

**MY LIFE, MY RIGHT: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE ON  
THE MORALITY OF ABORTION**

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## CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that **ONOABHAGBE EDE HILLARY** carried out this research project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Bachelor of Arts (B.A) degree in the department of philosophy.

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**External Supervisor**

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**Date**  
**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this project to God Almighty, my creator, my strong pillar and my source of inspiration and wisdom. My deepest gratitude goes to God who has provided all that was needed to complete this project.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude and indebtedness to my supervisor Dr. Emmanuell Asia. For his invaluable encouragement, suggestions and support from an early stage of this research and for also providing me extraordinary experiences throughout the work. Above all, his priceless and meticulous supervision at each and every phase of this work inspired me in numerous ways.

I specially acknowledge my parents, Mr & Mrs S. Onoabagbe for their undying support both financially and religiously. I also wish to thank my friends and siblings for continually urging and encouraging me till the end.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Abortion has always remained a very controversial topic anywhere the issue of women rights has been raised. While some persons see it as immoral to even speak of, others view it as a remedy for unwanted pregnancies. The whole debate surrounding abortion stirs up a lot of controversy and valid points as well, all this is as a result of the unraveling of facts and the circulation of myths all surrounding the topic. The debates for and against all take a logical side, however we must note that due to the sentimental nature of most of the points raised, many controversial points might complicate both sides.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Due to the fact that this report centers around an African perspective, we will be examining it from an Edo point of view. As the people of Edo state are faced with a lot of socioeconomic issues, proper healthcare cannot fully be vouched for despite the success of the abortion mostly depends on the quality of health care being administered. The arguments for and against abortion somewhat come to a point where healthcare has to be considered before even attempting to speak on the topic. Such is the case in Edo state as other factors also affect their view on abortion.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

After considering all the terms to be used and examined in this study it is important to state how they are all distinct in their own contexts. Placing life and rights on the same scale one might be compelled to assume that they shouldn't all be used together. However, they all share a similar connection, this is owing to the fact that life happens to be one of the basic human rights and abortion can be used to save a life, when administered properly.

Tedros stressed that safe abortion is health care: "it saves lives. Restricting it drives women and girls towards unsafe abortions; resulting in complications, even death". Through this report we will see how abortion, though it seems a bit risky but if administered properly and in a safe environment can be used to ensure the safety of women and young girls in any society, even under an African setting.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to shed more light on how a safe abortion should be made easily accessible as a form of basic health care. Here we will be using the idea of the right to life to back up the points raised by people in support of abortion. Despite how we have been made to see the act (abortion) over the years, we will be bringing up several instances and reasons why it should be an option made readily available for pregnant women/girls.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

It is important to note the importance/place of right in every society. However, several societies in West Africa are not in support of the idea that abortion should be made legal. Through this work a thin line will be drawn to connect both sides of the abortion debate.

## **1.5 Scope of Study**

It is commonly believed that all life begins at conception therefore tampering with said life can be viewed as murder. The various religions in African societies also view life as a very sacred concept. Despite how the very idea of abortion seems to go against everything stated in the previous sentence, there is also a relationship between them. What if the abortion is being done to save the life of the mother? In such cases where the existence of the foetus is detrimental to the life of the mother, shouldn't there be an alternative to help the mother? such cases will be examined so as to draw a conclusion on whether abortion should even be considered as an option in any African society.

## **1.6 Method of the Study**

The method employed in this research is analytical as well as expository. The primary aim here is to explain all the terms individually

to establish the relevance of such terms. The next step is to place abortion alongside life and rights. Furthermore we will also establish an African point of view on abortion. Subsequently we will also highlight the positive outcomes as well as the negative side effects of abortion. Generally this work contains four chapters in which Chapter 1 contains the general introduction, methodological arrangements and literature review. Chapter 2 contains the background of the study, under which we will examine both sides of the abortion debate as well as the debate itself. Under this chapter we will understand the base of the whole abortion debate before moving further to viewing it from an African point of view. Chapter 3 formally addresses the topic. Under this chapter we will talk about how the term abortion is viewed from an African perspective. We will also talk about its advantages and negative side effects. Chapter 4 contains the summary, recommendations and conclusion.

## **1.7 Definition of terms**

Here we will be defining all the major terms in this work so that clarity will be achieved as we progress. Life according to the Oxford Dictionary can be defined as the condition that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic matter, including the capacity for growth, reproduction, functional activity and continual change preceedong death.

