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**A Statistical Analysis on the Effectiveness of Abortion
Victim Photography in Pro-Life Activism**

Dr. Jacqueline C. Harvey

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About The Author.

Dr. Jacqueline C. Harvey is a bioethics and public policy scholar from Texas. She holds a Ph.D. in Public Administration, conducts research on an array of bioethics policies and is often called to submit analysis and expert opinions to various state courts and even the U.S. Supreme Court in defense of life. Her work can be found in *National Review Online*, *Public Discourse*, and *Human Life Review* among others. She currently teaches Political Science at Tarleton State University.



Executive Summary.

The use of abortion victim imagery in pro-life outreach is perhaps one of the most enduring debates within the pro-life movement. Although proponents cite cases of lives saved and minds changed supporting the effectiveness of the strategy, opponents insist these images impede public receptiveness to other strategies they claim could save more lives. They suggest, therefore, that these images do not advance the pro-life cause, but rather set the cause back by damaging the public opinion of the pro-life movement.



To test this theory, the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform (CCBR) launched an effort and commissioned a scientific study on the impact of abortion victim imagery. CCBR developed a survey administered by an independent party—immediately preceding and following simultaneous campaigns in selected geographic areas. By canvassing thousands across several neighbourhoods and surveying 1,741 diverse respondents, results found a statistically significant shift in pro-life worldview, a greater negative perception of abortion, a decreased degree of

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permissiveness and liberalism towards abortion law, and a significant gain in pro-life political views after seeing abortion victim imagery.

Those identifying as completely pro-life increased by nearly 30% following the campaign, with those identifying as pro-abortion also decreasing in their degree of remaining support for abortion. Overall, there was a statistically significant gain of nearly 17% toward a pro-life worldview. Those who were generally pro-life had an overall gain of 7%, with the corresponding loss (of those generally pro-abortion), also 7%. The degree of permissiveness toward abortion was statistically decreased and support for incremental pro-life gains, like gestational limits, substantially increased by 15% overall.

Feelings about abortion shifted toward a negative abortion view with fewer reporting feeling positive about abortion after CCBR's campaign showed what abortion truly is, although these results were not statistically significant. Additional analysis found that the strength of one's feelings toward abortion were conclusively parallel to political views about abortion, with those who felt strongly positive towards abortion favoring no legal restrictions, and those who felt strongly negative towards abortion favoring complete prohibition of abortion. This suggests that changing how the public feels about abortion impacts how people vote for candidates who would be willing and able to enact legal restrictions that actually save lives. Abortion victim imagery was effective at changing these feelings, with upwards of 90% of people responding that seeing these images increased their negative feelings towards abortion.

Those who had previously seen an image of abortion victim imagery before the CCBR campaign still reported that the other images increased negative feelings as well. This increase was statistically greater following the CCBR campaign, indicating that CCBR's presentation or choice of images for the campaign were more effective than images they had previously seen. This still suggests, nonetheless, that abortion victim imagery itself, regardless of presentation, is intrinsically effective at altering previously positive perceptions on abortion and changing the culture.

Ultimately, opponents' claims that abortion victim images are ineffective at changing public opinion are unsupported, as was the claim that this strategy is counterproductive or irreconcilable with other strategies. This indicates a loss from those inhibiting the abortion victim imagery strategy, since this strategy is scientifically established as an effective tool. More research is needed to determine where and when this strategy, among others, is the most fruitful choice for pro-life outreach.

Introduction.

Pro-life activists and organizations that employ images of abortion victims as a strategy to educate the public about the horrors of abortion, face substantial criticism and opposition to their efforts. This is certainly to be expected from those who identify as pro-abortion and are uncomfortable or unable to defend their position when the victims are visible.¹ However, pro-abortion opposition to abortion imagery often pales in comparison to the hostility from those who avow themselves as pro-life, yet are opposed to the use of victim imagery, even when they credit this strategy for their own conversion.² Pro-life people who decry the use of abortion victim photography suggest that the images not only fail to shift public perception against abortion, and in so doing, fail to advance the pro-life cause. Rather, they say that these images set the movement back by damaging public opinion of the pro-life movement and public receptiveness to other strategies that they assert *are* effective.



