortion issue, with the aim of enabling students to make up their own minds on what is right for them. It includes:

- Part 1 **Introduction and Cary's Story** – case study of an illegal abortion
- Part 2 **Around The World** – a comparison of abortion law and provision in different countries
- Part 3 **Here And Now and Lisa's Story** – current law and provision in Britain
- Part 4 **A Question Of Conscience and Anya's Story** – religious opinion, the pro-choice view and a case study of why a young woman chose abortion

**Part 1 – Introduction and Cary's Story:** A young woman uses a pregnancy kit to discover that she is pregnant. We are told that an estimated one million women get pregnant every day around the world, half of these women did not intend to get pregnant, and about one quarter of all pregnancies end in abortion (source: World Health Organisation). In the first case study, Cary describes how she had an illegal abortion in the 60s when she was a student.

*You may wish to point out that in Britain today abortion is very safe. More women die as a result of pregnancy than due to abortion complications – about 40 women die every year while pregnant or giving birth – only one of these deaths is due to abortion. See enclosed Abortion Factsheet (BACKGROUND, METHODS and SAFETY sections)*

**Part 2 – Around the World:** This section explains that although abortion is still illegal in many parts of the world, this does not prevent abortion but simply makes it more dangerous. Marge Berer, an international reproductive rights expert, explains that making abortion legal does make it safer and in countries such as the Netherlands, where there is good sex education and contraceptive availability, abortion rates tend to be low even though it is available on request in the first three months of pregnancy. In most countries in Africa abortion is illegal but an estimated 3,000,000 abortions take place there every year ie 10,000 per day; at least 100,000 women die every year around the world as a result of illegal abortions, whilst many more women are injured or become infertile; abortion is illegal in Ireland and at least 6,000 Irish women have to travel to Britain to seek an abortion (sources: OPCS, World Health Organisation)

*See enclosed Abortion factsheet (SAFETY section)*



### Part 3 – Here And Now and Lisa's Story:

A gynaecologist, David Paintin, and a GP, Lucia Grun, comment on the British law on abortion. According to the 1967 Abortion Act, abortion is illegal unless there is a risk to the woman's life, a risk of her suffering permanent injury, or a risk of serious fetal abnormality. Up to 24 weeks, abortion may also be allowed if there is risk to a woman's physical or mental health or to that of her existing children. Legal abortions must be performed by a registered medical practitioner, performed in an approved place and approved by 2 doctors. In the second case study, Lisa explains how she became pregnant while using the Pill and at the end of a relationship. She could not obtain an NHS abortion until she was 16 weeks pregnant.

*You may wish to explain that it is up to individual hospitals and health authorities to set the rules on which abortions they will perform. Some hospitals will not carry out abortions after 12 weeks into the pregnancy, even though the law allows abortion up to 24 weeks.*

Debbie Morrissey, of Marie Stopes International, talks about counselling women who are deciding whether or not to have an abortion. Debbie explains that although it is preferable if the woman's partner agrees with her decision, ultimately it is the woman who must decide.

*See enclosed Abortion factsheet (LAW section) and the Statistics Sheet.*

### Part 4 – A Question Of Conscience and Anya's Story:

This section explains how people who are anti-abortion are trying to change the law to make abortion completely illegal again. However, although the leaders of many religions do not sanction abortion, most people, regardless of religion, believe it is up to the woman to choose whether or not she continues with her pregnancy. A Marplan Poll asked "Should a woman have to the right to choose an abortion in the first few months of pregnancy?". The percentage who said yes, divided according to religious belief, were as follows: Church of England 86%, Catholic 67%, Non-Christian 74%, Non-religious 85%. Ruth Garside, a pro-choice campaigner, explains why she feels it is important to campaign for a woman's right to choose and why abortion should be available on request. Anya describes how she became pregnant at the age of 20. She explains how she and her boyfriend discussed whether or not to continue the pregnancy and why she chose abortion. She believes that she was the only person who could – or should – have made this decision.

*The video finishes by pointing out that no method of contraception is 100% effective and that four out of ten women in Britain will have an abortion in their lifetime. See enclosed Abortion factsheet (RELIGION, ETHICS, OPINION, WHO and WHY sections)*

### Follow-up questions

#### Part 1

- Why do you think so many women become pregnant when they don't want to?
- How would you feel if the government of this country passed a law making abortion illegal? What do you think the effects of this change would be?

#### Part 2

- Why do women risk imprisonment, their health and lives by having illegal or unsafe abortions?
- Do you think better sex education and contraception (as in the Netherlands) would help reduce unwanted pregnancies in Great Britain? Why?
- How does access to safe, legal abortion improve women's health?

#### Part 3

- Why do you think an early decision on whether or not to have an abortion is important?
- Who do you think should decide whether a woman can have an abortion – her or her doctor?
- Do you think women should be able to obtain an abortion on the NHS?

#### Part 4

- If you belong to a particular religion, do you agree with its teaching on abortion?
- Should people with strong moral objections to abortion be allowed to influence abortion law?
- Some people who are anti-abortion have resorted to intimidation, violence and even the murder of doctors. Do you think this is justified?
- The law in Britain does not allow women to decide for themselves about abortion. Should the law be changed?
- Think about the three different women in the video. Why did each of them decide to have an abortion? How were their experiences different? Do you think any of them shows signs of regretting her decision?
- What other reasons might women have for choosing an abortion?

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## The need for abortion on request

is the woman herself whose health and well-being are affected by pregnancy.

Women are trustworthy, responsible people who are capable of making valid judgements for themselves on moral issues.

However, the current law does not give women the right to choose.

The power rests with doctors, some of whom base their decisions on their own prejudices.

