

**HOW DO RELIGIOUS VIEWS IMPACT  
ABORTION VIEWS?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of what women in their early 20's are thinking about abortion and the different factors that influence a woman having an abortion. Also, this study is looking for a correlation between whether or not these women's religious views are affecting their views on abortion. Another factor we are looking for in this study is how those women who have had abortions feel about abortion and how that personally affected their lives. To find answers to these components, this study surveys 30 women at a university to find out how their religious views affect their views on abortion. With this research we find that religious views do not necessarily impact abortion view, but commitment to those religious views does. Also, we see that women who have had abortions, have been affected by some kind of emotional distress. We also see that religious views do affect these women's views of the different things that they would come into dealing with if they were in the position to have an abortion.*

## **HOW DO RELIGIOUS VIEWS IMPACT ABORTION VIEWS?**

Attitudes towards abortion are very controversial among today's literature. There are many different approaches to the study on what impacts one's decisions regarding abortion. There always seems to be a constant relationship between religious tendencies and abortion views. Research shows that there is a difference in views of abortion depending on the type of abortion. It seems that a person who identifies themselves as more associated with religious groups and being raised religiously come to be more opposing to abortion. On the other hand, people who don't identify with a religious background and identify within a religious group are more liberal with their views on abortion.

## **ABORTION IN RELATION TO RELIGIOUS GROUPS**

In a study by Hoffman and Johnson, evidence was found that Evangelicals and other groups have a widening gap that has developed significantly concerning abortions for elective reasons. Evangelicals have become stricter on their views of abortion for traumatic reasons when it was expected to see less opposition as well, but in a less definitive manner. While Catholics have steadily opposed elective abortions, Evangelicals have become more opposing to abortion for this reason (Hoffmann and Johnson 2005). Hoffmann and Johnson seem to believe that this rise in opposition may be due to the Supreme Court's decision to not change the pronouncement of Roe v. Wade among other cultural factors. Abortion seems to be something that brings togetherness to steadily religious people.

Research also shows that parental socialization within religious groups affects a person's moral attitudes in a conservative way. The fact of belonging to the group is not a determining

agent, but regular church attendance of a parent does have an effect. However, even stronger than the parent's socialization is the socialization habits of the person in question. If the person has close ties within regular church attendance, this is an even stronger force (Scheepers, Te Grotenhuis, and Van Der Silk 2002). Also in moral attitudes, education is a large factor. There is a correlation between higher education and more liberal views, and in contrast there is a correlation between less education and more conservative moral views.

Authors Cochran, Chamlin, Beeghley, Harnden, and Blackwell (1996) also found proof of religious groups being influential on moral views, particularly regarding abortion, in relation to reference group theory. Leaders within these religious groups serve as significant others. According to reference group theory, religion meets all the criteria to be a very influential reference group. The more influential the reference group, the greater affect it has on your actions. The norms and roles within these religious groups unite the members to the group's beliefs. This also ties into their application of socialization theory to religious groups. When you come into interaction with groups, you also learn to have the same emphasis on similar statuses among group members, agreement on values, and defining values among other aspects (Cochran et al 1996). In applying socialization theory it is found that interaction with people close to someone (i.e. Primary groups and significant others) are more influential on a person than informal associations. The results of these studies also confirmed that being affiliated with a religious group, including church attendance and strength of religious identity, there is a great effect on abortion views. Strong religious members are most likely to oppose legalized abortion. Another interesting find in this study is that it appears that one's spouse' religious affiliation is very much related to decisions on elective abortions, but seems to hold no significance on views of traumatic abortions.

A study was conducted by Laurent Begue (2001) to determine how views of abortion differed depending on variations of why the abortion decision was being made. This study, using Catholics specifically, found that the individual attitudes were very much affected by the social identity of the person evaluating a person's decision to have an abortion. This study found that when the person having the elective abortion was constrained by financial or other obligations, it was found more permissible than an elective of the abortion just for the sake of aborting. The evaluators, when faced with a situation where the person having an abortion was also identified as a Catholic was judged much harsher than one who was not Catholic (Begue 2001).

Religious groups are a fundamental part of one's view on abortion. All this research shows that the more you can identify with religious others close to you and your religious significant others, the more likely you are to be opposed to abortion. However, within this, the more dedicated to these religious groups you are, the greater the odds of opposition to abortion will be. There are also distinct differences in views on traumatic abortions in contrast to elective abortions. There is less research done on the distinction between these two different types and my research will further investigate feeling of traumatic verses elective views on abortion within religious and non religious groups. Also, these studies lacked information on these people's actual knowledge of abortion to see how that relates to views on abortion. My research will also delve into that aspect on abortion attitudes especially among college students when their beliefs are being altered and are at the common age of when abortion procedures occur.