In spite of the frequency and fervor of these debates spanning for several decades, this topic has been virtually ignored in scientific literature. The effectiveness of these images on shifting public opinion is a controversy that predates later debates, such as the effectiveness of state-level abortion regulations versus a national ban. Nonetheless, while the personhood versus incrementalism debate³ is informed by a wealth of studies from pro-life scholars⁴ and pro-abortion thinktanks⁵ on the impact these laws have on abortion rates, the abortion victim images debate continues devoid of any scientific evidence to defend or condemn their use. Furthermore,

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while those opposed to incremental laws represent a small minority (many of whom do not identify as members of the pro-life movement or relegate themselves to distinct factions), opponents of abortion victim imagery constitute a large number, and penetrate a diverse array of pro-life organizations that have sufficient influence where they can. Often, they join government officials to inhibit other organizations who swear to the effectiveness of the use of abortion victim imagery.⁶ This makes the need to study these claims even more critical than what the pro-life movement has been and will continue to study.

There are informal attempts like dueling commentary and anecdotes to offer evidence for each position, pro and con. Those in favour, offer their experience to support abortion victim imagery as effective,⁷ while those opposed, with limited to no observation or experience, also attempt to provide a rationale for their perspective. At best, they assert with data they have on the effectiveness of their own approaches that these images would repel those they serve in their own organizations.⁸

To test these hypotheses, substantiate the effectiveness of the abortion victim imagery strategy, and improve the impact of their efforts, the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform (CCBR) commissioned several sets of a scientific survey to gauge public opinion on abortion before and after their extensive campaigns in 2015. CCBR delivered postcards with these images to thousands, and commissioned an independent party to survey 1,741 respondents, a sample size sufficient to gauge public opinion within a five-point margin, with 99% certainty that results are generalizable to the entire population of Canada, which is 35,749,600.⁹

The Study.

The Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform (CCBR) educates the public with images of abortion victims displayed in a variety of approaches. These include “Choice” Chain, where groups of activists, each with individual handheld signs and literature, attempt to spark dialogue in heavy traffic pedestrian areas; a *Truth Truck*, otherwise known as the *Reproductive “Choice” Campaign*, features abortion victim imagery, and is driven on major roadways during heavy volume hours; the *Genocide Awareness Project* events, which are travelling projects that erect large panels on college campuses and use panels and banners in public areas like intersections or highway overpasses. CCBR also creates literature to disseminate: drop cards that are small and can be distributed liberally, and larger postcards for direct mail and canvassing neighbourhoods door to door.¹⁰



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For years, CCBR has evaluated the effectiveness of their efforts by public response, either in conversations at face-to-face events, or by calls and correspondence. They have also utilized surveys to gauge public opinion on abortion and to attempt to determine the effectiveness of their campaigns. With such large-scale events, pinpointing enough respondents who witnessed their efforts presented a limitation. Even if enough respondents could be found, survey answers after an event would be likewise limited without baseline data to establish public opinion before the campaign, to demonstrate any change, and to determine the degree of change following the campaign. Campaigns themselves would need to reach a substantial sample size in order to be representative of public opinion and measurable through a survey.

To overcome these limits, CCBR targeted specific geographic areas to canvass with postcards. These postcards were delivered directly to the mailboxes in these specific areas, to ensure delivery was not impeded by post office personnel. CCBR crafted a survey and hired the independent company, Blue Direct,¹¹ to collect responses in these target areas immediately prior to and following each campaign. Campaigns included more than one area to increase validity and were conducted simultaneously (to control for time): first in June of 2015, and then in September of 2015.

The survey employed before and after each campaign asked specific questions about the respondent's opinion and perception of abortion, and their political views on when abortion should be allowed, or if it should be restricted by law. The sample included demographic data on respondents from gender, age, language spoken, and whether or not there were children in the home.

Questions asked whether the respondent believed that abortion, in general, should be legal, mostly legal, mostly illegal, or illegal. The survey also asked whether abortion should be legal, mostly legal, mostly illegal, or illegal in all three trimesters of pregnancy to determine how the respondent would qualify their overall answer. For example, mostly legal could mean that the respondent thought abortion should be limited to the first trimester, whereas mostly illegal could be those who think abortion should sometimes be permitted in rare cases like rape, incest, fetal anomaly, or when posing a threat to the mother. The survey also asked the respondents' feeling about abortion on a four-point scale, from positive, mostly positive, mostly negative, and negative. It inquired if seeing an image of an abortion victim changed their feeling of abortion, and if so, if it increased positive feelings or negative feelings.

