

## **MODERATOR**

Hello everyone, thank you for coming today. Few topics are more ethically charged than that of abortion. Both sides hold strong opinions.

Those who see a fertilized egg as a human being view abortion as an act of murder.

However, restricting or outlawing abortion and forcing women to bring unwanted children to term would raise serious ethical and legal questions.

We should keep in mind while exploring abortion ethics, that abortion itself is legal, even if only for exceptional cases, in almost all developed countries.

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**DR. WILLIAMS**

Thank you. I know that this is an emotional issue, but it is very important that we protect the rights of an adult, human mother before the rights of a fetus, whose life is dependent on the mother.

A fetus, depending on the stage of development, has not developed to the point that it can feel pain or think of itself as a being with an identity, qualities we often associate with human life.

This issue is too complex to do more than skim the surface at the moment, of course, but remember that abortion is legal, and it is the mother's rights that the law keeps in mind. Surely, those rights are clear.

## **DR. MEADOWS**

We can barely skim the surface of this issue, that's true. But as long as we're painting in broad strokes, let's look at the case for defending the life of the fetus. First of all, determining exactly when life begins has long been a bone of contention among medical professionals.

If we cannot be sure when life begins, doesn't it make sense to err on the side of caution so we don't mistakenly take a human life? And we do value human life. It's isn't merely our job, it's ethical to do so.

We should see the potential future of the life in question and protect that future.

In some cases, we might say the younger life is worth even more than an older one, because a greater potential future lies ahead. That's why most parents would throw themselves in harm's way to protect a child.

Legally, yes, a woman has a right to an abortion. That certainly doesn't mean we should encourage her to have one, or that she should make the decision without access to information on the life growing inside her.

**MODERATOR**

We have a 2-part question from the audience.

How common is abortion? Is the number of abortions increasing or decreasing?

**DR. MEADOWS**

About half of pregnancies among American women are unintended, and about four in 10 of these end in abortion.

Statistics are incomplete, but the CDC reports the total number and rate of reported abortions for 2011 decreased 5% from the previous year.

**MODERATOR**

Thank you, Dr. Meadows.

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## **DR. WILLIAMS**

Erring on the side of caution is a double-edged sword. If we acknowledge that the mother is clearly a human life that we must protect, and that a fetus may or may not yet be a human being, then our ethical responsibilities are with the mother.

If we are speaking of a young mother in a disadvantaged situation, all the more reason for our responsibilities to be so. The birth of the child could be unfeasible economically, it could hamper her ability to work or go to school, it could bring on depression, and, in short, completely alter the mother's life, and not always for the better. Is the mother's life worth less than that of an undeveloped child?

## **DR. MEADOWS**

It isn't worth more. You mention school and work...the unborn child's ability to work or go to school is completely lost along with every other aspect of a life that could have been. Furthermore, it hardly makes for a good argument that a woman can suffer from post-partum depression, when women who have abortions may suffer from depression as well. If we value the sanctity of life, and if we also cannot say exactly when life begins, let's just assume it begins immediately upon conception. I realize that opens up many other issues with regard to the mother, but those are separate issues, and they do not directly affect the rights of an unborn child.

**MODERATOR**

Dr. Williams. This question is for you.  
When are most abortions performed?

**DR. WILLIAMS**

The majority of abortions take place early in gestation. In 2011, more than 90% were performed at earlier than 13 weeks' gestation; about 8% were performed at 14-20 weeks' gestation, and less than 2% were performed later than 21 weeks' gestation.

**MODERATOR**

Thank you.  
For more information and statistics on abortion in the United States, visit the links provided in the Resources tab.