The Oxford Dictionary defines rights as a moral or legal entitlement the have or do something. The Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy sees rights as entitlement (not) to perform certain actions, or (not) to be in certain states. Rights create the structure for governments, the content of laws, and they help to shape morality as we now see it. To accept a set of rights is to ensure the distribution of freedom and authority, and so to endorse a certain view of what may, mist and must not be done.

Abortion is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as the deliberate termination of a human pregnancy, most often performed during the first 28 weeks of pregnancy. Abortion can also be defined as the removal of an embryo or fetus from the uterus in order to end a pregnancy.

## **1.8 Literature Review**

### **Review of Related Literature**

1. The first works to be reviewed on this study are the debates in support of and against abortion respectively. By doing so we will be able to clearly understand the base of the entire discussion.

2. In the introductory remark we already examined the opinion of the WHO chief, Dr Tedros Adhanon. From his statement he believes that women should have the right to choose when it comes to their bodies and health. It is clear that he is in support of abortion.

3. We will examine the opinion of those that are in support of abortion. Here we will talk on how abortion affects women negatively. This will highlight the women's rights opinions that in certain circumstances favour abortion. Here we will be using an article by the BBC on women's rights as a case study.

4. Most people believe that life begins at conception, abortion to them isn't acceptable as it involves the removal of the fetus. Here we will be examining the debate against abortion. Under this part we will examine David Robert Grines article on the guardian.com, as he weighs up the fine main anti-abortion arguments.

5. Here we will be examining an African perspective that'll further make us see the morality behind it. We will be using the people of Edo State, Nigeria as a case study. Under this chapter we will be examining the article; Burden of Unsafe Abortion among Young ladies in Edo State, South-South, Nigeria, by TIA Osemi, Christopher C. Affusim, Pauline E. Eromon, Neba F and Mojeed .O. Momoh, the article was published in

2020-11-27 on the Orient Journal of Medicine, vol 32 NO: 3-4 (2020). The aim of this is to establish the Edo point of view on abortion.

6. To further emphasize/highlight the positive effects of Abortion we're using an article by MArge Berer; Making Abortions Safe: A matter of good public health policy and practice.

7. In talking about the negative effects of Abortion we will take a few points from the medical report made by Staff Nurse Johanna, G, MS, RN.

This report was submitted on [compasscare.info](http://compasscare.info).

## **Endnotes**

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7. Making Abortions Safe: a matter of good public health policy and practice. M. Berer.

8. Compasscare.info. Report made by staff nurse, Rochester; Johanna G. MS, RN.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

#### **2.1 The debate on Abortion**

The Abortion debate has been a long-standing and current controversy that covers areas that have to do with what is moral, legal, medical and religious. In most countries, the debate mostly centers around the "Pro-choice" and "Pro-life" movements. Pro-choice insists on a woman's right to bodily autonomy, whilst the Pro-life opinion is that the fetus is a human deserving of legal protection, separate from the will of the mother.

Many positions however continue to argue that Abortion is a moral issue and that it concerns the beginning of human life, rights of the fetus and bodily integrity. The base for the debate is that some Abortion rights advocates argue that it should be illegal for governments to regulate Abortion any more than other medical practices. Some however insist

that governments should be permitted to prohibit elective abortions after the 20th week, or the second trimester. Other parties however wish to prohibit all abortions, starting from conception. Having briefly taken a look at the scope of the entire chapter, we will now examine some views in support of abortion and arguments against Abortion.

## **2.2 Different views in support of abortion**

Under this subchapter we will be looking at the Women's rights arguments in favour of abortion. Some of them are;

- a. women have a moral right to decide what to do with their bodies
- b. the right to abortion is vital for ensuring gender equality
- c. the right to abortion is important for individual women in achieving their full potential
- d. placing a ban on abortion puts women at risk by forcing them to use illegal abortive measures

e. the right to abortion should be part of a portfolio of pregnancy rights that enables women to make a truly free choice whether to terminate a pregnancy.

The above points reminds us that even in the debate we should regard the woman as a person and not just a carrier for the fetus. We must therefore consider her rights and needs as well as those of the unborn child. Pro-choice women's rights activists do not take a causal or callous reaction to the fetus; they acknowledge that choosing an abortion is usually a case of picking the lesser out of two evils.