Research Methods.

The dataset yielded 1,741 respondents and the subsets were comparable: 845 before the campaign and 896 after. Some answers lacked responses and were excluded from the analysis of that item. Initial frequencies showed no disparities in demographics between the two datasets that could skew results. Data was identified by campaign and coded as 'before' or 'after', so campaigns could be compared individually and as a whole. The subsets were comparable: n=845 before the campaign, and n=896 after the campaign. Each subset was a sample size sufficient to gauge public opinion within a five-point margin, with 99% certainty that results are generalizable to the entire population of Canada in 2015: 35, 749,600.⁹ These were not paired samples that showed changes in individual opinions, but paired samples that showed changes in public opinion.



Responses were analyzed as written in the survey, and then taken a step further and recoded into measures that indicate the degree of support for abortion. They could also yield and measure change, and then they were subjected to analysis otherwise impossible with nominal or ordinal data. Moreover, these new variables more accurately represented respondent viewpoints, given the totality of answers. For example, one who thought abortion should be legal (but not mostly

legal) yet would restrict it to the first trimester and has a generally negative view of abortion, has a different overall perspective than one who believes abortion should be legal, supports no restrictions, and views abortion as strongly positive.

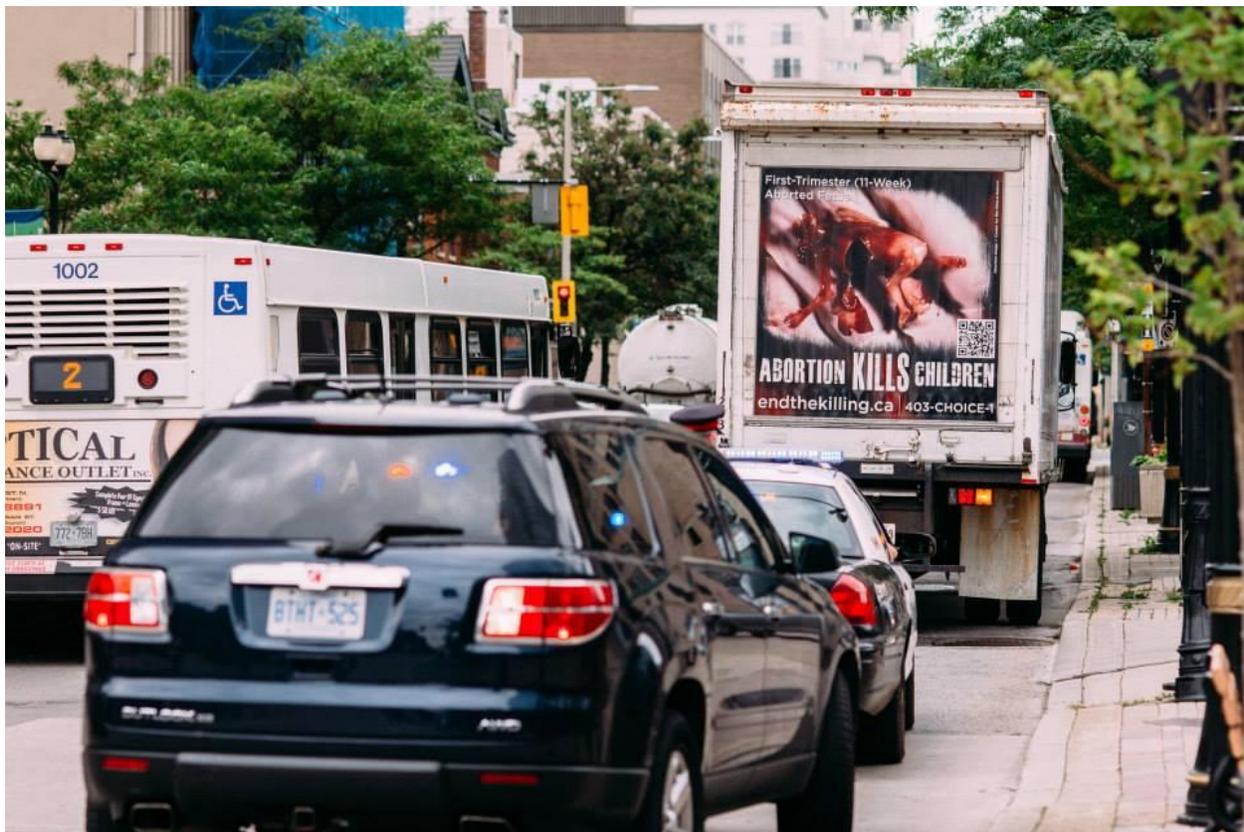
In addition to creating new and complex indicators of abortion perception, variables were also useful when simplified into new variables of dichotomous groups that could segregate those generally in favour of abortion, to those generally opposed. Those who thought abortion should be completely illegal, or at least mostly illegal, were coded as “generally pro-life” and those who thought abortion should be completely legal, or at least mostly legal, were coded as “generally pro-abortion.” For those who felt strongly positive or somewhat positive about abortion, they were coded as “generally positive,” while those who felt somewhat negative or strongly negative about abortion were coded “generally negative.” For those who would permit abortion at least in some cases, a measure of permissiveness was created based on how extreme those pro-abortion views were, from restricted to the first trimester, to those who wanted no restrictions, even in the third trimester. This was also coded as another variable: those who were “generally liberal” on abortion and supported even post-viability and late-term abortions, and those who were “generally conservative” and would permit abortion in the first trimester only.

