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‘Excruciating’ Pain During an Abortion?

How early in life can a fetus feel pain, and should this factor into abortions?

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"I'm a woman, not a womb." "This is my uterus." "My body, my choice." "Get your filthy laws off my body." These are messages written on posters that have circulated the streets of various abortion rallies. The marchers vigorously argue that a pregnant woman is merely carrying malignant tissue, which only until "viable" (able to live outside the womb) is not a separate, distinct being, and thus is up to the woman to decide what to do with. To those who disagree? "Mind your own uterus" (another poster).

Is abortion, thus, any different from removing a kidney?

If not, the people waving posters and chanting slogans through megaphones make a good point. But if so, what they are advocating is an absolute bloodbath. We must know for certain.

There is a common thread in these "pro-choice" posters and slogans: "I," "me" and "my." Pro-abortion women (and men) want government and society to let pregnant women "do what's best for themselves." Women who have an abortion go through enough emotional pain as it is. They do not want others to add to their suffering by criticizing, stigmatizing or interfering with their abortions.

With all this talk of "viability," emotional pain, stigma, and "I," "me" and "my," one relevant aspect of abortion goes overlooked: The pain experienced by the *fetus* as it is being aborted.

About a year ago, [LifeNews.com](#) reported, "Leading Physician Confirms Unborn Children Feel Excruciating Pain During Late-Term Abortions." The article noted the research of Dr. Steven Zielinski, who had testified to Congress that an unborn baby can feel pain at "8½ weeks and possibly earlier." The unborn fetus responds to touch as early as week six. Dr. Zielinski said that under certain circumstances, a baby before birth is capable of crying. Along with Dr. Thomas Marzen and Dr. Vincent Collins, Dr. Zielinski wrote:

Functioning neurological structures necessary for pain sensation are in place as early as 8 weeks, but certainly by 13½ weeks of gestation. Sensory nerves, including nociceptors, reach the skin of the fetus before the ninth week of gestation. The first detectable brain activity occurs in the thalamus between the eighth and 10th weeks. The movement of electrical impulses through the neural fibers and spinal column takes place between eight and nine weeks gestation. By 13½ weeks, the entire sensory nervous system functions as a whole in all parts of the body.

The book *The Development of the Brain* by S. Reinis and J. Goldman comes to a similar conclusion:

Lip tactile response may be evoked by the end of the seventh week. At 11 weeks, the face and all parts of the upper and lower extremities are sensitive to touch. By 13½ to 14 weeks, the entire body surface, except for the back and the top of the head, are sensitive to pain.

Dr. Randy O’Cannon writes in [an opinion piece](#) that there is “solid medical evidence to believe that the child not only feels pain, but feels it more severely than an infant or an adult.” He goes on:

Studied in more detail, fetal pain physiology indicates not merely pain awareness, but the possibility of increased pain capability. Between weeks 20 and 30, the unborn child has both a very thin protective layer of skin and more pain receptors per square inch than any other time before or after birth.

Furthermore, the pain-suppressing mechanisms that infants and adults generally possess do not begin to develop until weeks 30 to 32. As a consequence, the child aborted at 20 to 30 weeks is likely to be not just capable of feeling pain, but feeling it more widely, and intensely, and unremittingly, than a child born at term or an adult.

Neurologist Dr. Paul Ranalli concurs that the unborn child is at a “uniquely vulnerable time, since the pain system is fully established, yet the higher-level pain-modifying system has barely begun to develop.”

In a statement to the United States Senate last March, neonatology professor Dr. Colleen Malloy said:

There is no reason to believe that a born infant will feel pain any differently than that same infant if he or she were still in utero. I could never imagine subjecting my tiny patients to a horrific procedure such as those that involve limb detachment or cardiac injection.

Countering this, pro-abortion activists point to other leading physicians who attribute a later time frame for fetal pain. The former president of the International Fetal Medicine and Surgery Society (ifmss) stated that before 24 weeks pain is “not possible at all.” As Pam Belluck [wrote](#) for the *New York Times*, “Because so much about pain is undetermined, most scientific discussions eventually run into theoretical territory.” And so the “fetal pain debate,” and how it should translate into restricting abortions, rages on.