By requiring two doctors to certify that a woman has legal grounds for an abortion, the law leads to delays and late abortions.

Most women request an abortion very early in their pregnancy and almost 90% of abortions are carried out within the first 12 weeks. However, like Lisa, a considerable number of women face delay or refusal when they try to obtain an abortion within the National Health Service. Some may go on to have the baby but most turn in desperation to the private sector and often have an abortion later on in their pregnancy when the emotional distress and risk of physical complications are greater.

**No method of contraception is 100% effective**

**Most women who seek abortions were using some form of contraception at the time they became pregnant**

**About 4 out of 10 women in Britain will have an abortion in their lifetime**

## Part 4 – A Question of Conscience and Anya's Story

A Marplan opinion poll asked: "Should a woman have the right to choose an abortion in the first few months of pregnancy?" This bar chart shows the percentage of people who said "yes" according to their religion.

So, although the leaders of many religions do not agree with abortion, most people feel it is up to the woman to decide for herself.

**Church of England (86%)**

**Catholic (67%)**

**Non-Christian (74%)**

**Non-religious (85%)**

## The need for legal abortion

Because legal abortion is more likely to be safe and available to every woman who needs it.

Because illegal abortion kills at least 100,000 women every year.

Because illegal abortion also causes permanent injury and infertility.

Because making abortion illegal affects mainly poor women – abortion is usually available to those who can afford to pay, no matter what the law may say.

Because lack of legal abortion also results in abandonment of babies and infanticide by women who have been forced to continue with an unwanted pregnancy.

## Glossary (words that may need an explanation)

Cervix	the opening of the womb
D & C	an operation which scrapes out the contents of the womb
Placenta	provides nourishment to the fetus – attached to the wall of the womb
Ambivalent	unsure
Sanction	allow

**EDUCATION FOR CHOICE** believes that abortion is morally and medically acceptable. We believe that a woman faced with an unwanted pregnancy should have the right to choose an abortion if that is what she decides is the best solution at that time in her life. By providing project material on unwanted pregnancy and abortion, we aim to promote informed discussion, enabling students to make up their own minds on this issue.

## Practical advice is available from:

British Pregnancy Advisory Service (abortion)  
Helpline: 0345 304030  
Brook Advisory Centres (contraception & abortion advice)  
Tel: 0171-713 9000 (England & Wales)  
Tel: 0131-229 3596 (Scotland)  
Tel: 01232 328866 (N. Ireland)  
Family Planning Association (contraception)  
Tel: 0171-837 4044 (Britain)  
Tel: 01232 325488 (N. Ireland)  
Marie Stopes International (contraception & abortion)  
Helpline: 0800 716 390  
Ulster Pregnancy Advisory Association (abortion)  
Tel: 01232 381345

## Campaigning groups you can join

Abortion Law Reform Association, 11-13 Charlotte St,  
London W1P 1HD. Tel: 0171-637 7264  
National Abortion Campaign, 18 Ashwin St, London  
E8 3DL. Tel: 0171-923 4976

Education for Choice,  
11-13 Charlotte Street  
London W1P 1HD  
Tel/Fax: 0171 580 4672

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## Whose Choice?

## Background Notes for Students

Education For Choice believes that a woman faced with an unwanted pregnancy should have the right to choose an abortion if that is what she decides is the best solution at that time in her life. For that reason, we describe ourselves and this video as pro-choice.

These notes explain what you will see in the video, list the facts and figures and explain some of the terms used.

### Part 1 - Introduction and Cary's Story

It is estimated that:

- one million women become pregnant every day around the world
- half of these women did not intend to become pregnant
- one quarter of all pregnancies end in abortion

#### Before 1967

Abortion was illegal in this country and often dangerous

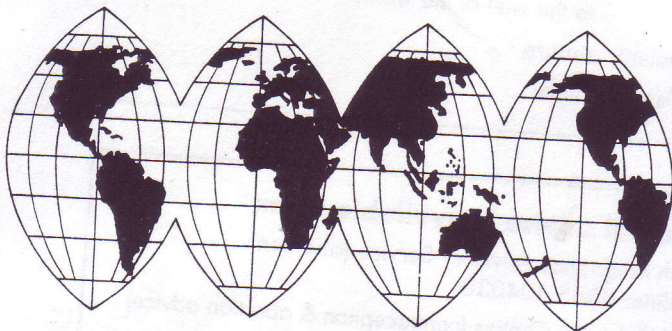
An estimated 100,000 illegal abortions took place every year

Women like Cary risked their health and even their lives rather than continue with an unwanted pregnancy

75 women died every year from illegal abortion

### Part 2 - Around the World

Where it is illegal, this does not stop abortions taking place. It simply makes them dangerous. Making abortion legal does not increase the number of abortions but it does make them safer because they are more likely to be carried out by qualified medical practitioners.



In Africa abortion is illegal in most countries, but an estimated 3,000,000 abortions take place there every year ie 10,000 per day.

An estimated 100,000 women die every year around the world as a result of illegal abortions and many more are injured or become infertile.

Every year 6,000 women travel to Britain from Ireland (where abortion is illegal).

The Netherlands allows abortion on request in the first three months of pregnancy. It also provides excellent sex education and contraception is readily available, resulting in one of the lowest abortion rates in the world.

### Part 3 - Here And Now and Lisa's Story

#### The British Law on Abortion

#### Abortion is illegal unless:

- There is risk to the woman's life
- There is risk of her suffering permanent injury
- There is risk of serious fetal abnormality

#### Up to 24 weeks, abortion may also be allowed if:

- There is risk to a woman's physical or mental health
- There is risk to the physical or mental well-being of her existing children

#### Legal abortions must be:

- Approved by two doctors
- Performed by a registered medical practitioner
- Performed in an approved place