Since many new explanatory variables were created from the same data and measured the same construct, the new variables were contrasted against original responses and comparable variables to ensure validity. Of course, those who felt generally positive about abortion were assuredly more liberal in their views on restrictions, and those who felt generally negative were overwhelmingly against abortion even in the first trimester. This supports the theory that perception about abortion and altering perception affects a person’s stance on abortions legality. All new variables were significant and the strength of the relationship with Cramer’s V statistic as a perfect $v=1$.

The analysis contrasted ‘before’ responses and ‘after’ responses for all the variables to determine if there was a statistically significant change for each item. These were done in contingency tables: first for the dichotomous variables and then for the original responses. Relationships were determined as well as the strength of the relationship. For any change determined, the next step would be determining the degree of change through ordinal regression to measure the specific difference in ordered responses, i.e. how many changed their view on abortion from “legal” to the lesser “mostly legal,” or went from feeling only “somewhat negative” about abortion to “strongly negative.”

Effects of Abortion Imagery Campaigns on Public Opinion.

Across all survey items and constructs, pro-life views increased and pro-abortion views decreased. Negative perception of abortion increased and positive perception decreased. On the mean, those who were “generally prolife”, “generally conservative,” or had a “generally negative” view of abortion had a statistically significant increase. On the other hand, those who were “generally pro-abortion,” “generally liberal,” or had a “generally negative” view of abortion had a statistically significant decrease.



This validates the fact that the shift CCBR seeks in public opinion is changing in the right direction. Since sample sizes are not identical and neither are respondents, therefore statistical significance, rather than frequencies, is the only valid measure of change and whether this change could be due to the CCBR campaign.

Increase in Pro-Life Worldview, Decreased Pro-Abortion Sentiment

The survey questioned respondents about their general and specific view of when abortion should be legal. Those who favoured complete abortion on demand or complete prohibition, were the fringe minority on polar ends. Most were leaning toward regulation after the first trimester. Those who wanted complete prohibition or a first-trimester limit were considered more pro-life than pro-abortion, while those who would keep late-term second trimester and full-term third-trimester abortion on demand were clearly more pro-abortion. The first table indicates the shift in worldview from before and after the CCBR campaign.



This is measured by looking at the direction of change toward a more pro-life worldview and away from a pro-abortion worldview. When analyzing the upper threshold for pro-abortion views, such as those that support total legality, and those who feel strongly positive about abortion – this threshold should only decrease. While this may show an increase in moderate views or in those who are somewhat positive toward abortion, this is not an increase in pro-abortion sentiment, unless the threshold for pro-life views decreased in the pro-abortion direction.

However, in regards to the degree of support for abortion on a four-point scale from total prohibition, mostly prohibited, mostly permitted, and completely permitted, the support for legal abortion decreased and the pro-life view increased. In the case of incremental changes in the

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degree of abortion support, this was statistically significant with $p=0.02$. There was a decrease in the most extreme pro-abortion stance and a trend toward the more pro-life view. Table 1 has these results, showing that all percentages shifted away from abortion legality.

