



Statement on the Use of Graphic Anti-Abortion Images

Monday, April 19, 2021

The recent increase in the use of graphic anti-abortion flyers in London and the ongoing use of pictures of aborted or non-viable fetuses in anti-abortion demonstrations is deeply concerning. At Anova, we believe in a world without violence. Bodily autonomy and freedom to choose are the essential building blocks to that world. Conversely, control over an individual's reproduction is a form of gender-based violence. Anti-abortion rhetoric normalizes the notion that other people should get to decide what someone does with their body.

- An abuser may force their victim to get an abortion, and/or may target their pregnant belly during assaults to cause miscarriage. Those graphic images can be painful reminders of their abuse and what they've survived.¹
- Survivors in abusive relationships may not be able to access/use contraception, and abusers may intentionally attempt to impregnate their victim in order to "trap" them with a child. We know that 1 in 5 women who experience abuse also report experiencing pregnancy coercion, and 1 in 6 report birth control sabotage.²
- Pregnancy is a dangerous time where abuse tends to escalate and become more severe³. Having safe access to abortion in order to more easily leave an abusive relationship can literally be life-saving⁴.

People who have abortions already face stigmatization and shame, particularly women for whom there is so much pressure to be maternal and nurturing (ie the "right" kind of woman). These graphic images are part of the larger anti-abortion narrative that focus primarily on women, reinforce social narratives of women being sexual gatekeepers who are entirely responsible for their circumstance, while completely ignoring men's roles in reproduction/reproductive coercion. These rigid and harmful gender roles are the foundation that upholds violence.

At Anova, we advocate for the use of trauma and violence informed care so that systems and services do not further harm survivors of violence or abuse. We know that for those individuals who have received abortion care, many of whom are survivors, these images can be deeply triggering and even invoke feelings of shame. This is the perpetration of harm and is counter to creating a world free of violence.

Anova:

- Supports an individual's right to choose what happens to their body and have control over their reproduction. This includes having safe and free access to abortion care.
- Recognizes that limiting access to abortion and reproduction control is an intentional tactic used by abusers and is a form of gender-based violence.
- Calls for the use of trauma and violence informed approaches as necessary building block to supporting survivors in their healing and preventing further harm.
- Sees the use of graphic anti-abortion images as counter to a trauma and violence informed approach, thus causing harm.
- Sees these anti-abortion images as being part of a larger anti-abortion narrative that perpetuates harmful gender roles that uphold gender-based violence.

Because of these, Anova supports:

- the *Viewer Discretion Act* (Bill 259), introduced on March 8, 2021 and mandating that any pictures of an aborted or non-viable fetus delivered through home delivery must be contained in an opaque envelope, with a warning, and a clear indication of who the sender is.

¹ (https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/rhr_11_35/en/)

² Miller E, Decker MR, McCauley HL, Tancredi DJ, Levenson RR, Waldman J, et al. Pregnancy coercion, intimate partner violence and unintended pregnancy. *Contraception* 2010; 81:316–22

³ Brownridge DA, Taillieu TL, Tyler KA, Tiwari A, Chan KL, Santos SC. Pregnancy and intimate partner violence: risk factors, severity, and health effects. *Violence Against Women* 2011;17(7):858–81.

⁴ Cheng D, Horon IL. Intimate-partner homicide among pregnant and postpartum women. *Obstet Gynecol* 2010; 115:1181–6.