## **METHOD**

### **Sample**

My sample consisted of thirty female college students from Tennessee Tech University from various departments. Five of my respondents were not of what I call “standard” college student age (19 years – 24 years), but were older. 20 of the 30 respondents claimed to be Protestant as their religious classification while the other 10 were very scattered. In most cases, when a respondent claimed they were very committed to their religious doctrine, it did affect their views on abortion with only a few outliers.

### **Measures**

In my research, I was looking to see how college aged women applied their religious views to their views on abortion. Also, I wanted to see how their knowledge of and experience with abortion affected these things. My research addressed 25 different items concerning these subjects. Depending on whether the respondent has had an abortion or not affected the number of items they responded to in the questionnaire. “Abortion views” served as my main dependent variable. Independent variables were filtered beginning by an overall variable of “religious view.” This variable was defined as the respondent’s personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practice. From here, I was also concerned with their “commitment to religious doctrine.” This variable will help me understand how the respondent personally feels about their commitment to the religious view they specified. I also aimed to find out how different aspects of abortion affected their abortion views. For example, I found many differing views concerning “the father’s input on abortion” and “whether respondent believes life begins at conception” and “if the respondent believes abortion after the first trimester is acceptable to them or not.” I then compared the results of these variables with each other to see if there were any interesting trends overlapping or not. I also was looking for information about how these variables affected the political idea of “woman’s choice.” By this, I mean if the above

variables had any influence on whether or not the respondents believed that abortion is all about a woman's choice of what to do with her body.

### **Procedures**

I first conducted three semi-structured interviews, and these interviews strongly guided me in knowing what I wanted to include in items on my questionnaire. I then constructed a questionnaire that I distributed to random women across a college campus. I received all my questionnaires back with almost all questions answered. It was a non-random sample as I targeted women who were in convenient placement for me to distribute my questionnaires. My questionnaire started with some general information questions concerning basic demographics and basic religious view and abortion view questions. I then divided my questionnaire into a section for women who had had an abortion to fill out and a separate section for women who had not had an abortion to fill out.

### **FINDINGS**

In my findings it is shown how my respondents varied in their responses concerning their abortion views and how their religious views affect this. In Table 1 you will see a comparison between how the respondents' categorized their commitment to their religious doctrine in contrast with if they believe their religious views affect their abortion views. Table 2 looks at how respondents classify their religious commitment again, but this time I will compare it to how strongly those respondents believe abortion to be all about a woman's choice. Table 3 will analyze respondents' political views in comparison to how they feel about the father's input on abortion. The final Table (Table 4) will look at those respondent's who have had abortions and the immediate facts that this action had on their lives.

In Table 1, you can see a comparison of a committed religious person thinks about it influencing their views on abortion. These results were distributed as I would expect as most people who said they were very committed to their religious doctrine would also say those religious views affected their views on abortion. The opposite is true as most people who said they were not very committed to their religious views did not factor religious views into their views on abortion.

**Table 1: Commitment to religious doctrine by If the respondent thinks their religious views influence their abortion views**

		If the respondent thinks their religious views influence their abortion views					Total		
		SA	A	D	SD	NA			
Commitment to religious doctrine	SA	Count	7	3	2	2	0	14	
		% of Total	23.3%	10.0%	6.7%	6.7%	.0%	46.7%	
	A	Count	1	4	2	1	1	9	
		% of Total	3.3%	13.3%	6.7%	3.3%	3.3%	30.0%	
	D	Count	0	0	2	0	0	2	
		% of Total	.0%	.0%	6.7%	.0%	.0%	6.7%	
	SD	Count	0	0	1	4	0	5	
		% of Total	.0%	.0%	3.3%	13.3%	.0%	16.7%	
	Total		Count	8	7	7	7	1	30
			% of Total	26.7%	23.3%	23.3%	23.3%	3.3%	100.0%

In contrast to Table 1, Table 2 presents findings indicating that while those who strongly agreed that being committed to their religious view did affect their abortion views, the number of people who strongly agreed abortion was all about a woman’s choice was such a close number to those respondents who said they strongly disagreed about woman’s choice. 36% of respondents that strongly agreed that they were very committed to their religious doctrine also strongly

agreed that abortion was all about a woman's choice. This can be contrasted with the slight difference in the women who strongly agreed that they were very committed to their religious doctrine and strongly disagreed that abortion is all about a woman's choice being 43%.

