

April 2023



Abortion Views Survey 2023

**RESULTS AND
ANALYSIS**

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Executive Summary

We surveyed 874 respondents on a randomly selected basis in England and Wales between June and November 2022. Contrary to what other surveys and polls suggest, a majority of respondents, when given the facts, thought our abortion law needed reforming in some way. The desire for reform was most apparent when it came to questions of abortion because of disability, fetal viability, fetal pain relief, and where abortions should be allowed to take place.

Key Points

- 26% of respondents said they were pro-life, 59% said they were pro-choice. The rest said they did not know (11%) or preferred not to say (4%).
- A total of 58% of respondents, when given facts, thought our abortion law should be restricted in some way, with only 11% wanting a relaxation in our laws.
- Just under half (46%) of respondents believed current abortion figures are too high. Only 1% of respondents believed we should have more abortions.
- Over half of respondents (55%) thought aborting a baby because of Down's syndrome was unacceptable, with 6 in 10 (63%) expressing support for reforming our abortion law in this area.
- 8 in 10 (79%) respondents thought aborting an unborn baby solely because s/he has cleft lip and cleft palate is unacceptable, with 76% expressing support for legal reform in this area.
- 61% of respondents supported a reduction in the upper abortion limit from 24 weeks to 22 weeks.
- 80% of respondents supported the mandatory introduction of painkillers for the unborn baby during an abortion procedure beyond 12 weeks gestation.
- 71% of respondents thought "pills by post" abortion was unacceptable. The figure concurs exactly with other polls on the matter and nearly exactly with the government consultation result on the same topic.

Methodology

We collected 874 surveys between 16th June and 26th November 2022 in 29 UK towns and cities across England and Wales.¹ Surveys were conducted on behalf of CBR UK during daylight hours, midweek and on Saturdays using 76 trained surveyors (44 female/32 male).² Surveys were collected using Google Forms accessible by phone or tablet.³ Data from the survey was stored securely on Google Drive. The surveys were taken predominantly on urban high streets (95%) on a random self-selecting basis (i.e members of the public were approached at random by our trained surveyors and those who consented were interviewed). The rest (5%) were collected door to door, in residential areas near to where the surveyors lived. No one under the age of 16 (the legal age of sexual consent) was included in the survey results.

Age Demographics

Even though our survey was conducted on a random, self-selecting basis, we managed to collect a robust and even spread of ages. As should be visible in the following table, all age categories were represented relatively evenly.

		Gender		Age						
	Total	Male	Female	16-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-65	65+
Total Surveys Completed	874	386	488	47	155	129	106	116	121	200
% of Survey	100	44%	56%	5%	18%	15%	12%	13%	14%	23%

Table A: A table to show the spread of ages of those surveyed

Those under 18 were slightly underrepresented and those over 65 were slightly over represented. This said the two best represented age categories in our survey, 18-24 and 25-34, constitute the age categories who have the highest number of abortions each year in England and Wales. See Table B below:



Table B: Legal abortions: numbers by age and Local Authority (England) and Locality Office (Wales) of residence, residents of England and Wales. SOURCE: Gov 2021 Abortion Data

¹Towns and cities include: Liverpool, Chester, Carlisle, Knarborough, Harrogate, York, Driffield, Maidstone, Worthing, Dover, Canterbury, Guildford, Hythe, Ashford, St Albans, Lancing, Folkestone, Gravesend, Croydon, Thamesmead, Woolwich, Hither Green, Plymouth, Norwich, Cardiff, Coventry, Birmingham, Walsall and Tamworth

² Training consisted of a single training session (in person or online) and the signing of our [code of conduct](#).

³ A handful of surveyors 2-3 struggled with the use of devices so were permitted to print out a survey and fill it in manually. The data was then re-inserted into a google form by a tech savvy team member after collection. See [Copy of Survey](#).

Data Summary

Establishing Starting Position

The purpose of the first two questions of the survey was to establish the general and specific views of the person being surveyed.

Q1	<i>Would you describe your views towards abortion generally as:</i>	TOTAL	Male	Female
	<i>Total Surveyed</i>	874	386	488
	Pro-life (against abortion)	224	106	118
	%	26%	27%	24%
	Pro-choice (for abortion)	515	212	303
	%	59%	55%	62%
	Don't Know	98	51	47
	%	11%	13%	10%
	Prefer not to say	37	17	20
	%	4%	4%	4%

Table Q1: Summary of question 1 of survey

The majority (59%) of people we surveyed identified as pro-choice (for abortion), with around one quarter (26%) identifying as pro-life (against abortion). 98 people we surveyed didn't know their general position.

