

Ella Roy
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Abortion: Murder or a Right?

A year ago, I volunteered at an organization here in Bangkok and while talking to of the kids taken care of by this organization, I met this wonderful girl, full of life, beautiful with thick brown hair, and a smile that makes you forget any worry you might have. She was 16 years old, a year older than me, and stood there with a baby boy rocking in her arms. Her baby boy. Looking at me with her sparkling hazel eyes, she told me her story. Just after she turned 16, nine months back, she had been raped by three grown men. She was beaten and left on the corner of the street until she was found the next morning. When a few weeks later she was certain of a pregnancy, she was devastated, knowing abortion was not an option. The Thai law states that abortion is illegal, apart from the following cases: To save the mother's life, to preserve the mother's physical or mental health or if the pregnancy is a result of an offense such as rape, incest, forced prostitution, or seduction of a girl under 15. As a 16-year-old, she was denied the right to an abortion. Her family started threatening her, saying they wanted nothing to do with her, nor her illegitimate child. She tried to do the abortion procedure herself but the operation went awry and almost killed her. Luckily she survived, but was left with heavy physical damages, all by herself without housing nor money. Before I left, she broke out sobbing, saying 'This law took away my future, as well as my child.'

Unfortunately, this is not only Thailand's reality. Half of the world's countries still have restrictions on abortion and are yet to fully legalize it. When it comes to this issue, people often differentiate between three philosophical stances: pro-life, the notion that the baby must live and be protected from abortion; pro-choice, which gives women the right to decide if they believe abortion is right or not; or pro-abortion, people who not only respect a woman's right to choose but fully support the concept of abortion. I am pro-choice, as I believe whether an abortion is 'justified' or not depends on the situation. Abortion should be legalized in more countries; Laws against abortions do not stop women seeking ways to end their pregnancies, but just make abortions less safe; victims of rape or incest should not be forced to carry a child; and lastly, the choice lies with the woman herself, and not with the government.

Access to legal, professionally-performed abortions reduces maternal injury and death caused by unsafe, illegal abortions. According to Daniel R. Mishell, MD, University of Southern California, before abortion was legalized or in places where it is not, women frequently try to induce abortions by themselves, or by going to unsafe "back-alley" abortionist (Mishell, 2014, as quoted in 'Argumentative Essay' by Jazette Dalisay). The World Health Organization estimated in 2004 that unsafe abortions cause 68,000 maternal deaths worldwide each year, many of those in developing countries where safe and legal abortion services are difficult to access (Ahman and Shah, 2004).

There are innumerable reasons for why women necessitate an abortion. Although there is the basic 'just not wanting a child', other motives are way more urgent. RAINN estimates that there were 17,342 pregnancies as a result of rape ("Who are the Victims", 2013). Women whose pregnancies resulted from such an incident should not be forced to keep the child. This also applies to teenagers, who become mothers and have grim prospects for the future. They are much more likely to leave school, receive poor prenatal care; rely on public assistance to raise a child or develop health problems (Alcorn, 1994). Many people argue that abortion should not be the safety net for dumb, uneducated teenagers, but it should, at least, be a basic right when it endangers the mother's life or when it results from abuse, rape or any other sexual harassment.

Abortion is a very sensitive topic, due to the uncertainty of whether a woman having control over her unborn child is a basic right. People argue that a government interfering in a woman's life in this way is 'crossing a line', as the government is forcing women to continue their pregnancy. What about forcing women to use contraception or interfering in their choices in any other ways? How do people find it unacceptable to intervene in private decisions this way, but not for abortion? I believe, in the end, it is no one's but the woman's decision to make, and not a government law.

The most common argument against abortion is that it is 'murder'. This, however, is utterly false, as nearly all abortions take place in the first trimester when a fetus cannot exist independently of the mother ("What is Abortion", 2015). Furthermore, people argue that abortion could become a form of contraception, which is also false. In the countries where abortion is legal, only 8% of women who have abortions do not use any form of birth control, which is due to individual neglect rather than to the legal availability of abortions (Sumbhoose, n.d.). Abortion should be legalized, as women still seek possibilities for illegal unsafe abortions and as victims of abuse should not be forced to carry a child. I do not believe abortion is immoral, especially not following rape or other abuse. I am pro-choice but not for abortion. Abortion is a dreadful decision to be faced with and for many women, it is painful and ruthless. There are situations that a baby should not be brought into, and the choice should always be left to the woman.

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