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The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

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Volume 4  
Issue 6 July

Article 12

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July 1977

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### Recommended Citation

Wagenaar, Theodore C. and Knol, Ingeborg W. (1977) "Attitudes toward Abortion: A Comparative Analysis of Correlates for 1973 and 1975," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 6 , Article 12.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol4/iss6/12>

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ATTITUDES TOWARD ABORTION: A COMPARATIVE  
ANALYSIS OF CORRELATES FOR 1973 and 1975\*

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ABSTRACT

This paper contains an analysis of both the level of support for abortion and the correlates of such support for both 1973 and 1975, as indicated by National Opinion Research Center data. In comparison to previous research, which focused primarily on bivariate analyses of demographic variables, we examine the role of demographic and other variables (such as work status, unemployment history, receipt of government aid, and belief in an afterlife) at both the bivariate and multivariate levels of analysis. The result indicates an abatement of the previously increasing level of support; this datum plus the increase in persons responding "don't know" suggest the occurrence of a reappraisal of support for abortion. The bivariate analysis indicates that support is highest among those who: are white, never married, or higher socioeconomic status, with no religious affiliation, seldom attend church, live in the Northeast or West, or have lower exposure to children. Multivariate analysis indicates that religion and socioeconomic status are the most salient variables. A comparison between the 1973 and 1975 data indicate reduced support among men and increased support among women, reduced support among the never married, and increased support among blacks, Catholics, Southerners, and those with less than a high school education.

Abortion has become one of the most salient social issues in America in the last decade. The rise in the numbers of abortions (four million by 1976) and the general acceptance of abortion have been widely discussed in both the popular press and the research literature. The attention given to abortion is undoubtedly a reflection of the salience

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\*Revision of a paper presented at the annual meetings of the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research, November 19-20, 1976, Chicago.

of children both for individuals and for a nation's future (Blake, 1971). Thus both individual citizens and governmental agencies are interested in the abortion controversy; this interest culminated in the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion. In spite of a long-term increase in support for abortion (Mileti and Burnett, 1972), the abortion issue remains a volatile political issue due to intense minority opposition. This political volatility was clearly exhibited in the 1976 presidential election campaign. The development of the women's liberation movement with its emphasis on freedom of choice regarding child-bearing has also propelled the abortion controversy into the limelight.

Since research on persons who have experienced abortions is somewhat difficult to complete, most researchers analyzing abortion have focused on attitudes held towards abortion by the public. There are two major themes in the research literature. One is the general increase in support for abortion over the last decade. In 1965, for example, slightly over half of all Americans approved of abortion in the event of rape or possible deformity (Westoff, Moore, and Ryder, 1969); the data reported in this study indicate that by 1975, about 84 percent of the American population approved of abortion in the event of rape or possible deformity. There have been similar increases in support for abortion under other conditions as well (Arney and Treasher, 1976). The second major theme is the analysis of correlates of abortion, usually involving such conventional demographic variables as age, sex, religion, residence, race, marital status, and socioeconomic status. Results of these studies conclude that support for abortion is highest among non-Catholics, urban residents, residents in the East and West, whites, the highly educated, and those not actively involved in religious affairs (e.g., Blake, 1971; Rao and Bouvier, 1974; and Pomeroy and Landman, 1972). The data on such variables as sex, age, parity, and marital status indicate either minimal relationships or inconsistent results.

However, there are a few problems with the existing research on attitude towards abortion. First, many studies are limited to college students or married women, (e.g., Bogen, 1973; Maxwell, 1970; and Westoff, Moore, and Ryder, 1969). Second, most studies are limited to the standard demographic variables as noted above. Third, with the notable exceptions of Arney and Trescher (1976) and Pomeroy and Landman (1972), few studies examine the changes that may have occurred over time in the correlates of abortion in similar data sets. Fourth, it is surprising that even such major studies as those by Pomeroy and Landman (1972) and Westoff, Moore, and Ryder (1969) do not report levels of statistical significance in their analyses of relationships. Hence relatively small relationships are often discussed as though they were statistically significant when no levels of statistical significance are reported. A

last and major problem is that few researchers have taken a comprehensive multivariate approach to the analysis. Westoff, Moore, and Ryder (1969) do report on a factor analysis of the combined pool of independent and dependent variables, but make no analysis of the unique effect of each independent variable. Some writers do control out for one or two variables when examining a particular independent variable (e.g., Blake, 1971; Rao and Bouvier, 1974), and Miletic and Barnett (1972) examine each of nine demographic variables separately via crosstabular analysis with controls for the other eight. But few analysts examine the unique effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable with simultaneous controls for other independent variable (i.e., beta weights). As a result, both the number of relationships and their significance may be overstated.