Q2	Which of the following best describes your view?	TOTAL	Male	Female
	Total Surveyed	874	386	488
	It's a women's right to choose to terminate at any point in the pregnancy, up to the due date	179	85	94
	%	20%	22%	19%
	It's a women's right to choose to terminate up to the current legal limit of 24 weeks	336	147	189
	%	38%	38%	39%
	It's a women's right to choose to terminate only in rare cases, such in the event of a severe abnormality, rape, incest. etc	244	102	142
	%	28%	26%	29%
	Abortion should not be permissible under any circumstance	81	39	42
	%	9%	10%	9%
	Prefer not to say	34	13	21
	%	4%	3%	4%

Table Q2: Summary of question 2 of survey

When given five options and requested to specify their exact view, 38% of respondents supported the current UK legal limit of 24 weeks. 37% of respondents specified they believed either abortion is only acceptable in extreme cases like fatal fetal abnormality, rape and incest etc. (28%), or should not be permissible under any circumstances (9%). 1 in 5 (20%) of respondents supported abortion up to birth for any reason.

Abortion Figures

The purpose of the third question was to introduce the respondent to accurate abortion figures expressing the scale of abortion in the UK.

Q3	<i>Last year 214,869 abortions took place in England and Wales, the highest figure on record. Do you think this number is:</i>	TOTAL	Male	Female
	Total Surveyed	874	386	488
	Too High	400	179	221
		46%	46%	45%
	Too Low	7	2	5
		1%	1%	1%
	About Right	76	39	37
		9%	10%	8%
	Doesn't Matter	308	128	180
		35%	33%	37%
	Prefer not to say	83	38	45
		9%	10%	9%

Table Q3: Summary of question 3 of survey

Just under half the people we surveyed (46%) believed current abortion figures to be too high. A significant but lesser proportion, around 1 in 3, (35%) believed the abortion figures don't matter. A tiny proportion of people (1%) believed we should have more abortions.

Down's Syndrome abortion

Under the [Abortion Act 1967](#) it is permissible to abort an unborn baby in the womb until birth, if the child born would "suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped"⁴. The most common abnormality cited as a reason for abortion is Down's syndrome. Our fourth and fifth questions address this topic.

Q4	<i>In the UK it's legal to abort an unborn baby up to the moment of birth if they have Down's syndrome. Last year 856 unborn babies were aborted with this condition. Do you think this aspect of the law is:</i>	TOTAL	Male	Female
	<i>Total Surveyed</i>	874	386	488
	Unacceptable	484	196	288
		55%	51%	59%
	Acceptable	194	94	100
		22%	24%	20%
	Neither	129	62	67
		15%	16%	14%
	Prefer not to say	67	34	33
		8%	9%	7%

Table Q4: Summary of question 4 of survey

A majority of those we surveyed (55%) thought aborting an unborn baby simply because they had Down's syndrome was unacceptable. 22% thought it was acceptable. 15% thought it was neither acceptable nor unacceptable and 8% preferred not to say.

⁴The [Abortion Act 1967](#), section 1

Q5	<i>In light of this information, to what extent would you support or oppose amending the law to prevent unborn babies with Down's syndrome being aborted beyond 24 weeks?</i>	TOTAL	Male	Female
	<i>Total Surveyed</i>	874	386	488
	Strong Support	380	163	217
	%	43%	42%	44%
	Tend to Support	167	75	92
	%	19%	19%	19%
	Neither	144	70	74
	%	16%	18%	15%
	Tend to Oppose	72	34	38
	%	8%	9%	8%
	Strongly Oppose	62	23	39
	%	7%	6%	8%
	Prefer not to say	49	21	28
	%	6%	5%	6%

Table Q5: Summary of question 5 of survey

In the follow-on question 63% of respondents supported reforming the abortion law to bring it in line with the UK limit for non-disabled children. This was an increase of 8% on those who said abortion because of Down's syndrome was 'unacceptable'.

Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate Abortion

Question 6 seeks to address the subject of Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate abortions.

Q6	<i>In the UK it's legal to abort an unborn baby up to birth if they have cleft lip and cleft palate, a condition which can be rectified with surgery. Last year 40 unborn babies were aborted in the womb because they had these conditions. Do you think this aspect of the law is:</i>	TOTAL	Male	Female
	<i>Total Surveyed</i>	874	386	488
	Unacceptable	691	309	382
	%	79%	80%	78%
	Acceptable	64	30	34
	%	7%	8%	7%
	Neither	86	31	55
	%	10%	8%	11%
	Prefer not to say	33	16	17
	%	4%	4%	3%

Table Q6: Summary of question 6 of survey

79% of those we interviewed thought aborting a baby in the womb just because it has a cleft lip or cleft palate was unacceptable. 7% thought this was an acceptable practice with 14% putting forward a neutral view or no view at all.

