

Women's Reproductive Rights: White Ribbon Australia Position Statement

White Ribbon Australia believes that all women should have complete control over their reproductive and sexual health.

We take this position because:

- We are opposed to all forms of control, violence and abuse. Restricting or denying a woman the autonomy to make decisions about her body is an attempt to maintain power and control over a woman. This is also known as reproductive coercionⁱ.
- Sexual and reproductive rights are basic human rights. Denying a woman access to contraception and abortion is a denial of basic rights to health care. It impacts on a woman achieving economic and sexual self-determination and having full access to education and employmentⁱⁱ. **It is a woman's right to choose if and when she gets pregnant. It is a woman's right to seek an abortion.**
- Women want access to abortion and control over their reproductive rightsⁱⁱⁱ.
- Criminalisation of abortion and restricted access to abortion and birth control (through high cost and limited availability) endanger women's physical and emotional health and wellbeing^{iv}.
- It is consistent with community attitudes on abortion, with most Australians being pro-choice. The 2003 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes found that the vast majority of Australians are pro-choice, including 77% of people who identify as religious^v.

Because of this, we advocate for:

- Decriminalisation of abortion, for example we support the [It's Not 1889 Campaign](#) by Pro Choice Queensland.
- Nationally consistent access to safe and legal abortion, including late-term abortion in all states and territories, removing uncertainty for women and health professionals.
- Provision of abortion through the public health system in all states and territories.
- Cost and travel support for women who want an abortion. This is especially vital for women in rural and remote areas, and women experiencing financial abuse.
- Full access to affordable, long-acting and reversible contraception.
- Financial and social support for pregnant women who want to continue the pregnancy and remain in or leave an abusive relationship.
- Respectful relationships education for young people that includes sexuality education.
- Training for health professionals and the domestic violence sector in identifying and responding to reproductive coercion.
- Post-abortion support for women who need it.
- Recognition of reproductive coercion as an example of domestic violence in state and territory laws.

Violence and pregnancy

Intimate partner violence has a range of health consequences for women. This includes sexually transmitted infections, unintended and unwanted pregnancy, abortion and unsafe abortion, and pregnancy complications^{vi}.

Research indicates that unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections are more common among women experiencing domestic violence^{vii}. Pregnancy is also a trigger for domestic violence to first occur: of women who have experienced violence during pregnancy by a previous partner since the age of 15, 25% indicated that the violence first occurred during the pregnancy^{viii}.

This violence can be related to reproductive coercion. Reproductive coercion is any behaviour, physical and emotional, aimed at establishing and maintaining power and control by restricting a woman's reproductive autonomy, denying her control over decisions related to her reproductive health and limiting her access to reproductive health options.

Perpetrator behaviours include:

- **Pregnancy pressure**, for example a man accusing a woman of not wanting to be pregnant because she doesn't love him or because she wants to continue alleged affairs.
- **Contraceptive sabotage**, for example destroying birth control pills or condoms, rape, controlling finances and restricting a woman's access to birth control, insisting on unprotected sex.
- **Pregnancy outcome control**, for example pressuring a woman to continue a pregnancy or pressuring a woman to end a pregnancy^{ix}.

While some women in violent, controlling and abusive relationships may be forced to have an abortion by their partners, there is no sound data on the prevalence of this in Australia^x. Just as a woman should not be forced to continue an unwanted pregnancy, a woman should never be forced to have an abortion. A woman's choice and autonomy are paramount.

Acknowledgements

White Ribbon Australia thanks Children by Choice for assisting with the formulation of this position statement. You can learn more about reproductive coercion on their website:

<https://www.childrenbychoice.org.au/factsandfigures/reproductivecoercion>

ⁱ Children by Choice. (2016). *Violence and Pregnancy*. Available:

<https://www.childrenbychoice.org.au/factsandfigures/violenceandpregnancy>

ⁱⁱ Kerr, K. (2014). 'Queensland Abortion Laws: Criminalising one in three women' *QUT Law Review*. 14 (2):15-35, p.24. Available: <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/QUTLawRw/2014/12.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Betts, K. (2004). 'Attitudes to Abortion in Australia: 1972 to 2003'. *People and Place*. 22. Available: <http://researchbank.swinburne.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository/swin:62>

^{iv} Kerr, *op. cit.*, p.31.

^v Betts, *op. cit.*

^{vi} <https://www.childrenbychoice.org.au/factsandfigures/violenceandpregnancy#r1>

^{vii} Miller, E. (2010). 'Reproductive coercion: Connecting the dots between partner violence and unintended pregnancy' *Contraception* 81 (6): 457-459.

^{viii} Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013). *Personal Safety Survey, Australia, 2012*. Canberra: ABS. Table 27.

^{ix} For more information on reproductive coercion, visit:

https://www.childrenbychoice.org.au/images/downloads/MelbConfPosterPamReproCoercion_final.pdf

^x Children by Choice, *op. cit.*