In this study we attempt to remedy these inadequacies. A comparative analysis of correlates of support for abortion is described for the two-year span 1973-1975. The data used are the General Social Surveys for 1973 and 1975, compiled by the National Opinion Research Center; each of the two data sets is based on a random sample of approximately 1500 Americans. Hence generalizability of the findings is high. In addition to the usual demographic variables, we also analyze the relationships between support for abortion and such variables as number of siblings, receipt of government aid, past employment, working status, belief in an afterlife, and party identification. Furthermore, levels of statistical significance are reported for all relationships and both bivariate and multivariate analysis procedures are employed. The overall focus is to assess the change, if any, in the correlates of support for abortion in 1973 and 1975. Attention is also devoted to the changes in the dependent variable, support for abortion.

#### METHODS

The dependent variable, support for abortion, has previously been operationalized in a variety of ways. The most common approach is to ask the respondent if he or she would approve of abortion in a variety of situations. The responses are then analyzed separately (e.g., Blake, 1971), cumulated to create a scale (e.g., Hedderson, 1974), or trichotomized according to a selected criterion (e.g., Arney and Trescher, 1976). NORC uses the following question: "Please tell me whether or not you think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion . . .

- a. if there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby
- b. if the woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy
- c. if she became pregnant as a result of rape
- d. if she is married and does not want any more children

e. if the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children

f. if she is not married and does not want to marry the man."

The first three situations are usually described as "hard" reasons; i. e., those beyond a woman's control, and the last three are usually described as "soft" reasons; i. e., those over which a woman might be able to exercise some control (e.g., Westoff, Moore, and Ryder, 1969; Pomerooy and Landman, 1972). Support for the three hard reasons is generally much higher than support than support for the three soft reasons. To determine the scalability of the six items, a Guttman scale was created for each of the two data sets. The coefficients of reproducibility for the 1973 and 1975 data are .95 and .94 respectively. In both cases, the item receiving the most support is the "woman's health" item and the item receiving the least support is the "married, no more children" item. The abortion scale used in this study was simply computed by cumulating the total number of items agreed with; the Guttman scaling analysis validates the use of such a scale. Hence the score values for the abortion scale range from zero to six.<sup>1</sup>

Education, father's education, and age are measured by actual number of years. Number of children and number of siblings are also absolute values. Church attendance is divided into nine categories ranging from "never" to "several times a week," family income is divided into twelve categories ranging from "under \$1,000" to "\$25,000 or over," and size of city is divided into nine categories ranging from "open country" to "over 250,000". In an attempt to quantify region and state of residence, a mean "Index of Southerness" was computed for each of the nine regions (Gastil, 1972). This index reflects the extent of Southern influence in each of the states (and regions). Race, sex, unemployment history, receipt of government aid, working status, and belief in an afterlife were all dichotomously coded (0 and 1).<sup>2</sup>

Since the abortion support scale is interval in nature, one-way analysis of variance was employed to assess bivariate relationships with nominal level independent variables. Spearman's  $r$  and Pearson's  $r$  are used as measures of association for ordinal, interval, and ratio level independent variables. Stepwise multiple regression analysis (with forward calculations) is the method employed to assess multivariate relationships. Regression analysis yields two indicators of the relationship between an independent variable and the dependent variable. One is the contribution to the variance explained, which yields an estimate of the predictive ability of the independent variable given all other independent variables. The other indicator is the beta value, which is the standardized partial regression coefficient and indicates the direct effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable, controlling for other variables in the regression equation. The robust-

ness of regression analysis with ordinal level and dichotomous nominal level independent variables has been documented (e.g., Hawkes, 1971; Kerlinger and Pedhazur, 1973; Labovitz, 1967).