Table 1: Impact of CCBR Abortion Victim Image Campaign on Abortion Worldview*				
	Before CCBR Abortion Victim Image Campaign	After CCBR Abortion Victim Image Campaign	Pro-Life Percentage Points Gained	Cultural Impact (Percentage Increase in Pro-Life Views)
Completely Pro-Abortion	15.30%	13.60%	1.70%	11.11%
Moderately Pro-Abortion	18.50%	16.00%	2.50%	13.51%
Mildly Pro-Life	39.00%	35.20%	3.80%	9.74%
Completely Pro-Life	27.20%	35.20%	8.00%	29.41%
Total Overall Cultural Impact: 15.95%				

***Statistically Significant at $p=0.02$**

The upper threshold of abortion on demand with no restriction is accurately labeled with completely pro-abortion. However, those mildly pro-abortion that supported abortion in limited cases would not be accurately identified as completely pro-life. Nonetheless, these individuals who wish for abortion to be “mostly illegal” (just not illegal), as more closely ideologically aligned with those who are completely pro-life than those who are moderately pro-abortion.

For this reason, a new variable was created to split the respondents into ‘generally pro-life’ and ‘generally pro-abortion.’ Statistical significance was found with the four-point scale, but was just shy of statistical significance. While the percentage of those who were pro-life increased by 4.92%, and those identifying as pro-abortion decreased 9.16%, this gain was not statistically

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significant due to the change in those identifying as pro-life falling within a 5 percentage point margin of error.

The total cultural impact is an overall 7.04% gain towards a pro-life worldview. This was not statistically significant to suggest the change was due to the campaign, but nonetheless, the frequencies are in the right direction. Results are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Impact of CCBR Abortion Victim Image Campaign on General Abortion View				
	Before CCBR Abortion Victim Image Campaign	After CCBR Abortion Victim Image Campaign	Pro-Life Percentage Points Gained	Cultural Impact (Percentage Increase in Pro-Life Views)
Generally Pro-Life	48.80%	51.20%	4.80%	9.16%
Generally Pro-Abortion	52.40%	47.60%	2.40%	4.92%
Potential Overall Cultural Impact: 7.03%				

Increased Conservative Views on Abortion, Decreased Liberal Abortion Views:

While not all who changed from ‘generally pro-abortion’ moved to ‘generally pro-life,’ nearly a tenth of respondents no longer thought abortion should be legal or mostly legal after the first trimester, even if they did not wish to make it totally illegal or mostly illegal in the first trimester. Since the increase to pro-life was not quite statistically significant, pro-life respondents were controlled for, in an analysis on the nearly substantial 9.16% that no longer identified as thinking abortion should, overall, be mostly legal.

Although it was not statistically significant, it can be assumed that 4.92% did identify as more pro-life, by excluding just those who saw an abortion victim and yet did not convert to the pro-life cause. Examining just those who supported legal abortion, it was possible to determine how

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many were liberal in their support of legal abortion on demand (into the second and third trimesters,) and how many were conservative in wanting abortion on demand, yet wanting it to be legal only in the first trimester. Since there are nuances like rape, incest and health that could not be addressed in detail during the survey, those who thought abortion should be “mostly illegal” in later gestation were more conservative than those who thought abortion should be “mostly legal.” The gain in a more conservative view parallels the gain in the liberal view. Table 3 shows this gain.

Table 3: Impact of CCBR Abortion Victim Image Campaign on Degree of Liberalism*				
	Before CCBR Abortion Victim Image Campaign	After CCBR Abortion Victim Image Campaign	Pro-Life Percentage Points Gained	Cultural Impact (Percentage Increase in Pro-Life Views)
Liberal	54.60%	45.40%	9.20%	16.85%
Conservative	46.10%	53.90%	7.80%	16.92%
Total Overall Cultural Impact: 16.88%				

***Statistically Significant at p=0.03**

Conservative sentiment switched from the minority to the majority by a virtually identical margin. There was a statistically significant gain, lost from a pro-abortion liberal worldview, to a (not completely, but incrementally) more pro-life conservative worldview, following the abortion victim image campaign. There was an almost 17% overall increase in the number of people who were conservative and a corresponding decrease in those who were liberal. Since this was statistically significant with $p=0.03$ at the 0.05 level, this indicates the change was not due to randomization or chance, but more likely the intervention of CCBR campaigns.