Q7	<i>In light of this information, to what extent would you support or oppose amending the law to prohibit abortions solely in the case of cleft lip and cleft palate?</i>	TOTAL	Male	Female
	<i>Total Surveyed</i>	874	386	488
	Strong Support	509	225	284
	%	58%	58%	58%
	Tend to Support	156	83	73
	%	18%	22%	15%
	Neither	95	37	58
	%	11%	10%	12%
	Tend to Oppose	40	14	26
	%	5%	4%	5%
	Strongly Oppose	45	13	32
	%	5%	3%	7%
	Prefer not to say	29	14	15
	%	3%	4%	3%

Table Q7: Summary of question 7 of survey

76% of respondents supported changing the abortion law to prohibit aborting babies solely on the basis of having cleft lip and cleft palate. This included 69% of those who identified as pro-choice in question 1 (*cf. Table 4.1 Pro-Choice Data Summary*). Only 10% said they would oppose such a change.

Viability

In UK law the unborn baby is only protected so long as they can survive outside the womb. The threshold for this used to be at 28 weeks under the [Abortion Act 1967](#), but was reduced to 24 weeks in 1990. However, with advances in medical science, the age of viability of the baby has dropped further. According to a 2019 report published by the [British Association of Prenatal Medicine](#) 3 in 10 babies born at 22 weeks in the UK can survive with help. Having outlined this fact we questioned whether the respondent thought the gestational limit should be changed in order to respond to this advance in medicine.

Q8	<i>In the UK 3 in 10 babies born at 22 weeks survive with help. To what extent would you support lowering the abortion limit to 22 weeks to respond to this advance in medical science?</i>	TOTAL	Male	Female
	Total Surveyed	874	386	488
	Strong Support	372	157	215
	%	43%	41%	44%
	Tend to Support	163	79	84
	%	19%	20%	17%
	Neither	142	67	75
	%	16%	17%	15%
	Tend to Oppose	84	36	48
	%	10%	9%	10%
	Strongly Oppose	72	28	44
	%	8%	7%	9%
	Prefer not to say	41	19	22
	%	5%	5%	5%

Table Q8: Summary of question 8 of survey

Our results found that 61% of those we surveyed supported a 2 week reduction in the upper limit for healthy babies (from 24 weeks to 22 weeks). 51% of those who self-identify as pro-choice also supported some form of reduction (29% strongly, 21% mildly, cf. [Table 4.1 Pro-Choice Data Summary](#)). 18% of respondents said they would resist such a change. This resistance to reform is around 8-10% higher than those who oppose reform in the areas of Down's syndrome and cleft lip and cleft palate abortion.⁵

⁵ Support vs Opposition analysis has been included in the supplementary document [Abortion Views 2023: Analysis and Commentary](#).

Fetal Awareness and Pain Relief

The next question sought to gauge public opinion on the topic of fetal awareness and pain relief.

Q9	<i>According to the latest research an unborn baby can feel pain from 12 weeks onwards, yet almost all of the 13,500 unborn babies that were aborted beyond this point in 2021 were given no pain killers. To what extent would you support or oppose amending the law to require that unborn babies, over 12 weeks old, be given pain killers before being aborted?</i>	TOTAL	Male	Female
	<i>Total Surveyed</i>	874	386	488
	Strong Support	562	246	316
	%	64%	64%	65%
	Tend to Support	139	58	81
	%	16%	15%	17%
	Neither	75	34	41
	%	9%	9%	8%
	Tend to Oppose	18	10	8
	%	2%	3%	2%
	Strongly Oppose	18	5	13
	%	2%	1%	3%
	Prefer not to say	62	33	29
	%	7%	9%	6%

Table Q9: Summary of question 9 of survey

80% of respondents strongly supported or tended to support the introduction of painkillers for the unborn baby beyond 12 weeks gestation, before being aborted. Only 4% of respondents suggested they would resist such a change. Even those who supported abortion up till birth thought this a humane idea with 75% offering strong or mild support to this proposition (cf. Table 4.1 Pro-Choice Data Summary).

83% of respondents who identified as pro-life also expressed support. 7% of respondents said they prefer not to say.

Pills-by-Post Abortion

This question is designed to focus on the way in which abortion is now administered.