## RESULTS

### Support for Abortion

The levels of support for each of the six abortion items in 1973 and 1975 are reported in Table 1, and the levels of support for multiple items are reported in Table 2. The overall conclusion from both tables is that the patterns of responses are very similar; 80 percent or more of the respondents in both years approve of abortion for each of the three hard reasons (defect, health endangered, rape), and about half of the respondents in both years approve of abortion for each of the soft reasons (married but no more children, low income, not married). However, some differences do exist. For each of the six items, there is a

TABLE 1 Support for Abortion in Six Situations, 1973 and 1975  
(differences noted in parentheses)\*

Item	% Approval		% Disapproval		% Don't Know	
	1973	1975	1973	1975	1973	1975
Serious Defect	82.2	80.3(-1.9)	15.1	16.2(+1.1)	2.4	3.3(+ .9)
Health En- dangered	90.6	88.1(-2.5)	7.6	9.0(+1.4)	1.7	2.5(+ .8)
Rape	80.6	79.9(- .7)	15.9	15.5(- .4)	3.3	4.4(+1.1)
Married, No More	46.1	43.8(-2.3)	50.5	51.9(+1.4)	3.3	4.2(+ .9)
Low Income	51.7	50.5(-1.2)	45.1	44.5(- .6)	3.1	4.6(+1.5)
Woman Not Married	47.3	45.8(-1.5)	49.1	49.1( 0)	3.3	4.8(+1.5)

\*Total for each year does not equal 100% due to exclusion of "no answer."

slight decrease in percent approval between 1973 and 1975; the average decrease is 1.7 percent. Similar data are found in the "percent disapproval" category, where the average increase in disapproval is about one-half of one percent. This slight decrease in approval is also manifested in Table 2, where we find that the percent approving of only one item has increased from 5.5 percent to 6.6 percent and the percent approving of all six items has decreased from 42.6 to 41.5. The discrepancy between decrease in approval and increase in disapproval is partially explained by the increase in the proportions of respondents indicating that they simply "don't know" whether they approve or disapprove; there is an increase in the "don't know" category for each of the six situation items and the average increase is 1.1 percent, which

TABLE 2 Total Number of Abortion Items Approved (differences noted in parentheses)\*

Number of Items	Percent	
	1973	1975
Zero	5.5	6.6 (+1.1)
One	4.7	4.8 (+ .1)
Two	10.1	8.4 (-1.7)
Three	20.9	21.0 (+ .1)
Four	8.7	8.7 ( 0 )
Five	7.6	9.1 (+1.5)
Six	42.6	41.5 (-1.1)
	100.0	100.0

N=1349 1281

"Persons with "don't know" or "no answer" response categories for one or more items excluded from base (10% for 1973 sample and 14% for 1975 sample).

represents about a 40 percent increase between 1973 and 1975 (Table 1). Two conclusions are evident. First, the steady increase in support for abortion reported in the late 60's and early 70's (e.g., Blake, 1971; Pomeroy and Landman, 1972) seems to have abated. It appears that support for abortion may have peaked at the time of the Supreme Court decision and may have begun a slight decline since that time. Second, the data in the "don't know" category indicate that an increased number of Americans feel ambivalent about their attitudes toward abortion; perhaps the vocal minority opposition has influenced many persons who formerly clearly supported abortion to rethink their views. In short, the data indicate that there may be a reassessment of abortion attitudes occurring among Americans.

#### Bivariate Relationships

Next we examine possible shifts in the characteristics of persons supporting abortion. The one-way analysis of variance of abortion support with the nominal level independent variables is reported in Table 3. The level of statistical significance used to determine whether a significant difference exists is .05. Regarding sex of the respondent, it can be seen that the higher level of support for males in 1973 no longer existed in 1975. It is significant to note that the increase in support by women approximates the decrease in support by men. Perhaps both shifts can be explained by the increased popular attention focused on the role of women; women may be becoming more sympathetic to abortion as part of an increased level of overall support for women's rights while men may be becoming more resistant as part of a

TABLE 3 One-way Analysis of Variance of Support for Abortion and Nominal Level Independent Variable, 1973 and 1975.