Abortion Victim Images Increase Negative Feelings, and Feelings Correspond to Public Policy Positions

This study examines the effect of abortion victim images, so the survey questioned regarding the images specifically. Respondents were asked if pictures of abortion victims affected their feelings about abortion, and whether positively or negatively. The results from viewing any image of abortion victims (not just a CCBR campaign image), was that it increased negative feelings, but that this increase was higher following CCBR's image choice and method of delivery.

Feelings on abortion are critical because how one feels is statistically shown to correspond to one's view of abortion legality and degree of liberalism. While those who think negatively of abortion may still support its legality, the degree of permissiveness parallels these feelings. Those who feel strongly negative about abortion are more likely to support a total ban, much like those who view abortion as strongly positive support total legality. There are incremental parallels as well, as evidenced in Figure 1.

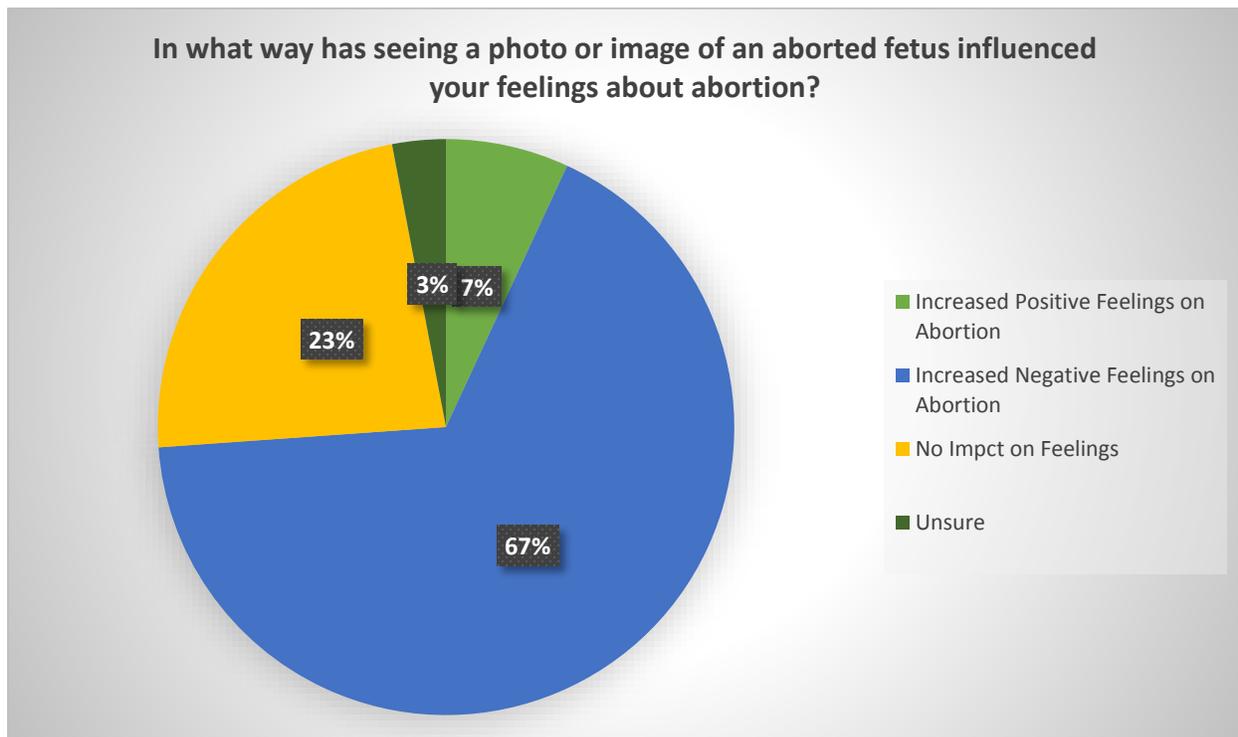


Figure 1

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The correlation between these are significant, but the strength of the relationship is the key evidence. Cramer's V indicates a relationship of $v=0.756$ which shows a strong relationship, but one which does not parallel perfectly and suggest the two are the same construct. People who feel negatively about abortion still support legality, so it does not parallel perfectly, but 75% of answers correspond to one's feelings.