**Table 2: Commitment to religious doctrine by Whether respondent believes abortion is all about a woman's choice**

			Whether respondent believes abortion is all about a woman's choice					Total
			SA	A	D	SD	NA	
			Commitment to religious doctrine	SA	Count	5	2	
		% of Total	16.7%	6.7%	3.3%	20.0%	.0%	46.7%
	A	Count	2	4	2	0	1	9
		% of Total	6.7%	13.3%	6.7%	.0%	3.3%	30.0%
	D	Count	1	1	0	0	0	2
		% of Total	3.3%	3.3%	.0%	.0%	.0%	6.7%
	SD	Count	5	0	0	0	0	5
		% of Total	16.7%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	16.7%
Total		Count	13	7	3	6	1	30
		% of Total	43.3%	23.3%	10.0%	20.0%	3.3%	100.0%

Table 3 shows 12 out of 29 respondents' indicated that they did not believe the father's input to be considered important. We see 10% of the total surveyed who claimed a Liberal political ideology say that the father's input was not important and we see 17% of the total surveyed who claimed a Conservative political ideology claim that the father's input was not important. In contrast, there were 10% of the total surveyed who claimed a Liberal political ideology who agreed that the father's input was important and 24% of those who classified themselves with a Conservative political ideology agreed that the father's input was important.

Of the 6 Liberal respondents who also replied to the question of the father's input being important, 3 responded that the father's input was important while 3 also disagreed that the father's input was important. This equality was also seen among people who classified themselves politically as Moderate. 4 of these respondents agreed that the father's input was important while 4 Moderate respondents disagreed that the father's input was important. The different results are seen in the Conservative group. Out of the 12 Conservative respondents, 7 agreed that the father's input was important while only 5 disagreed that the father's input was important. Therefore we can conclude that Conservatives are more likely to value the father's input.

<b>Table 3: Political Ideology of respondent by If father's input is considered important</b>								
			If father's input is considered important					Total
			SA	A	D	SD	No Answer	
Political Ideology of respondent	Liberal	Count	0	3	0	3	1	7
		% of Total	.0%	10.0%	.0%	10.0%	3.3%	23.3%
	Moderate	Count	2	2	3	1	0	8
		% of Total	6.7%	6.7%	10.0%	3.3%	.0%	26.7%
	Conservative	Count	3	4	1	4	0	12
		% of Total	10.0%	13.3%	3.3%	13.3%	.0%	40.0%
	Other	Count	1	2	0	0	0	3
		% of Total	3.3%	6.7%	.0%	.0%	.0%	10.0%
Total		Count	6	11	4	8	1	30
		% of Total	20.0%	36.7%	13.3%	26.7%	3.3%	100.0%

While I only had 2 respondents admit that they had had an abortion, both respondents experienced some emotional trauma. This also matched the results of my interviews as my interviewees who had had abortions had experienced some kind of emotional distress. (Table 4)

The “ALL” category in Table 4 includes: relief, depression, shame or guilt, numbness/nothing, and sadness/grief.

<b>Table 4: How respondent felt immediately after the abortion by If respondent has had an abortion or not</b>					
			If respondent has had an abortion or not		Total
			yes	no	
How respondent felt immediately after the abortion	depression	Count	1	0	1
		% of Total	3.3%	.0%	3.3%
	Does Not Apply	Count	0	28	28
		% of Total	.0%	93.3%	93.3%
	ALL except other	Count	1	0	1
		% of Total	3.3%	.0%	3.3%
Total		Count	2	28	30
		% of Total	6.7%	93.3%	100.0%

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This research was very helpful in showing ways to better understand what this age of women are thinking about abortion and what factors go into influencing their views on abortion. My research confirmed previous literature that stated the more dedicated one is believed to be to their religious views, the more conservative views they will have about their views on abortion. I think a more in depth analysis of the factors I have researched would prove to have very interesting correlations with one another as this is such a prevalent issue in today's society. This study has reinforced the information from past literature also by showing that religious views do in fact affect views on abortion in a conservative manner as far as political views are concerned. More research should be done to find out what is influencing a women's view of "the father's input." I think it is important to know why this factor is devalued and what their basis is for

believing that. Also, I wonder if I would have had more respondents of the same general age, but not college students, if there would have been more respondents who had had abortions. Then we could find more out about if education level influences abortion views. And, if one's education is affected by their domestic financial circumstances does that also correlate with their views and experience with abortion.

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