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean Abortion Scale Scores, Levels of Statistical Significance, and Differences Between 1973 and 1975</u>		
	1973	1975	Difference
Sex	<.05	N.S.	
Male	4.29	4.13	-.16
Female	4.04	4.14	+.10
Marital Status	<.05	N.S.	
Married	4.11	4.11	.00
Widowed	3.82	4.02	+.20
Div-Sep	4.23	4.25	+.02
Never Married	4.58	4.29	-.29
Race	<.05	<.05	
White	4.23	4.12	-.11
Black	3.33	3.66	+.33
Working Status	N.S.	N.S.	
Not Fulltime	4.09	4.08	-.01
Fulltime	4.24	4.22	-.02
Ever Unemployed	<.05	<.05	
No	4.07	4.08	+.01
Yes	4.36	4.31	-.05
Ever Receive Gov't Aid	N.S.	N.S.	
No	4.23	4.15	-.08
Yes	4.02	4.12	+.10
Party Identification	N.S.	N.S.	
Republican	4.27	4.12	-.15
Democrat	4.06	3.97	-.09
Independent	4.26	4.33	+.07
Belief in Afterlife	<.05	<.05	
No	4.80	4.59	-.21
Yes	3.87	3.93	+.06
Religion	<.05	<.05	
Protestant	4.18	4.12	-.06
Catholic	3.63	3.75	+.12
Other	4.95	5.12	+.17
None	5.27	5.15	-.12

backlash against increased support for women's rights. Also, as women become more career-minded and enter the labor force in increasing numbers, it is becoming increasingly acceptable for women to reject the traditional pronatalist role for women.

In 1973, statistically significant differences existed among the various categories of marital status; never married individuals are the most approving of abortion, followed by those who are divorced and separated, married, and widowed. A control for age (not reported in tables) indicated that the higher levels of support among the never married applies only through about 50 years of age. The data for 1975 indicate non-statistically significant differences among the categories of marital status, due primarily to the minimal increase in support among widowed persons and the somewhat larger decrease in support among never married persons in the 1973-1975 interim (there are no significant shifts in the married or divorced-separated categories.) The reduction in support among the never married is particularly unexpected since it is commonly expected that single (and usually younger) persons would increasingly support abortion. Blake (1971:546) explains the decreased level of support among younger, single persons as being a factor of reduced tolerance of failures in the use of birth control. That is, never married persons of 1975 are more likely to view the abortion act as a "mistake" that should have been avoided, whereas previously such persons tended to view abortion as a necessity to avoid unwanted births. Further analysis indicated that never married females were the only females whose support decreased instead of increased in the 1973-1975 interim; perhaps this finding reflects the increased propensity for single pregnant women to bear and keep their children rather than obtain abortions or give the children up for adoption.

Statistically significant differences between blacks and whites regarding abortion support exist for both 1973 and 1975; whites are considerably more approving than blacks. Since blacks come from and have larger families than whites, we controlled for the number of siblings and the number of children; the differences persisted in the face of these controls. Between 1973 and 1975, blacks experienced a significant increase in support and whites a modest decrease, perhaps indicating a differential response to the 1973 Supreme Court decision. That is, since prior to 1973 most blacks did not have the access to safe abortions that most whites had, perhaps the increased support among blacks reflects their response to the more widespread availability of legal, safe abortions.

No statistically significant differences regarding abortion support exist between those currently working fulltime and those not currently working fulltime; neither are there any significant differences between those who have ever received governmental aid and

those who have never received such aid. However, in both years respondents who had been unemployed in the previous ten years are more supportive of abortion than those who had not been unemployed. This difference is stable over the three-year period. Perhaps experience with unemployment heightens individuals' concerns about providing adequately for themselves and thus makes them more sympathetic to the role abortion may play in lessening the financial burden of an unwanted pregnancy.

There are negligible differences among political party affiliations concerning support for abortion. However, there are distinct religious differences. Three variables involving religion are examined--affiliation, ideology (belief in afterlife), and commitment (attendance at religious services). The data on the first two are reported in Table 3 and the data on the third are not reported in tables. Catholics in both years are by far much less approving of abortion than any other religious group. This datum is undoubtedly a reflection of the Catholic Church's total ban on abortion; witness the strong reaction of the Catholic clergy to the 1973 Supreme Court decision. However, in light of the ban, it is significant to note that the mean number of items supported by Catholics is still about 3.7--most Catholics agree with at least three of the abortion situation items. Furthermore, there was an increase in that value between 1973 and 1975 (+.12), which signifies a minor trend towards increasing support for abortion among Catholics. Evidently Catholics are experiencing reductions in the traditionally complete acceptance of Church teachings. This conclusion is also supported by the increased propensity for Catholics to reject the Church's teachings on the use of birth control. Protestants have the next lowest level of support for abortion, and persons labeled "other" and "none" have higher levels of support. The largest difference is between those ascribing to either Protestantism or Catholicism ( $\bar{X}=3.9$ ) and those selecting "other" or "none" ( $\bar{X}=5.12$ ). Thus individuals ascribing to a "mainline" religion are significantly less supportive than are those ascribing to some other religion or to no religion. As expected, those subscribing to no religion are the most supportive of abortion. In short, religious affiliation is significantly associated with stance toward abortion.