The simplest version of the women's rights argument in favour of Abortion goes like this;

- a. a woman has the right to decide what she can and can't do with her body
- b. the foetus exists inside a woman's body

c. a woman as the right to decide whether the foetus remains in her body

d. therefore, a pregnant woman has the right to abort the foetus.

This issue raises many ideas about human rights into focus;

a. every human being has the right to own their body

b. a foetus is part of a woman's body

c. therefore that woman has the right to abort a foetus they are carrying.

Some people believe that it is unfair and unethical to ban Abortion because doing so denies freedom of choice to women and forces the unwilling to bear the unwanted. The women's liberation movement sees Abortion rights as vital for gender equality. They insist that only if women have the right to choose whether or not to have children, can they achieve equality with men. Men don't get pregnant so they aren't restricted in the same way. Their belief is that women's freedom and life choices are limited by bearing children, and the stereotypes, social

customs and oppressive duties that went with it. They acknowledge that right to control one's body as a key moral right, and one that women could only achieve if they were entitled to abort an unwanted foetus.

From all that we have discussed it is safe to say that women need free access to Abortion in order to achieve full political, social and economic equality with men, and that they need to have the same freedoms as men. Women need the right to Abortion to have full rights over their own bodies, without this right they do not have the same moral status as men.

### **2.3 Arguments against abortion**

Not everyone who is in support of Women's rights is in support of abortion, and many of them are active in trying to promote practical solutions to the causes that drive women towards Abortion. Some take side with the Pro-life advocates and say that the right to life should

outweigh the right of an individual to equality or to control their own bodies.

Some insight that Abortion does not liberate women, but allows society not to cater to women's needs. They add that women's need for equality is not free access to Abortion but to be given what they need to survive financially and socially as mothers. They should be provided with readily available and affordable childcare, a workspace or school that acknowledges the needs of mothers and a state support that helps to reintegrate women into the workforce. They believe that if women couldn't have abortions so easily, governments would have to invest more money in supporting mothers.

Others oppose Abortion because it sidesteps other real issues that should be addressed. Megan Clancy put it this way;

"there are women who are raped and become pregnant; the problem is that they were raped, not that they are pregnant. There are women who are starving who become pregnant; the problem is that they are pregnant. There are women in abusive relationships who become pregnant, the problem is that they are in abusive relationships, not that they are pregnant."

Others believe that Abortion can damage the long-term physical and emotional health of women who have an abortion. Abortion also violates feminist principles as some feminists oppose all forms of violence, including abortion, because they are inconsistent with the core feminist principles of Justice, non-violence and non-discrimination.

To further emphasize the views of the anti-abortionists we will examine D.R Grimes' article on the guardian.com as he weighs up the fine main anti-abortion arguments. During the course of the argument for and against Abortion, misunderstandings and myths tend to fill the void

between the opposing sides. To have a reasoned discussion about abortion rights, we have to clarify some of the misconceptions clouding the topic. To be able to choose reason over rhetirics, we have to address some of the myths that emerge each time the Abortion topic is raised.

a. ABORTION LEADS TO DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE.

This is the most absurd of all the myths surrounding Abortion, the opinion that it leads to depression and suicide must be a very absurd notion. It is a very common opinion among anti-abortion campaigners as they call it PAS - Post Abortion Syndrome, a term coined by Dr Vincent Rue. Rue is a prolific anti-abortion activist who testified before the US Congress in 1981 that he had observed post-traumatic stress syndrome in women who had undergone abortions. This claim grew into the odd opinion that Abortion leads the suicide and depression. Nevertheless, the claim is not recognised by relevant bodies, thus the link between Abortion and mental health problems has been dismissed by organizations such as; the American Psychiatric Association and the

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. The reason for this dismissal is due to the fact that there is no evidence that PAS exists.

Despite all the controversy surrounding the myth it still persists. In a recent move, some states in the US now require physicians to warn women seeking abortions of the danger to their mental health, despite the lack of scientific evidence. Contrary to the claim, the majority of women granted an abortion reported relief as their primary feeling and not depression.

#### b. ABORTION CAUSES CANCER.

There has been a claim that women who have an abortion are at much risk of breast cancer. This alleged connection is not supported by the scientific literature, the link is also rejected by the medical community. Despite the lack of evidence for this claim, it didn't stop the administration of G.W Bush from altering the National Cancer Institute

(NCI) website to suggest that Abortion may lead to breast cancer in the early 2000's. The medical community reacted with disgust and the New York Times slammed the claim if the Bush administration as an "egregious distortion". The NCI convened a workshop to examine the claim in February 2003, and the conclusion was devoid of any evidence and it was rather political than medical in nature.

