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Abstract:

## Partial-birth abortion and the impartiality of journals

The recent ban in the US on partial-birth abortion is probably the most important ruling on abortion in 30 years. The banned procedure consists in deliberately and intentionally vaginally delivering a living foetus until the entire foetal head is outside the mother's body for the purpose of performing an overt act that the person knows will kill the partially delivered living foetus<sup>1</sup>.

The seemingly "official" opinion of the Lancet appears to be supportive of unrestricted abortion laws. However, it is disappointing to see recently published opinion articles in this direction (<sup>2,3</sup>) deprived of empirical data (i.e. no reference to systematic reviews or meta-analyses, no estimates, no confidence intervals).

Is this unvarying opinion truly representative of the views of the medical profession at large? Many physicians, fully agree with a ban on partial-birth abortion for reasons that well deserve to be listened to. In contrast to monolithic partiality, plurality of voices is healthy for journals. A balanced and representative view of a topic so hot as this is always welcomed. Otherwise, we, the readers, could suspect being subjected to indoctrination. Almost no person believes that a mother, in the privacy of her own home, and for her own reasons, may abusively punish, or kill her newborn, regardless of her economic condition or the inconvenience that the child brings to the mother's life. If 99.9% of the population believes that infanticide is absolutely wrong, then why is near-birth abortion considered a right? Is cutting the umbilical cord a new scientific criteria to pinpoint the

difference between human life and a group of cells that have no rights at all?

But, does actually abortion improve women's mental health? In fact, induced abortion has been associated to a greater risk of mental disorder, after careful control of pre-abortion psychological variables (<sup>4</sup>). The high quality of this epidemiologic study (<sup>4</sup>) contrasts sharply with that of a previous null study repeatedly quoted by activists supporting abortion (<sup>5</sup>), where the flaws were very bizarre: e.g. losses to follow-up amounted to 50%, there was no unexposed cohort, and no control for confounding was accomplished in the major analyses (<sup>5</sup>).

I hope the Lancet will open its pages fairly to dissenters from its apparently unique and officially-correct opinion on this complex topic.

I have no conflict of interest.

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#### REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> [www.supremecourt.us/opinions/06pdf/05-380.pdf](http://www.supremecourt.us/opinions/06pdf/05-380.pdf) (last checked: July, 23rd, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Grimes DA, Benson J, Singh S, Romero M, Ganatra B, Okonofua FE, Shah IH. Unsafe abortion: the preventable pandemic. *Lancet* 2006;368:1908-19.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas G. Sex, politics, and money. *Lancet* 2006;368:1943-6.

<sup>4</sup> Fergusson DM, Horwood LJ, Ridder EM. Abortion in young women and subsequent mental health. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry* 2006;47:16-24.

<sup>5</sup> Major B, Cozzarelli C, Cooper ML, Zubek J, Richards C, Wilhite M, Gramzow RH. Psychological responses of women after first-trimester abortion. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2000;57:777-84.