November 21st, 2017

Dear Senator Noone,

Thank you again for the opportunity to present the findings of my research to the Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth Amendment. I have followed the work of the Committee since my appearance on October 11th and wish to thank the members for their continued thoughtful consideration of the issues at hand.

A particular result from my research on early medication abortions obtained in Ireland using online telemedicine was discussed again at the Committee meeting on November 8th. I believe that there was some confusion about how to interpret the results of the bar chart showing the feelings women reported after completing their abortions. It is very important for your further discussions and deliberations on the mental health implications of abortion and the need for counseling that this chart be interpreted correctly. I would like to provide some brief further clarification for the Committee.

The most important thing to understand is that the chart reflects the number of times each feeling was reported (expressed as a percentage), and not the number of women who reported each feeling in isolation. It is not accurate to say that “46% of women expressed negative feelings”. If you were to read the chart that way, then you would also have to say that 174% of women expressed positive feelings, which clearly makes no numerical sense. The reason you cannot interpret the chart as though these feelings were expressed in isolation is because most people reported more than one feeling, and thus the percentages sum to well over 100%.

To help the Committee make these statements accurately, I have re-run the analyses to express the results as the percentage of women reporting three broad categories of feeling: 1) negative feelings only; 2) positive feelings only; 3) a mix of positive and negative feelings. The results show that:

- 7% of women reported only negative feelings
- 66% of women reported only positive feelings
- 27% of women reported a mix of both positive and negative feelings

It is critical to recognize that negative feelings occurred much less commonly that positive feelings, and also that the vast majority of negative feelings were accompanied by positive ones, most commonly relief and satisfaction. I think it would be considered very normal for a woman who feels relieved or satisfied about her abortion to also feel some sadness. But such feelings
cannot be equated with serious mental health concerns, nor can we claim that these women necessarily need counseling.

It is also important to understand that we cannot necessarily attribute any of these feelings solely to the abortion itself because for these women, the circumstances under which they obtained and conducted their abortion were often very stressful. For example, a woman who reports feeling disappointed may be disappointed by the abortion, but equally, she may be disappointed in the way she had to go about obtaining the abortion under Ireland’s current laws.

Finally, it is also worth considering the feelings of these women prior to their abortions. Given that 100% of them voluntarily sought early medication abortion, it seems reasonable to conclude that their feelings regarding their unwanted pregnancies were overwhelmingly negative.

I thank the Committee for their attention to this matter and hope these additional data provide useful clarification.

Sincerely,

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