#### c. ABORTION REDUCES FERTILITY.

The claim that Abortion can damage fertility is understandable, but this is based on out-dated understanding of abortive methods. Earlier surgical abortions were performed using a dilation and curettage (D&C) method, with the risk of scarring that could potentially lead to complication. This method is however obsolete and has been replaced with a much safer and effective suction method in the early 1970s, the method was recommended by the WHO in the 21st century. There is

however no evidence that either medical or modern surgical abortions impacts future fertility.

d. THE FOETUS CAN FEEL PAIN.

One of the most inflammatory arguments against abortion is rooted in the assertion that the foetus can feel pain, and that termination is therefore a brutal affair. This is however unlikely to be true. A foetus in the early stages of development lacks the developed nervous system and brain to feel pain or even be aware of their surroundings. Despite the claim's lack of veracity, the myth remains a strong one and some states in the US have dictated that doctors can be fined for not warning women that the foetus might experience pain, despite the scientific evidence that proves otherwise.

e. REDUCING ACCESS TO ABORTION DECREASES DEMAND FOR ABORTION.

Limiting the access to Abortion doesn't quell the demand for abortion, and illegalizing Abortion simply makes it less safe. In the contemporary world where international travel is affordable, abortion restrictions make even less sense. Placing extra barriers can not stop women from seeking it, they can only add financial and emotional obstacles on their way. Abortion is an emotive topic and one can sway eitherways. However, despite the fact that people have the right to hold any opinion they want, one cannot keep inventing their own facts. Such truth bending not only sounds void, it complicates an already difficult situation many women face.

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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **MY LIFE, MY RIGHT: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE ON**

#### **THE MORALITY OF ABORTION**

In this chapter we will now discuss abortion as seen through an African point of view. To be able to effectively do this we will be examining the standpoint of the people of Edo State, Nigeria. Moving further, as we approach the point where we will discuss the positive effects of Abortion in Africa, we will draw points from an article by M. Berer as she talks about making Abortion safe in a society, furthermore we will also pick out some points from the anti-abortionists point of view which is deeply rooted in a medical report made by a staff nurse in Rochester; Johanna, GMS, RN, and this report was submitted on [compasscare.info](http://compasscare.info).

Moving on we will also conclude the chapter with some common crises/conflicts concerning the topic, this is being done to provide a sorry

of balance for the two contrasting points of view concerning abortion and to further solidify the stand point of the people of Edo State.

### **3.1. Abortion as seen from an African perspective**

To properly talk about abortion and its effects from an African point of view, I intend to arrive at my points using the society I am most familiar with. We will be taking most of our points from the article; Burden of Unsafe Abortion among young ladies in Edo State, South-South, Nigeria, published on The Orient Journal of Medicine. As unsafe abortion is mostly viewed as a preventable cause of maternal mortality, it is a common occurrence among the adolescents and young females mainly due to a cluster of socio-economic loopholes. This cross-sectional study was carried out to highlight some of the burdens of unsafe abortion among our very young females.

A total of 423 young sexually active females from the ages of 15-29 years, they were gotten from 4 communities (2 urban and 2 rural) in Edo

State, Nigeria, using the multistage sampling technique. The participants were between 17-29 years, mostly from a low socio-economic class and also students that possessed tertiary level of education. The average age of sexual partners, and 77.1% of them were found wanting for not using any sort of contraceptive. A large percentage of the participants (67.4%) have had abortions, 75.4% of the correspondents had carried out unsafe abortions.

The adjoining factor between abortion and the people of Edo State were statistically justified: increasing age, not married, socio-economic status, and reproductive tract infections. This report showed that unsafe abortion was relatively high among adolescents and young women in Edo State, South-South, Nigeria. Other factors such as; inadequate access to health care services, socio-economic vulnerability and teenage pregnancies combine in exposing a large number of women at risk of unsafe abortion and abortion related fatalities.

### **3.2. Positive effects of Abortion in Africa**

Due to the socio-economic conditions in most parts of Africa, implementing a safe method of abortion would be a step towards safeguarding the women involved. The women must first be sensitized on their rights so that such services would be made available when necessary. Also, legalizing abortion would reduce the trauma (both physical and mental) that unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions expose women to. Bringing abortion facilities and services out into the open is a pre-condition for ensuring the quality of care, affordability, accessibility and availability. Especially for the lesser earning women. To ensure that safe abortions are carried out, the health facilities will have to be properly equipped to handle such if the need ever arises.