For decades, the consensus was that a fetus is “viable” outside the womb after about 24 weeks. Yet more and more frequently, babies are born as early as 21 weeks and are surviving outside of the womb. If we are to believe the former president of ifmss, it is “impossible” for these babies to feel pain? Some contend that pain pathways are opened up through the process of birth, or that because the brain’s cortex does not develop until the 23rd week, there is no prior sense of pain. Others counter that the cortex is not necessary for pain to be sensed, and point out examples of young children with hydranencephaly (a condition in which the cortex is mostly or completely missing). While the arguments go back and forth, one thing is obvious: technological advancements are allowing babies to have a higher chance of survival *weeks* earlier than previously established “viability” dates and supposed “pain-development” stages.

The Catholic News Agency [reported last year](#) a case of the dichotomy between *saving* babies and *aborting* them at the same stages of development (emphasis added):

Dr. Kathi Aultman, a retired gynecologist, said she had performed both first and second trimester abortions, had an abortion herself, and has a cousin who is an abortion survivor. ... While she worked in the neonatal intensive care unit by day and in an abortion clinic by night, her conscience began to be troubled by the fact that she was *intent on saving babies in the nicu who were the same age as those being aborted in the clinic*.

Scientific reports on the age at which a fetus experiences pain are helping somewhat to gradually bring down the cutoff date for abortions in various U.S. states. Yet the efforts are only piecemeal as the debates rage on, and the abortion of babies in the womb continues on *right up to the ninth month*

In eight American states, babies continue to be legally terminated by the instruments of abortion [for any reason](#) through the *ninth month* of pregnancy. Two states impose prohibitions beginning with the third trimester (28 weeks). The majority of states restrict abortions to a younger fetal age.

Pro-abortion activists point out the “rarity” of late-term abortions in America, often referring to 2012 data showing 1.3 percent of abortions occurring at or after 21 weeks. That impersonal percentage is put into perspective when you realize that it equates to more than *9,000* such abortions: more than one every hour. Further, those numbers are based on [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention statistics](#), which recorded 699,202 reported abortions for 2012. The Guttmacher Institute reported more than *1 million* abortions that year.

How were these 9,000 late-term babies aborted? Probably through a method called Dilation and Evacuation (D&E). This method is typically used after 16 weeks. Either the fetus is first injected with a heart-stopping medication (basically inflicting a heart attack) before dismemberment, or it is simply aborted while fully active and cognizant. A once pro-choice obstetrician-gynecologist, Dr. Tony Levantino, describes from experience how the process works:

A second trimester D&E abortion is a blind procedure. The baby can be in any orientation or position inside the uterus. Picture yourself reaching in with the Sopher clamp [a long, toothed gripping device] and grasping anything you can. ... Once you have grasped something inside, squeeze on the clamp to set the jaws and pull hard—really hard. You feel something let go and out pops a fully formed leg about four to five inches long. Reach in again and grasp whatever you can. Set the jaw and pull really hard once again and out pops an arm about the same length. Reach in again and again with that clamp and tear out the spine, intestines, heart and lungs.

The toughest part of a D&E abortion is extracting the baby's head. The head of a baby that age is about the size of a plum and is now free floating inside the uterine cavity. You can be pretty sure you have hold of it if the Sopher clamp is spread about as far as your fingers will allow. You will know you have it right when you crush down on the clamp and see a pure white gelatinous material issue from the cervix. That was the baby's brains. You can then extract the skull pieces. If you have a really bad day like I often did, a little face may come out and stare back at you.

That's just normal routine in the convenient, "safe" world of abortion. But of course, "pro-choice" activists wouldn't have you focus on that. They'd rather deflect attention to "My body," "My rules," "My choice" (more posters). Who cares about the fetus? "My body, my choice, get ovary it" (another poster).

There is something macabre about these slogans when you put them side by side with *what an abortion is*.