Belief in life after death was used to assess one dominant aspect of religious ideology. Persons believing in life after death are significantly less supportive of abortion than those without such a belief, although this difference narrowed between 1973 and 1975. The drop in support among those not believing in an afterlife is greater than the increase in support among those believing in an afterlife, suggesting that a greater reappraisal may be occurring among those

without religious ideological beliefs than among those with such beliefs. Perhaps the increased attention focused on the meaning of life has more salience for those without religious beliefs since those with such beliefs have already confronted the definition of life issue.

Attendance at religious services is significantly positively related to support for abortion (Spearman  $r = -.30$  for 1973 and  $r = -.33$  for 1975, for both  $p. < .05$ ). Hence degree of religious commitment also significantly affects one's attitudes on abortion. In sum, all three religious concepts—affiliation, ideology, and commitment—play a major role in influencing one's support for abortion.

Socioeconomic status was operationalized with three variables—respondent's education, respondent's total family income, and father's education.<sup>3</sup> The Spearman (for income) and Pearson (for both education variables) correlations with abortion support are as follows: for education,  $r = .26$  for 1973 and  $r = .23$  for 1975; for income,  $r = .17$  for 1973 and  $r = .13$  for 1975; for father's education,  $r = .22$  for 1973 and  $r = .20$  for 1975 (all correlations significant beyond .05 level). The correlations are modest, indicating a mildly positive association between socioeconomic status and support for abortion. For all three indicators, the correlations are somewhat stronger for 1973 data than 1975 data, suggesting that socioeconomic status is becoming somewhat less salient as a predictor variable. A one-way analysis of variance of the education variable for both years (not reported in tables) indicates that support for abortion is rising among those with less than a high school education and dropping slightly among the college educated. This datum may indicate that more highly educated persons were the first to support abortion and that persons with lower education levels are now following that trend. Higher socioeconomic status persons are more likely to support abortion due to increased exposure to social issues and increased cosmopolitanism, both products of higher education. The fact that upper socioeconomic status women have long had access to safe abortions may also explain the relationship.

The data on age indicate minimal, nonstatistically significant relationships for both 1973 and 1975; this finding is consistent with the literature. Two variables tapping exposure to children were also analyzed. Statistically significant modest negative relationships between support for abortion and both number of siblings and number of children were found—for number of siblings, Pearson  $r = -.21$  for 1973 and  $r = -.16$  for 1975; for number of children,  $r = -.16$  for both 1973 and 1975. A control for age in the relationship between abortion support and number of children did not significantly alter the zero order correlations. It seems that persons with more extensive involvement with children are somewhat less likely to support abortion. Apparently experiential involvement with children engenders a higher

level of resistance to antinatalist policies. However, the low correlations should be underscored.

Since residence is often cited as a salient variable in abortion attitude research (e.g., Mileti and Barnett, 1972), we examined the role of both city size and "Southernness" of region. City size is negligibly positively correlated with the abortion scale for both years, and the Southernness index has low negative correlations with abortion support for both years (Pearson  $r = -.06$  for 1973 and  $r = -.14$  for 1975;  $p < .05$  for both years). To a minor extent, persons living in areas characterized by Southern culture are less likely to support abortion. An analysis of the regions with one-way analysis of variance (not reported in tables) indicated that support for abortion is highest in the Northeast and West and lowest in the South. Furthermore, the only category in which a shift occurred between 1973 and 1975 was the South, with a significant increase occurring. Perhaps the explanation for this finding is analogous to that for education; i.e., Southerners may simply be catching up with the higher levels of support exhibited earlier by residents of the Northeast and West.

Respondents who indicated that they "don't know" for at least one of the six abortion scale items were compared with those who responded either "yes" or "no" to all six items. The former were more often Black, widowed, highly committed to religion, rural, Southern, older, lower socioeconomic status, and had more exposure to children (results not reported in tables). Also, between 1973 and 1975 these categories became even more associated with "don't know" responses. Compared to the analysis described above, it can be seen that "don't know" respondents are more like respondents displaying low support for abortion than like those displaying high support. This analysis suggests that an unsure opinion, like the low support response, represents a reappraisal of attitudes toward abortion.

