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# Legalized Abortion: Benefits to Women's Rights and Health

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## Abstract

The tension surrounding abortion in the United States has arguably dominated the political sphere for quite some time. The Pro-Choice community expresses its continued support of the ruling and the necessity for legal abortion. In contrast, the Pro-Life community has called for the overturning of the 1973 Supreme Court ruling of *Roe v. Wade* for reasons based in religion and the right to life; however, legalized abortion has protected the lives of women through safer procedures, legal autonomy over one's body, and the preservation of mental health.

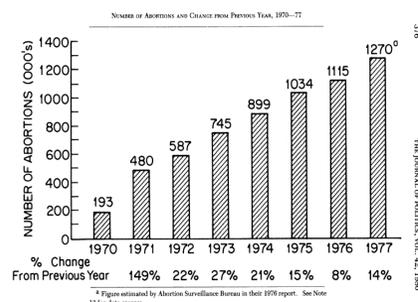
**Methods:** Historical research was conducted using previously published studies, historical journals, and archives.

**Peer Involvement:** Research was presented at the 2019 Michigan Regional Phi Alpha Theta Conference at Oakland University.

**Future Engagement:** This research will be incorporated into a public website via Google Sites by the end of the Spring 2019 semester. Additions to the research will be made before publishing.

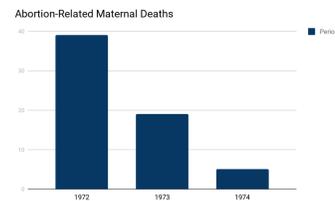
## Introductory Information

Abortion has increased from 193,000 in 1973 to nearly 1.3 million in 1977, but there was not a significant spike following *Roe v. Wade*. The largest increase in abortions occurred before *Roe v. Wade* from 1970 to 1971. Since 1973, the percentage change from the previous year has decreased with the exception of 1976 to 1977.



## Safety

Willard Cates & Roger Rochat, two physicians from the CDC, conducted a study that associated the decrease in abortion-related maternal deaths to an increased accessibility of abortion facilities:



Today, legal abortion is safer than tonsillectomies and natural childbirth.

### Madame Restell

Mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, New York City, Caroline Ann Lohman, aka Madame Restell, placed advertisements in the newspaper for services that included "Female Pills: an infallible regulator of \*\*\*\*\* [menses]" which came with the warning to not use them while pregnant.



It was understood that these pills were meant to cause miscarriage. Restell, without medical training, would administer these pills which were concoctions of tansy oil, pennyroyal, rue, ergot, and possibly opium. Side effects included damage to internal organs, seizures, and death. Restell performed abortion procedures as well. She worked as an illegal abortionist for decades, performing thousands of abortions for New York's women.

### Jane

In the early 1970s, an underground group of feminist laywomen known as Jane established an abortion referral service. The group became aware that the abortionists they referred women to were not licensed physicians, and decided to learn how to perform abortions themselves.

Jane performed over an estimates 11,000 abortions, none of which resulted in bodily harm or death of their clients. The story of Jane proves that not all illegal abortions were of the coat-hanger or dangerous concoction imagery.

## Autonomy

Women have been struggling to obtain the unalienable right to the condition over their bodies since before the common era. 1800 B.C.: Code of Hammurabi deemed women to be the property of men. Rapists were to pay reparation to a woman's husband or father for "damaged goods". By the late 19th to early 20th century, physicians would remove the uterus, ovaries, and clitoris to "treat" rebellious or depressed women. In 1973, women fought for the right to decide the condition of their bodies as far as pregnancy goes. And finally today, women are still fighting to keep their right to choose.

## Mental Health

Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (ANSIRH), a research group at the University of California-San Francisco: conducted a study that compared the psychological effects of women who have abortions and women who are denied abortions and follows them for five years. In this study, some women had abortions while others were turned away because they surpassed the gestational age limit. Women who were denied abortions experienced more anxiety. These anxiety levels peaked around the time of the denial and remained high throughout parenting. In the 1960s, women who were compelled into forced birth showed higher scores of depressive symptoms and lower indicators of happiness. Today, the risk of depression is 5 times greater for women with unwanted pregnancy. Forced birth increases the risk of severe postpartum depression two fold. This increase in depression is also linked to an increase in self-destructive behaviors including suicide.

## Conclusion

Before allowing our personal and moral convictions to determine our position, it is crucial to understand that abortion did not begin with *Roe v. Wade*; *Roe* was a judicial decision that has saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of women. So we must ask ourselves, isn't there room in our personal and moral convictions to value the full life of women?