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## December 13, 2022

The Arizona Psychological Association (AzPA) joins our national colleagues, the American Psychological Association (APA), in expressing our deep concern over the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.

Our association recognizes that views regarding abortion vary in our society, and that for many these views are a reflection of their personal and/or religious beliefs. As representatives of a profession grounded in science, our concern is not an indication of agreement or disagreement with any particular personal or religious viewpoint, but primarily a reflection of scientific evidence that informs the work we do. This was illustrated in a statement by the American Psychological Association president Frank C. Worrell, PhD, "This ruling ignores not only precedent but science, and will exacerbate the mental health crisis America is already experiencing."

The evidence that informs our concerns is clear in indicating that restricting access to abortion negatively impacts numerous aspects of an individual's mental health, physical health, and social/socioeconomic factors. In a longitudinal cohort study, researchers found that women who were denied an abortion reported an increase in anxiety symptoms, lower self-esteem, and lower life satisfaction 1 week after seeking an abortion. In addition to an increase in initial mental health concerns, women who were denied abortions and gave birth reported more health and medical complaints (Foster et al., 2018) over 5 years. Researchers also found a number of detrimental social factors associated with restricted access to abortion. These factors include increase in overall negative financial consequences (e.g. credit and debt problems,) as well as both immediate and longer term household poverty (Foster, et al., 2018, Miller, Wherry & Foster, 2020), all of which can have long term impacts on families and contribute to multigenerational poverty and associated challenges (Duncan, Ziolo-Guest, & Kalil, 2010).

The presence of evidence regarding the harm of abortion restriction stands in contrast to the *absence of evidence* for an often presumed notion among those supporting restricted access to safe abortion. It is argued that engagement in abortion procedures results in increased mental health and physical health issues, however, studies found that abortion does not increase women's risk of experiencing symptoms of posttraumatic stress, depression, anxiety, or of experiencing lower self-esteem or life-satisfaction (Biggs et al., 2016; Biggs et al., 2017, Rocca et al., 2020.)

While our association's primary concern is related to the negative impact of restriction in abortion access, we are also deeply concerned about the broad precedent of a legal ruling that serves to restrict individual rights and freedoms and the potential implications of this for the members of our association and the communities we serve. As psychologists, we are aware of the deeply harmful

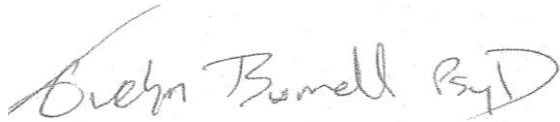
impact of social stigma and policies that marginalize people's experience related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or religious belief. We sincerely hope that this ruling does not represent a precedent that would contribute negatively to our communities in this way.

We urge that policies related to reproductive rights and access to safe abortion should not be based on the premise of emotional harm, uncertainty of the decision, or future regret as longitudinal studies have found that women most commonly self-reported feeling relief 5 years post-abortion (Steinberg,2020, Rocca et al. 2020.)

We ask state policymakers and leaders to create and support policies that will increase access to accurate scientific information and education to help individuals make informed decisions about their pregnancies and access to safe medical/mental health care.

We ask the AzPA membership to advocate for reproductive rights and to provide a quality of care in the work that we do that is founded in science.

On behalf of the AzPA Governing Council,



Evelyn Burrell, PsyD  
AzPA President



Shirley Yang, PsyD  
AzPA Diversity Representative

## April 2023 Update

### Confidentiality and Reproductive Health

The Council passed a [policy](#) asserting that confidentiality is central to the practice of psychology, and that psychologists should follow the APA Ethics Code when it comes to patient confidentiality surrounding reproductive health. The policy reaffirms “that a psychologist’s allegiance to the Ethics Code, including ethical standards related to patient confidentiality, should be given the utmost attention and significance especially when psychologists are faced with ethical conflicts with a law requiring the disclosure of confidential information regarding sexual and reproductive health, including birth control; fertility treatment; contemplating, seeking, or having had an abortion; and related issues.”

The vote was 148-4, with one abstention. This measure follows on a [resolution](#) the Council passed in February 2022 reaffirming APA’s commitment to reproductive justice as a human right, including equal access to legal abortion, affordable contraception, comprehensive sex education and freedom from sexual violence, with a particular emphasis on individuals from marginalized communities.

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