#### Multivariate Relationships

Regression analysis was employed to assess the relative predictive importance of each independent variable (contribution to  $R^2$ ) and the unique effect of each independent variable (beta weight).<sup>4</sup> The results of this analysis are reported in Table 4. For both years, the most salient predictor variable is church attendance (contribution to  $R^2$  for 1973 is 11% and for 1975 is 13%). The beta weights are the largest of the independent variables analysed ( $B = -.32$  for 1973 and  $B = -.34$  for 1975). It seems that church attendance has become slightly more important in the 1973-1975 interval as a predictor variable, due perhaps to the increased attention official religious organizations have focused on abortion and the definition of life following the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion.

TABLE 4 Multiple Regression Analysis of Support for Abortion with All Independent Variables Except Religious Affiliation and Party Identification.\*

Variable	Simple R		Contribution to R <sup>2</sup>		Beta	
	1973	1975	1973	1975	1973	1975
Church Attendance	-.33	-.36	.113	.130	-.32	-.34
Education	.26	.23	.076	.051	.19	.17
Father's education	.22	.20	.011	.003	.10	.08
Belief in afterlife (0=No, 1=Yes)	-.19	-.18	.008	.007	-.10	-.08
Race (0=Black, 1=White)	.16	.03	.007	.001	.06	-.03
Age	-.06	-.04	.007	.007	.13	.16
Number children	-.16	-.16	.006	.012	-.08	-.11
Number siblings	-.21	-.16	.003	.000	-.06	-.02
Family income	.15	.11	.002	.003	.06	.07
Ever unemployed (0=No, 1=Yes)	.07	.05	.002	.002	.06	.05
Ever receive gov't aid (0=No, 1=Yes)	-.07	-.04	.002	.000	-.05	-.01
Southernness of residence region	-.06	-.14	.001	.005	.02	-.06
Sex (0=Female, 1=Male)	.04	-.01	.001	.004	-.03	-.07
Size of city	.04	.09	.000	.000	-.01	.00
Working status (0=not full time, 1=full time)	.05	.03	.000	.000	.01	.00
			R <sup>2</sup> <sub>m</sub>	.239		.225

\*Using listwise deletion of missing data, the N for 1973 is 885, and the N for 1975 is 866.

Two of the three socioeconomic status variables--respondent's education and father's education--rank second and third for both years in terms of both contribution to  $R^2$  and beta weights (for respondent's education, the values are 8% and .19 for 1973 and 5% and .17 for 1975; for father's education, the values are 1% and .10 for 1973 and .3% and .08 for 1975). The values for both variables decreased somewhat between 1973 and 1975, supporting the conclusions of the bivariate analysis.

Next in statistical importance is the religious ideology item concerning belief in life after death. For both years, the contribution to  $R^2$  is about .7 percent and the beta value is about -.09. Age makes a similar contribution of .7 percent for both years and has a beta of .13 for 1973 and .16 for 1975. The size of the coefficients are not large, but they differ in direction from the bivariate relationships (from minimally negative to minimally positive). With other variables considered simultaneously, it appears that older persons are only slightly more likely to support abortion than younger persons. The salience of race is more pronounced in 1973 than 1975, although the values for both years are quite low. This time difference was also noted in the bivariate analysis. The beta values for both number of siblings and number of children are negative, but relatively low. The remaining variables do not contribute significantly to the variance explained and have minimal unique relationships with abortion support.

In sum, the regression analysis underscores the role of religion and socioeconomic status in influencing support for abortion. Coupled with the bivariate analysis of religious affiliation, the results suggest a highly significant link between abortion support and all three indicators of religion (affiliation, commitment, and ideology). Since one's religious beliefs and practices reflect one's moral and ethical values, we conclude that attitudes towards abortion are in large part determined by such values. Since discussions of moral and religious values typically involve the definition and meaning of "life", it is not surprising that the religion variables explain so much of the variance in support for abortion. Individuals committed to a particular religion and its ideological beliefs can be expected to apply such beliefs to their views on contemporary social issues such as abortion.

Perhaps the best explanation for the salience of socioeconomic status involves the role of advanced education. An advanced education generally involves exposure to and interaction with widely divergent people and ideas. The net result for many individuals is an increased level of tolerance for ideas contrary to one's own personal beliefs and values (cf. Brookover and Erickson, 1975:369). In short, edu-

cation has a liberalizing effect on individuals.