In Mozambique, although abortion has not been legalized, safe terminations have however been available at the main hospital in Maputo since 1981 in order to reduce the casualty rate from unsafe abortions. A study report however showed that young women who had

recently migrated to the city, who were from poorer social status, who did not frequently use contraceptions and who had no previous abortions were less likely to be aware that they could access such as these hospitals. The women who were at risk were the women who were poorly informed. Thus, abortions would help to raise public awareness on the availability of health services.

### **3.3. Negative effects of Abortion in Africa**

Despite so many prospects seen in the legalization of abortion, we must also talk about the side effects/impacts it could have on the health of the women. It is generally believed that the possible complications of an unsafe abortion could lead to the damage of the womb or cervix, incomplete abortion (usually requiring additional surgical procedure), infection of the uterus or fallopian tubes, uterine perforation and in most cases death. As part of the future consequences, people believe that a

woman's risk of preterm birth increases by 50% and 62% after two or more abortions.

In a continent like Africa where most of the countries do not have the adequate medical facilities to handle safe abortions, that can hinder the safety of the women if they attempt such. Even our cultural values might possibly hinder the process because abortions go against our values as Africans. The act itself can also damage the woman psychologically and physically, permanently. There is believed to always be a subsequent series of trauma as a post event result. And since the well being of women is one of the fundamental priorities of government and non-governmental agencies, the legalization of Abortion has to be discouraged.

## **Endnotes**

1. Burden of unsafe Abortion among young ladies in Edo State, South-South, Nigeria. T.I.A Oseni, C.C Affusim, P.E Eromon, N.F Fuh, M.O Momoh. Orient Journal of Medicine vol 32, NO 3-4 (2020).
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5. Report made by staff nurse, Rochester; Johanna, GMS, RN. Compasscare.info.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **4.1 Summary**

Having gone through the debates for and against abortion and having discussed Abortion from the view of the people of Edo State, South-South, Nigeria, we have now come to a point of clarification. From the definition of each term to their relationship we can now see the positive and negative effects of Abortion. This study was carried out to highlight the various point of view on the issue of Abortion, and along the way, we clarified most of the common misconceptions surrounding abortion. However, we have to take into full consideration the opinion of the people of Edo State. Drawing our points from the article uploaded on the African Journal of Literature, we can mostly see Abortion from a negative light as the people of Edo State do not possess the proper facilities to carry out safe abortions. Hence it would be advisable that the socio-economic conditions of the people residing there should be put

into consideration before such laws should even be talked about, let alone implemented. This position is due to how abominable the act may be viewed here. Despite our position, one must however note the fact that abortions can also help to prevent unwanted pregnancies and providing it in a safe environment would ensure it's effectiveness.

## **4.2 Conclusion**

In conclusion, we must however note that it is commonly believed that all life begins at conception therefore tampering with said life can be viewed as murder. The various religions in African societies also view life as a very sacred concept. Despite how the very idea of abortion seemed to go against everything stated in the previous sentence, there is also a relationship between them. What if the abortion is being done to save the life of the mother? In such cases where the existence of the foetus is detrimental to the life of the mother, there should always be an alternative to help the mother. Thus, such cases have been examined

and we have now drawn our conclusion on whether abortion should even be considered as an option in any African society. In a continent like Africa where most of the countries do not have the adequate medical facilities to handle safe abortions, that can hinder the safety of the women if they attempt such. Even our cultural values might possibly hinder the process because abortions go against our values as Africans. The act itself can also damage the woman psychologically and physically, permanently. There is believed to always be a subsequent series of trauma as a post event result. And since the well being of women is one of the fundamental priorities of government and non-governmental agencies, the legalization of Abortion has to be discouraged.

### **4.3 Recommendation**

We recommend as follows that:

- i. For Abortions to be made safe there must be an improvement in the health practices in that society
- ii. Women should be properly sensitized on the negative as well as positive side effects of Abortion
- iii. Abortion shouldn't be considered in societies that the populace are not properly informed and proper healthcare isn't available
- iv. The right to life should be considered whenever the topic of abortion is raised
- v. It is imperative that the government properly check the practice of clandestine abortion so as to prevent any unseen complications.

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