Q10	<i>Since April 2020, UK abortion providers have been permitted to send abortion pills to women by post, up to 10 weeks gestation, without any face to face appointment or ultrasound scan. On the one hand this has increased the convenience of medical abortion. On the other hand it has led to 1 in 17 women requiring hospital treatment having taken these pills. Do you think this is....</i>	TOTAL	Male	Female
	<i>Total Surveyed</i>	874	386	488
	Unacceptable	624	278	346
	%	71%	72%	71%
	Acceptable	108	47	61
	%	12%	12%	13%
	Neither	98	40	58
	%	11%	10%	12%
	Prefer not to say	44	21	23
	%	5%	5%	5%

Table Q10: Summary of question 10 of survey

7 in 10 (71%) of those we surveyed thought “pills by post” self-administered home abortion was unacceptable. Just over 1 in 10 (12%) supported the idea with 16% expressing neutrality or no opinion.

Overall Reform

The final question was designed to serve as a summary for all the other previously asked questions and gave the respondent an opportunity to reflect and alter their original view if they chose to.

Q11.	<i>In light of the issues raised by this survey, would you say that that UK abortion law, in general, needs</i>	TOTAL	Male	Female
	<i>Total Surveyed</i>	874	386	488
	Support Greater Restrictions	409	175	234
	%	47%	45%	48%
	Support Relaxation	94	32	62
	%	11%	8%	13%
	Keep the Same	169	82	87
	%	19%	21%	18%
	Restrict Completely	98	49	49
	%	11%	13%	10%
	Prefer not to say	104	48	56
	%	12%	12%	11%

Table Q11: Summary of question 11 of survey

A majority (58%) of respondents believed the UK abortion law needs restricting, either to make abortion less common (47%) or restricting completely (11%). Only 11% wanted to see abortion law relaxed.

The Impact of Images

Having completed the survey, each respondent was offered an opportunity to see what a baby looks like before and after an abortion. 368 people (42%) opted to do this. The images consisted of: a) a living embryo in the uterus at 8 weeks from fertilisation, b) an 8 week aborted embryo in faeces and c) a 10 week old surgically aborted fetus. Having seen images the respondent was then asked whether seeing these images affected their position.



Image 1: 8 week living embryo

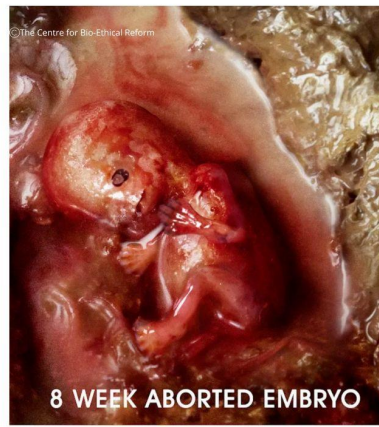


Image 2: 8 week aborted embryo



Image 3: surgical abortion at 10 weeks

Image A: The images and wording, in order of how they were seen, for those who agreed to the optional section.

While almost half (49%) said their views had not changed, 32% said that seeing the image made them more supportive of restricting abortion laws.

A majority of respondents who identified as pro-life, who saw the images, expressed greater support for abortion restrictions. 1 in 5 respondents who identified as pro-choice, expressed increased support for 'increasing restrictions' having seen them. 38% of those who did not know their general position towards abortion, expressed increased support for restrictions having viewed the images.

<i>Having viewed these images how would you say it has changed your view on abortion?</i>	<i>Self Categorization to Question 1: What would you say your position generally to abortion is</i>				
	ALL	PROLIFE	PROCHOICE	DON'T KNOW	PREFER NOT TO SAY
<i>Total Surveyed</i>	368	111	205	40	12
Made you more supportive of increasing restrictions around abortion	119	59	43	15	2
%	32%	53%	21%	38%	17%
Made you more supportive of decreasing restrictions around abortion	29	11	16	2	0
%	8%	10%	8%	5%	0%
Hasn't changed	182	32	130	17	3
%	49%	29%	63%	43%	25%
Prefer not to say	38	9	16	6	7
%	10%	8%	8%	15%	58%

Table Q12: Summary of question 12 with breakdown of categorisation from question 1 - ie. pro-life, pro-choice, don't know and prefer not to say.

Appendix

Copy of *Original Survey*
Copy of *Code of Conduct*

The following documents are available on CBR UK's website:
UK Abortion Views Survey 2023: Further Analysis, Commentary and Recommendations
UK Abortion Views 2023: Data Tables

More Information

To find out more about this publication and the work of CBR UK please visit www.cbruk.org/abortionviews or contact info@cbruk.org