Much less common than D&E, but still offered by abortion clinics and still torturing and ending the short lives of babies, is the instillation/saline method. It is horrific beyond words. These abortions target late-term babies. Abortion practitioners inject into the mother's womb a toxic blend of chemicals that slowly [burns the child to death](#). That's if it *does* actually die—these abortions have a high "failure" rate: saline-burned babies can and have survived.

Yet the pain of such an ordeal isn't limited to later, more developed fetuses. The first widely shown abortion ultrasound was of a fetus at only 12 weeks (from Dr. Bernard Nathanson's film *The Silent Scream*). As related by [AbortionFacts.com](#), the video "shows a child serenely resting in her mother's womb.

Suddenly the child is alarmed because of the intruding abortion device. She moves as far away as she can, trying desperately to save her life. Just before her body is torn to pieces and sucked out through the vacuum tube, her tiny mouth opens in an unheard scream of terror. After the abortion the doctor who performed it was invited to view the ultrasound. He was so upset with what he saw that he left the room. Though he had performed over 10,000 abortions, he never performed another one.

A squirming child only makes abortion efforts that much more difficult. As such, according to [DoctorsOnFetalPain.com](#), "fetal surgeons have found it necessary to sedate the unborn child with anesthesia to *prevent the unborn child from thrashing about* in reaction to invasive surgery" (emphasis added).

But somehow these practices continue as safe, convenient, legal, accepted. Maybe it's the fact that we can't see the baby in there, or can't *feel* the pain it goes through. We can't see the tiny bodies move away from the forceps until they are cornered. We can't feel the pain of a tiny, fully formed leg being ripped off, then an arm, then part of a spine. Maybe that is how we can pass laws that state that the fetus's life is in it's mother's hands to kill at any point for any reason. It's just "part of the mother's tissue." But the mother does not *feel* the piercing, poisoning, tearing, slicing, crushing and burning. *The baby does*. Doesn't this fact in itself show that an unborn baby is a unique life distinct from his or her mother?

If it *is* indeed a distinct entity from the mother, then whether or not it is developed enough to feel pain shouldn't even have to factor into the abortion debate. Either it *is* a life, or it isn't. Either it's a unique being, thus necessitating its own rights, or it's a growth of the woman's flesh. Either it's on par for removal with a kidney or appendix, or it isn't.

The administration of U.S. President Bill Clinton expressed a desire to make abortion "safe, legal and rare." Why rare, if it's perfectly normal and appropriate? In 2005, then Sen. Hillary Clinton said that abortion "represents a sad, even tragic choice." Why tragic?

Either the procedure called "abortion" is fine, normal, safe and humane, or it isn't.

So we ask: *Is abortion murder?* Absolutely yes—but perhaps not for the reason you may think. Read *Trumpet* contributor Fred Dattolo's fantastic article "[Is Abortion Really Murder?](#)" to find out why.

In a December 2016 *Women of the Hour* podcast, a celebrity discussed the fearsome, dreadful, barbaric "stigma" faced by women who abort their babies. In an attempt to empathize with women who have aborted their unborn sons or daughters, the actress stated: "Now I can say that I still haven't had an abortion, *but I wish I had*." If she *had* conceived a little life, allowed it to grow for several weeks, then had someone in a white coat poison and/or pull it apart and/or crush and suction that little one, *then* she could help eradicate a "stigma."

Words fail.

A massive backlash pressured this celebrity to apologize for her comment. But examples including hers certainly show how far we've "progressed" in our "advanced" society. Yes, we've stopped thronging to the coliseums to watch armed men kill each other. Instead, we've turned to killing of the most helpless and defenseless human beings in society. *En masse*.

Because since you've started reading this article, more than 600 abortions have happened worldwide. About 15 of them occurred in the U.S. The degree of fetal pain? Depends on the age. Legal? Probably. Does it matter? Not really—"My body, my decision." That's what they tell us. So the unborn babies die on—many of them in excruciating pain—and the marchers march on. "You're not the boss of me. Mind your own uterus."

As someone once said, "I've noticed that everyone who is for abortion has already been born." And so those who have had a chance at life continue to debate the status of the unborn. But abortion isn't an issue of loud debate. It is the sound of silent screaming. ■

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