### Conclusions

In contrast to the steadily increasing support for abortion found in previous research, the data analyzed in this study indicate a slight decrease in support. Both this decrease and the significant increase in numbers of Americans reporting that they are unsure of their opinions are indicative of a reappraisal occurring concerning the rightness or wrongness of abortion. Several factors may have contributed to this reappraisal. Perhaps the most significant factor may be the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, which has generated widescale interest and dissent. Second, Watergate may have had some impact by turning many discussions of social issues into discussion of values. Both Watergate and the legalization decision have served the function of bringing the discussion of values and moral issues out in the open. Third, the increased attention devoted to the definition and meaning of life, as exemplified in the Karen Quinlan case, may have influenced people's attitudes toward abortion. A fourth factor may be the significant increase in numbers of abortions that have occurred since legalization; Weinstock, et. al. (1976) report that by 1976 more than one in 14 of all women of reproductive age had obtained legal abortions. Many Americans may never have expected that such large numbers of abortions would occur and may now be expressing second thoughts about their approval of abortion. A final possible explanation for stabilization of support may simply be that we are nearing the end of a long-term transition stage from predominant disapproval to predominant approval.

The bivariate phase of the analysis supported many of the previous findings on correlates of support for abortion. Support is highest among those who are white, have no religious affiliation, seldom attend church, do not believe in an afterlife, are higher in socioeconomic status, have minimal exposure to children, are living in the Northeast and West, or have been unemployed in the previous ten years. No significant differences were found for sex, marital status, working status, party identification, age, size of city, and receipt of government aid.

The most notable shifts in the correlates of support for abortion between 1973 and 1975 include:

- a reduction in sex differences, with males becoming less supportive and females more
- a reduction in support among the never married, although they are still the most supportive of the marital status categories

- an increase in support among blacks and a decrease in support among whites, although whites are still more supportive
- increased support among Catholics and those belonging to some "other" religion and a decrease in support among Protestants and those who have no religious affiliation, although Catholics are still by far the least supportive
- a decrease in the positive relationship between socioeconomic status and support, although still significantly positive
- an increase in support among the less educated and slight decrease among the college educated, although the relationship is still positive
- an increase in support among Southern people, although they are still the least supportive
- a reduced difference between those who believe in life after death and those who do not, although the difference is still significant

These shifts indicate that, in spite of a trend toward decreased support, increased support exists among certain types of persons--the less educated, Southerners, blacks, and Catholics. However, significantly lower support levels still characterize such persons. In short, since these persons expressed less support originally, their more rapid increase in support may simply reflect a catching up with the types of persons who more readily supported abortion--the more highly educated, Northeasterners and Westerners, whites, and those without a religion. If this trend continues, there may be few differences among these categories in the future.

Overall, however, the support for abortion under the six circumstances examined remains fairly high, with over 80 percent of both samples supporting abortion for the "hard" reasons (defect, health endangered, rape) and over 40 percent of both samples supporting abortion for the "soft" reasons (married but no more children, low income, not married). Clearly, the American population continues to support the use of abortion.

The most significant contribution of this study lies in the multivariate analysis, which few previous studies have utilized. This analysis of 15 independent variables clearly indicates the role of religion and socioeconomic status in abortion support. Involvement and belief in religion, particularly Catholicism, is the most salient factor in influencing support for abortion, and ranking at the upper end of the socioeconomic status continuum is the second most salient factor. However, it should be emphasized that all 15 variables, which include the most commonly used demographic independent variables, explain only about 23 percent of the variance in support for abortion and have only

modest beta weights. Hence the majority of the variance in abortion support remains unexplained. Future research on other variables may help to increase the total variance explained for abortion support. Perhaps various psychological and life-experience variables may prove to be more salient than the usual demographic variables. Also, continued monitoring of the yearly National Opinion Research Center polls may indicate further shifts in the correlates of support for abortion.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Persons responding "don't know" to any of the six items were excluded from the analysis of relationships although a comparison between these respondents and the rest is discussed below. For 1973 such respondents comprised ten percent of the total sample and for 1975 they comprised 14 percent of the sample.
2. Further information on variable construction and sampling can be found in the respective NORC codebooks.
3. Occupational prestige and occupational classification were also examined, but the multivariate analysis indicated that they were less important than education, income, and father's education.
4. Three nominal level variables--marital status, party identification, and religious affiliation--are not amenable to being recoded into dummy variables and hence are not included in the regression analysis.

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