When looking simply upon the impact of abortion victim imagery themselves, there is a subset of viewers that indeed declared no reaction to these images. Unfortunately, those who claim the images had no impact are more likely to be pro-abortion than pro-life. Pro-life persons indicated no reaction only 20% of the time, and negative thereafter. When including the 26.7% of those undecided who declared themselves unmoved by these images, a disturbing 53.3% supported abortion. This is the target audience, not the 20% who already knew what abortion entails and therefore reject it.

Overall, results show overwhelming negative feelings after viewing the image: 66.9%, ten fold more than those who say they had increased positive feelings (6.9%). Figure 1 does indicate that the 23% are not affected overall, but this does not indicate public relations damage, rather just those resolute or apathetic about abortion. If isolating simply those affected by the images, the results are much more stark.

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A majority of people are affected by abortion victims, and when they are, over 90% increase their negative view of abortion. Figure 2 shows this contrast.

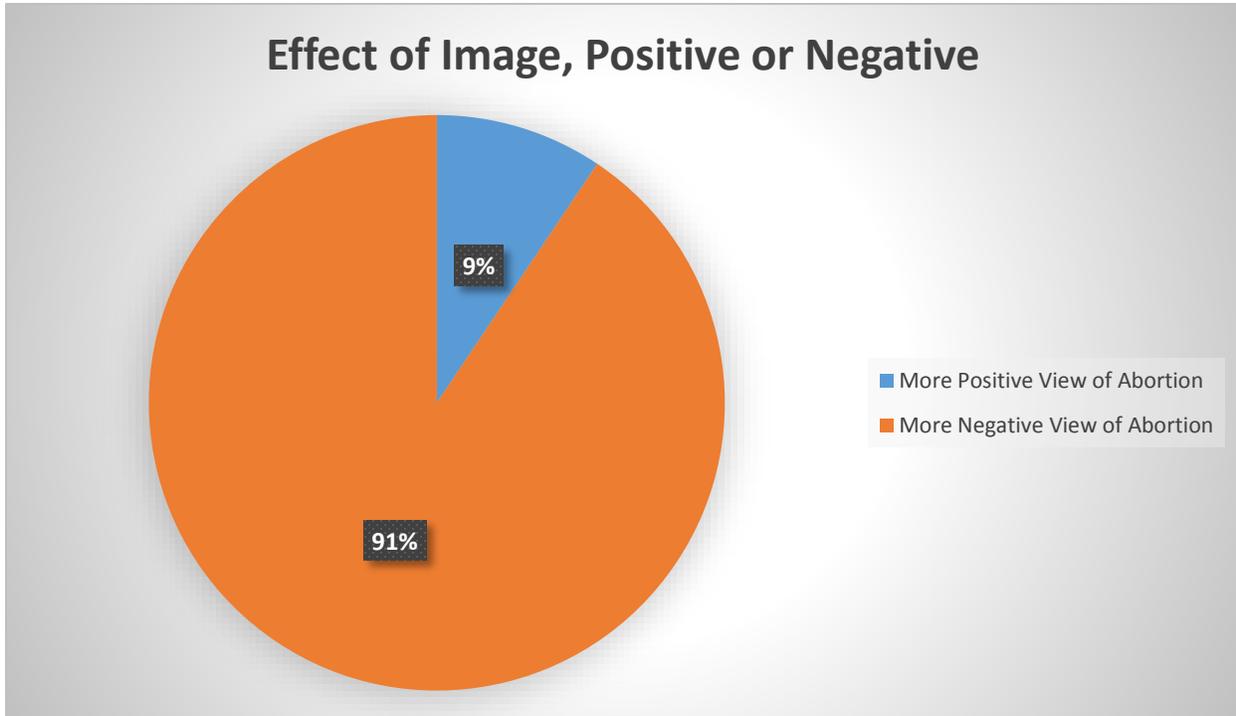


Figure 2

The overall difference between increased negative feelings attributed to the CCBR campaign was not statistically significant (1.2%), as evidenced by Table 3. It is important to note that this table, in spite of lacking statistical significance, still favours the pro-life direction all the same. The results in themselves indicate that abortion victim images increase negative feelings against abortion, so this modest gain is simple encouragement that CCBR could indeed be conveying this message with greater acumen than other uses of abortion victim imagery. As well, it does so without impugning other campaigns. Table 3 shows how these images change people's overall feelings when they think about abortion, after seeing victims of abortion in a CCBR campaign.

