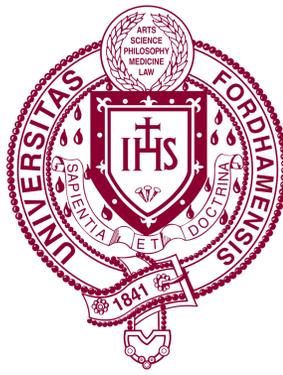




Attitudes Toward Late Term Abortions

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Abstract

The present study assessed college students' attitudes toward late term abortion, in particular, the New York State Reproductive Health Act (NYSRHA). The NYSRHA allows abortions after the 24th week where it must be established there is a lack of "fetal viability" or that the termination is necessary "to protect the patient's life or health." Participants completed a questionnaire with items related to abortion in general, including one item specifically about the NYSRHA. Results were consistent with previous research, suggesting that most people hold moderate positions toward abortion.

Introduction

- On January 22, 2019, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed New York's Reproductive Health Act (NYSRHA) into law (New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, 2019). This new law expands women's right to access pregnancy termination services in New York state (NYSRHA, 2019).
- The average pregnancy lasts between 38 to 42 weeks; the new law enables women to choose to have an abortion after 24 weeks.
- Before the signing of the NYSRHA, abortions after the 24th week were only allowed when the mother's life was at risk; other instances were criminalized.
- Now, after the 24th week, it must be established there is a lack of "fetal viability" or that the termination is necessary "to protect the patient's life or health." The law does not offer definitions or criteria of fetal viability or the patient's "health."
- A state licensed, certified, or authorized health care practitioner operating within their lawful scope of practice is tasked with determining the criteria are met (NYSRHA, 2019).
- This allows attending physicians the room they need to make the best medical judgment. The RHA also removed abortion from the state's penal code.
- National data provided by the Center for Disease Control (Jatlaoui et al., 2018) calculates that most abortions, roughly 65%, were performed within the first eight weeks of the pregnancy. Conversely, approximately 1% were completed after 21 weeks.
- Those national statistics incorporate data from New York City, accounting for about two-thirds of abortions reported by New York state in 2015, but do not include abortions outside the city.
- In New York City, 2.3% of abortions were performed after 21 weeks. Less than 9% of abortions were completed after 13 weeks. It should be noted that, as of this writing, 10 states ban abortions after the 20th week (Jatlaoui et al., 2018).
- While several studies address attitudes toward abortion in general, there are virtually none yet conducted considering New York's new legislation.
- This present study sought to measure current attitudes towards late term abortions among young adults, specifically, college students considering recent legislation and its impact on these attitudes as mentioned above.

Method

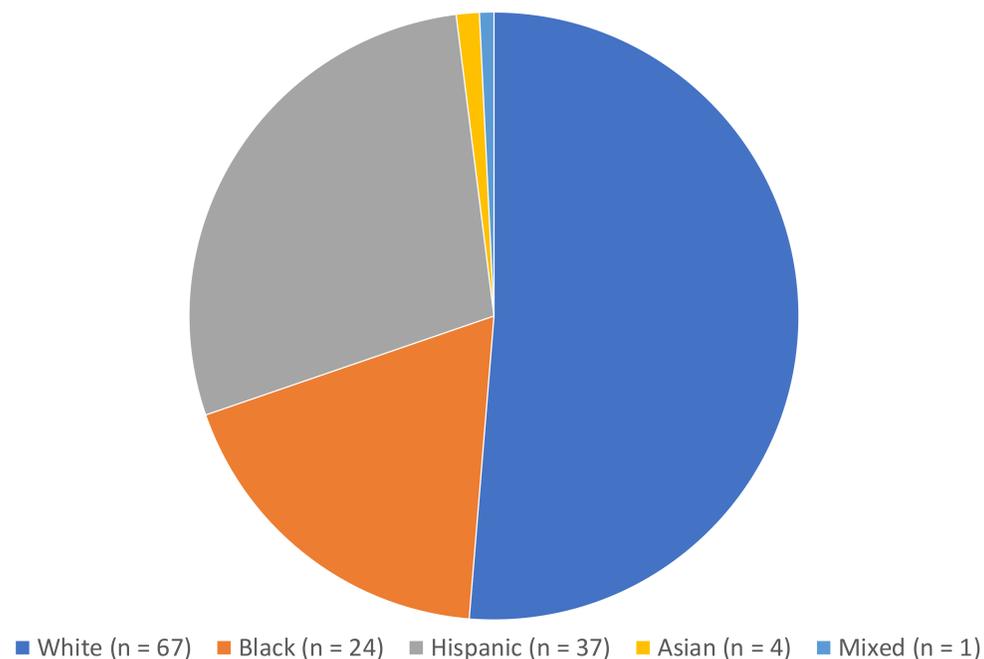
Participants

- Participants in this study were undergraduate students recruited from a public university in the Northeastern United States.
- The sample consisted of 104 women and 29 men ($N = 133$) with a mean age of 21.86 ($SD = 5.51$). See Figure 1 for participant demographics.
- All participants were treated in accordance with the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (APA, 2016) and in accordance with Institutional Review Board guidelines.

Materials

- Participants were given a packet containing a demographic survey and a questionnaire created for the purposes of this study.
- The questionnaire consisted of a total of 8 items related to abortion in general, including one item specifically about the New York State law.
- Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale with response categories ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*).
- The demographic survey contained one question asking participants how liberal or conservative they were with response categories ranging from 1 (*extremely liberal*) to 8 (*extremely conservative*).

Figure 1. Participant Demographics



Results

- Of the entire sample, 125 participants (93.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that abortion should be legal when the woman's own health would be seriously endangered by the pregnancy.
- In cases where the woman became pregnant as a result of rape or incest, 121 participants (91%) agreed or strongly agreed that abortion should be legal.
- In cases where the woman has made a personal decision to abort the fetus, 102 participants (76.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that abortion should be legal.
- When asked specifically about the NYSRHA, 34 participants (25.6%) agreed or strongly agreed with the law, and 98 participants (73.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the law.
- Participants describing themselves as conservative were more likely to disagree with NYSRHA ($r = -.35, p = .004$).

Discussion

- The results of the present study are consistent with the results of previous research, suggesting that most people hold moderate positions toward abortion (Andaya, 2021; Coleman-Minahan et al., 2021; Mosley et al., 2020; Rye & Underhill, 2020; Smith & Son, 2013).
- Smith and Son found that only about 8% of Americans would fall under an absolute pro-life position on abortion (e.g., "Abortion should be illegal in all cases.") and approximately 31% would fall under an absolute pro-choice position (e.g., "There should be no laws on abortion and women should have the right to this procedure at any time during the pregnancy.").
- Approval for abortion is generally highest when the women's health is seriously endangered, followed by pregnancies resulting from rape or incest and a serious deficit in the fetus (Andaya, 2021; Smith & Son, 2013).
- Majorities have not approved when the woman wants the abortion for any reason (Smith & Son, 2013) or at any time during the pregnancy (Coleman-Minahan et al., 2021; Smith & Son, 2013).
- These findings are consistent with the question in the present study about the NYSRHA.
- Further research is needed on the NYSRHA and similar laws that are likely to follow in other states.

References

Available upon request.