

## LIFE ISSUES FORUM

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### Women and Abortion

By Gail Quinn

A story in the March 6 issue of *Newsweek*, "Reality Check for 'Roe,'" reports that "anecdotal evidence is growing" that women have moral qualms about abortion. One New York abortion clinic operator says her patients actually talk of "babies" and "killing". She thought they were picking up language from protestors outside the clinic, but when she "started really tuning in" to her patients, she realized: "She really feels that way." An abortion clinic operator in Pittsburgh admits that "patients are not coming to, quote, 'exercise their constitutional rights.' They want to talk about prayer and forgiveness."

A new development? Actually, anecdotal evidence has long existed. But as more women speak publicly--about their moral qualms with abortion, and about the short- and long-term harm abortion has caused them--these concerns have become harder to dismiss or ignore.

As a society, we have spent more than three decades with our heads in the sand concerning abortion's impact on women. Thirty-three years ago the U.S. Supreme Court framed the issue as a matter of doctor-patient privacy (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973); and later as something that must be available because women had come to order their lives around its availability (*Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 1992).

Is abortion critical to women? Not according to a 2003 national poll by the Center for Gender Equality, in which only 30% of women said abortion should be generally available. When asked to rank 12 issues in order of importance to the women's movement, women ranked "Keeping abortion legal" next to last.

We have also turned a blind eye to the increasingly well-documented harm that abortion has caused many women. In *McCorvey v. Hill*, where federal courts have been asked to revisit the U.S. Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* ruling, almost 1000 women filed affidavits attesting to long-term emotional damage from their abortion experience. In the same case, scientific studies were filed indicating that "women may be affected emotionally and physically for years afterward and may be more prone to engage in high-risk, self-destructive conduct as a result of having had abortions" (concurring opinion by Judge Edith Jones).

"In sum," said Judge Jones, "if courts were to delve into the facts underlying *Roe's* balancing scheme with present-day knowledge, they might conclude that the woman's 'choice' is far more risky and less beneficial...than the *Roe* Court knew."

"Hard and social science will of course progress even though the Supreme Court averts its eyes," notes Judge Jones. "That the Court's constitutional decisionmaking leaves our nation in a position of willful blindness to evolving knowledge," she points out, "should trouble any dispassionate observer."

Strong words from a smart lady. Abortion's negative impact on women needs to be examined in the light of day.

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