Table 3: Impact of CCBR Abortion Victim Image Campaign on Abortion Feelings				
	Before CCBR Abortion Victim Image Campaign	After CCBR Abortion Victim Image Campaign	Pro-Life Percentage Points Gained	Cultural Impact (Percentage Increase in Pro-Life Views)
Generally Positive Feelings About Abortion	37.80%	36.60%	1.20%	3.17%
Generally Negative Feelings About Abortion	62.20%	63.40%	1.20%	1.93%
Potential Overall Cultural Impact: 1.2%				

Incremental Shift in Abortion Acceptance and Legal Permissiveness

Examining just those who had not converted to the complete pro-life worldview of total prohibition shows clear incremental changes in the pro-life direction. Frequencies do illuminate the overall results. It also shows potential incremental change. Answers that appear negative, like an increase in those who are moderately or mildly pro-abortion, show that there is more likely to be an incremental gain according to the overall results.

This is measured by looking at the direction of change toward a more pro-life worldview, and away from a pro-abortion worldview. When analyzing the upper threshold for pro-abortion views such as those that support total legality, and those who feel strongly positive about abortion- this threshold should only decrease. While this may show an increase in moderate views or of those who feel somewhat positive toward abortion, this is not an increase in pro-abortion sentiment unless the threshold for pro-life views decreased in the pro-abortion direction. Those views should only increase. Without significance, it is not possible to attribute these changes to the campaign rather than to change, but they do show a potential shift in the making. In the case of incremental changes in the degree of abortion support, this was statistically significant with $p=0.02$. There was a decrease in the most extreme pro-abortion stance, and a trend towards the more pro-life view.

Conclusion.

Opponents' claims that abortion victim images are ineffective is unsupported by a statistically significant gain in public opinion. There was a statistically significant gain in those who were generally pro-life, and a corresponding loss of those generally pro-abortion: an overall 17% gain in anti-abortion political view (permissiveness) rather than pro-abortion after the campaign. The degree of permissiveness toward abortion was statistically decreased and support for incremental pro-life gains like gestational limits, substantially increased.



Those identifying as completely pro-life increased by nearly 30% following the campaign, with those identifying as pro-abortion decreasing also in their degree of remaining support for abortion. Overall, there was a statistically significant gain of nearly 17% towards a pro-life worldview: those who were generally pro-life and the corresponding loss of those generally pro-abortion. As well, there was an overall 7% gain in those identifying as pro-life rather than pro-abortion after the campaign. The degree of permissiveness towards abortion was statistically decreased and support for incremental pro-life gains (like gestational limits) substantially increased by 15% overall.

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Feels about abortion shifted significantly toward a negative abortion view, with fewer reporting feeling positive about abortion after CCBR's campaign, showing what abortion truly is. Additional analysis found that the strength of one's feelings toward abortion were conclusively parallel to political views about abortion, with those who felt strongly positive about abortion favouring no legal restrictions, and those who felt strongly negative favouring complete prohibition. This suggests that changing how the public feels about abortion impacts how they vote for candidates willing and able to enact legal restrictions that actually save lives. Abortion victim imagery was effective at changing these feelings, with upwards of 90% responding that seeing these images increased their negative feelings toward abortion.

Those who had previously seen an image before the CCBR campaign still reported that other images had increased negative feelings as well. This increase was statistically greater following the CCBR campaign, indicating that CCBR's presentation or choice of images for the campaign was more effective than images they had previously seen. This still suggests, nonetheless, that abortion victim imagery in itself, regardless of presentation, is intrinsically effective at altering previously positive perceptions on abortion and changing the culture.

Based on a single campaign this change is not drastic, yet for every variable there were marked incremental shifts in the desired direction toward more pro-life public opinion. Respondents still report as pro-abortion, but fewer do. Those who do, demonstrate less enthusiasm and greater support for abortion restrictions. Opposing claims that abortion victim images are ineffective at changing public opinion can only be supported if effectiveness is qualified as an unrealistic, instantaneous, and drastic conversion against all abortion. However, there was no evidence to support claims that the strategy of abortion victim images does any harm whatsoever, or that it inhibits other strategies.

Endnotes.

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⁶ Strand, Paul (January 15, 2013). Graphic Abortion Signs Ban Threat to Free Speech? *Christian Broadcasting Network*

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