

## A woman's right to choose

July 10, 2019

The topic of abortion still carries a lot of stigma. Raising the issue or disclosing "I had an abortion" is met with some kind of judgement and the eyebrows inadvertently going up. This needs to change and we need to be talking about it and getting active, especially as the law seems to be going backwards in the United States with the introduction of the "heartbeat law", directly overriding the right to freedom of choice. It is our responsibility to help break down this stigma and change the law.

In NSW, abortion remains a criminal offence. It is only lawful if the woman's doctor believes on reasonable grounds that it is necessary to avoid a serious danger to the woman's life or her physical or mental health. It is 2019 in a prosperous and forward-thinking country and women are not entitled to abortion on demand. Worse still, our Prime Minister, and other prominent ministers around the country believe that abortion should remain illegal. Scott Morrison, just before the latest federal election, stated that it was a "very controversial and sensitive issue" and he was not going to engage in discussions about it as "it is not good for the country". He might be right, it might "divide Australians", but it shouldn't. This state-based rule, only now a criminal offence in NSW and South Australia, needs to change.



I feel it goes beyond having the right to have a say over our bodies as women. I feel it goes to having a say over our lives. No one will deny that having a baby affects your life. No one can deny that women carry the responsibility in the majority of circumstances during the course of a child's life, and are particularly and undeniably affected throughout the pregnancy and during the baby phase. It alters our careers, it alters our responsibilities and it alters our relationships. It even affects our dismal superannuation outcome (compared with men) and our job prospects. For me, having a baby comes with considerable thought. While you might judge it to be selfish for a woman, or a couple, to choose "no, not right now", or "no, full stop", it ultimately should be a choice, regardless of financial or personal circumstances as there are many complex reasons that may affect the decision.

As Tanya Plibersek rightly pointed out: "80 per cent of Australian's support a women's right to choose ... even people who have strong moral or religious objections themselves by and large realise that they can't make that choice for others." We should be getting to the stage where the right of freedom of choice comes without the stigma. For teen pregnancies out there, and we all know someone who we've taught or went through school with who became pregnant, they deal with a tough situation. They should know that there are options and that it should still be a choice, supported regardless, without the stigma.

The world, and Australia, seems a long way off supporting this issue without the controversy. We need to speak up around this issue, and encourage the men in our lives to vocally support choice as well. We need to stop shaming abortion, challenge our own views if necessary, and be supportive to those who may have been through this often traumatic experience. After all, one in six women in their 30s has had an abortion according to the Australia New Zealand Journal of Public Health. [#Stopthebans](#)

By Hannah Archer-Lawton, Women's and Anna Stewart Program Restricted Committee member