

Abigail Turner, PhD  
Interested Party Testimony  
Senate Bill 23  
Ohio Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee

Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman and Ranking Member Antonio and Members of the Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee.

My name is Abigail Turner. I have a PhD in epidemiology from the University of North Carolina, and I am an Associate Professor of Medicine at Ohio State University. I conduct research on the clinical, biological, and behavioral factors associated with good sexual and reproductive health among people in Ohio and around the world. My statement reflects my views as a private citizen. I am not representing Ohio State or any other organization.

Today I will summarize the scholarship on abortion patients' "decisional certainty" – that is, how confident women are about their decisions to obtain an abortion, and what their retrospective feelings are in the days, months and years following the procedure. These points are distilled from social science research published in peer-reviewed journals.

The two main points I will cover are:

1. The overwhelming majority of women are certain about their decision at the time of procedure;
2. The overwhelming majority of abortion patients retrospectively believe that their decision was the right one for them; and

**Point 1: The overwhelming majority of women are certain about their decision at the time of the procedure.**

The majority of women are certain of their decision when they present for abortion care,<sup>1</sup> and most studies describe relief as the prevailing emotion among those who have obtained abortion.<sup>2</sup> Women do report a range of emotions at the time of or immediately after their abortions: in one study, over half

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<sup>1</sup> Kumar, U. et al. (2004) Decision making and referral prior to abortion: a qualitative study of women's experiences. *J Fam Plann Reprod Health Care* 30:51-54. Goenee, M.S. et al. (2014) Decision-making concerning unwanted pregnancy in general practice *J Fam Pract* 31:564-570. Gatter, M. et al. (2014) Relationship between ultrasound viewing and proceeding to abortion. *Obstet Gynecol* 123:81-87. Cameron, S.T. and Glasier A. (2013) Identifying women in need of further discussion about the decision to have an abortion and eventual outcome *Contraception* 88:128-132. Foster, DG et al. (2012) Attitudes and decision making among women seeking abortions at one U.S. clinic. *Perspect Sex Reprod Health* 44:117-124. Roberts S. et al. (2017) Do 72-Hour Waiting Periods and Two-Visit Requirements for Abortion Affect Women's Certainty? A Prospective Cohort Study. *Womens Health Issues*. (4):400-406.

<sup>2</sup> Rocca C.H. et al. (2013) Women's emotions one week after receiving or being denied an abortion in the United States. *Perspect Sex Reprod Health*. 45(3):122–31. Broen A.N. et al. (2004) Psychological impact on women of miscarriage versus induced abortion: a 2-year follow-up study. *Psychosom Med*. 66(2):265–71. Kero A, Hogberg U, Lalos AS. Wellbeing and mental growth—long-term effects of legal abortion. *Soc Sci Med*. 2004;58(12):2559–69. Major B, Cozzarelli C, Cooper ML, Zubek JM, Richards C, Wilhite M, et al. Psychological responses of women after first-trimester abortion. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*. 2000;57(8):777–84. Lazarus A. Psychiatric sequelae of legalized elective first trimester abortion. *J Psychosom Obstet Gynaecol*. 1985;4(3):141–50.

reported that their decision was either somewhat or very difficult.<sup>3</sup> Complex feelings are a normal part of major life decisions.<sup>4,5</sup> Some women may also be distressed about factors that may be related to the reason for the abortion, such as relationship dissolution. Others worry about social disapproval.<sup>6</sup> Importantly, people who are denied an abortion also have negative emotions when they are turned away. Studies that interview women years after their abortions also show that most women feel positive emotions and satisfaction about their abortion decision.<sup>7</sup>

**However, emotional state is distinct from decisional certainty. Women may have strong feelings about their abortion, but they are not confused about their decision.** For example, some women feel sadness about their abortion, and at the same time they do not regret it.<sup>8</sup> One researcher refers to this as “head versus heart conflict.”<sup>9</sup> One recent study found that abortion decisional certainty is similar to or higher than the certainty women feel about other healthcare decisions, such as mastectomy after a breast cancer diagnosis, prenatal testing after infertility, or antidepressant use during pregnancy.<sup>10</sup> Women’s decisional certainty regarding abortion was also higher than that exhibited by men deciding between prostate cancer treatment options.<sup>11</sup>

