



Media Statement: A response to 'Call for Free Abortions'

'Call for free abortions as needy women priced out of procedure' says the headline, with women's health advocates stating that, 'Growing numbers of women in desperate financial straits cannot afford abortions.' (Sydney Morning Herald, August 6)

With up to 75% of abortion seeking women stating financial constraints as a reason they are unable to continue their pregnancies, one has to wonder what these 'women's advocates' are doing to ensure that no woman has an unwanted abortion when financial constraints are a primary factor.

The cases put forward in this article of the woman with 5 children and a domestic violence issue, a homeless mother and a mother with children in foster care seem on the surface to be desperate cases for abortion. However, these cases only demonstrate how miserably we are failing to support women and children out of their dire circumstances by offering them surgical solutions to their social problems. This kind of problem provides abortions for the pregnant, homeless women, instead of housing and financial support.

The suggestion by Catherine White that the continuation of unplanned pregnancies places a burden on child protection and welfare services is without evidence, and is a not too cleverly disguised opinion that women from lower socioeconomic circumstances should not be offered the support they need to bring their children into the world. Her statement that women adversely suffer mental health issues if they give birth following an unplanned pregnancy is also without substantiation. In fact, the opposite is true with international evidence demonstrating that up to 30% of women experience serious and prolonged mental health problems after abortion, creating an unnecessary burden on our economy, not to mention the lives of women themselves and their families.

The fact is that about half of all pregnancies are unintended, and about half of these lead to abortion, with more than 95% of those being undertaken for psychosocial reasons. These reasons are often complex and often related to a woman's economic situation, including worry about employment, education, housing and withdrawal of support from partners and family. Until we have a system where a woman's economic and social needs can be adequately addressed and remedied, we cannot continue to espouse abortion as an actual choice.

When a woman is forced to choose between her education and having her baby, her employment and having her baby or her boyfriend/partner/husband and having her baby this is not choice, it is coercion. When services fail to demonstrate their willingness to meet a woman's social and economic needs so that she feels able to choose to continue her pregnancy, they are contributing to this coercion.

Instead of more discussion about increasing access to abortion, particularly medical abortion with its much higher risk of adverse effects, we need to be discussing the real reasons why women have abortions and offering real solutions. Only then can we say that real choice exists.

Debbie Garratt
Executive Director
02 6059 5550