**Point 2: The overwhelming majority of abortion patients retrospectively believe that their decision was the right one for them.**

Abundant evidence supports the fact that women remain confident about their abortion decision when asked days or years after the procedure. In a national study of 843 women undergoing abortions, participants were asked about their abortion one week later. Nearly all - 95% - did not regret their

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<sup>3</sup> Rocca CH, Kimport K, Gould H, Foster DG. Women's emotions one week after receiving or being denied an abortion in the United States. *Perspect Sex Reprod Health.* 2013;45(3):122–31.

<sup>4</sup> American Psychological Association. Report of the Task Force on Mental Health and Abortion. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2008. 10.1037/a0017497

<sup>5</sup> Adler NE, David HP, Major BN, Roth SH, Russo NF, Wyatt GE. Psychological factors in abortion. A review. *Am Psychol* 1992;47: 1194–204. Stotland NL. Psychosocial aspects of induced abortion. *Clin Obstet Gynecol* 1997;40:673–86.

<sup>6</sup> Kimport K (Mis)Understanding Abortion Regret. May 2012. *Symbolic Interaction*, 35(2):105–122.

<sup>7</sup> Smith EM. Follow-up study of women who request abortion. *Am J Orthopsychiatr.* 1973;43(4):574–85. Broen AN, Moum T, Bodtker AS, Ekeberg O. The course of mental health after miscarriage and induced abortion: a longitudinal, five-year follow-up study. *BMC Med.* 2005;3 10.1186/1741-7015-3-18 Kero A, Hogberg U, Lalos AS. Wellbeing and mental growth—long-term effects of legal abortion. *Soc Sci Med.* 2004;58(12):2559–69. 10.1016/j.socscimed.2003.09.004 .

Major B, Cozzarelli C, Cooper ML, Zubek JM, Richards C, Wilhite M, et al. Psychological responses of women after first-trimester abortion. *Arch Gen Psychiatry.* 2000;57(8):777–84. Epub 2000/08/02.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> *Contraception.* 2017 Mar;95(3):269-278. doi: 10.1016/j.contraception.2016.09.008. Epub 2016 Oct 10.

Measuring decisional certainty among women seeking abortion. Ralph LJ, Foster DG, Kimport K, Turok D, Roberts SCM. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27745910>

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

decision to have an abortion.<sup>12</sup> The overwhelming majority of women feel that termination was the right decision for them.<sup>13</sup>

Women sometimes regret becoming pregnant.<sup>14</sup> A small percentage of women regret their abortion decisions.<sup>15</sup> Others leave the clinic when they are uncertain.<sup>16</sup> The overwhelming majority of women who seek abortion are certain in their decision; these women want access to abortion and not to be required to have an unwanted birth.

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<sup>12</sup> Rocca C, Kimport K, Gould H, Foster DG. Women's emotions one week after receiving or being denied an abortion in the United States. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* (2013) Sept; 45(3):122–131. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1363/4512213>

<sup>13</sup> Rocca CH, Kimport K, Roberts SCM, Gould H, Neuhaus J, Foster DG. Decision rightness and emotional responses to abortion in the United States: a longitudinal study. *PLOS ONE* (2015) Jul; 10(7):e0128832.

<sup>14</sup> Gipson, J. D., Koenig, M. A., & Hindin, M. J. (2008). The effects of unintended pregnancy on infant, child, and parental health: a review of the literature. *Studies in Family Planning*, 39(1), 18-38.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

<sup>16</sup> Gatter M et al., Relationship between ultrasound viewing and pro-ceeding to abortion, *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 2014, 123(1):81–87. Cameron ST and Glasier A, Identifying women in need of further discussion about the decision to have an abortion and eventual out-come, *Contraception*, 2013, 88(1):128–132