

Abortion in Canada: Understanding the experiences and choices of women who've faced unwanted pregnancies

Most who either chose abortion or carried pregnancy to term at peace with their decisions

November 22, 2022 – An unplanned or unwanted pregnancy is a life experience that has touched nearly three-in-ten Canadian women, but their anxieties, challenges, and choices can be among the least discussed aspects of the abortion debate.

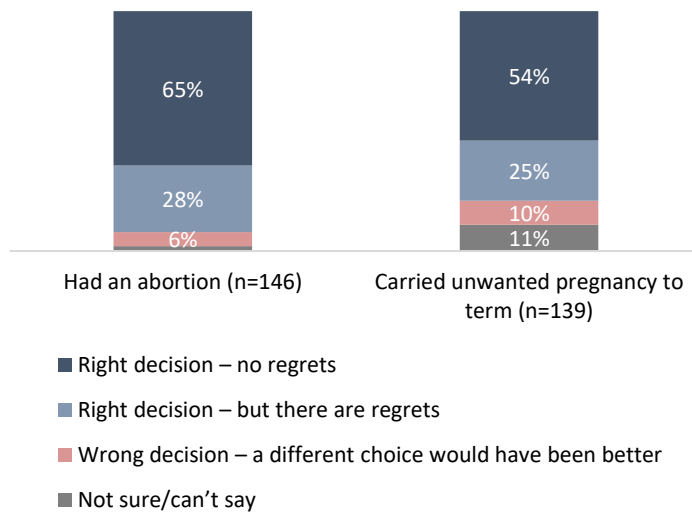
A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute – the first in a three-part series – canvasses the personal experiences of those who have faced an unwanted pregnancy and either had a surgical or procedural abortion or carried that unwanted pregnancy to term. What did they decide to do? What was the experience like? Was it a decision that led to contentment or regret? While advocates loudly and vociferously debate the morality and legality of the issue, researchers heard from women who navigated these challenges themselves.

A significant segment of Canadian women report proximity to the situation: two-in-five (41%) say someone close to them – an intimate friend or a family member – has had an abortion. For one-in-six women, it has formed part of their own history: 16 per cent have gone through a surgical or procedural abortion. An almost equal sized group of women (15%) report carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term. Among those who opted for abortion, 16 per cent had a difficult time obtaining one.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

How women facing unwanted pregnancy felt about their decisions:



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Aug. 29-30, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 1,805 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

INDEX

Part One: Personal experiences

- Proximity to abortion in the lives of Canadians
- Access a challenge for close to one-in-five
- Regrets exist, but vast majority stand by decision

Part Two: How many have carried unwanted pregnancy to term?

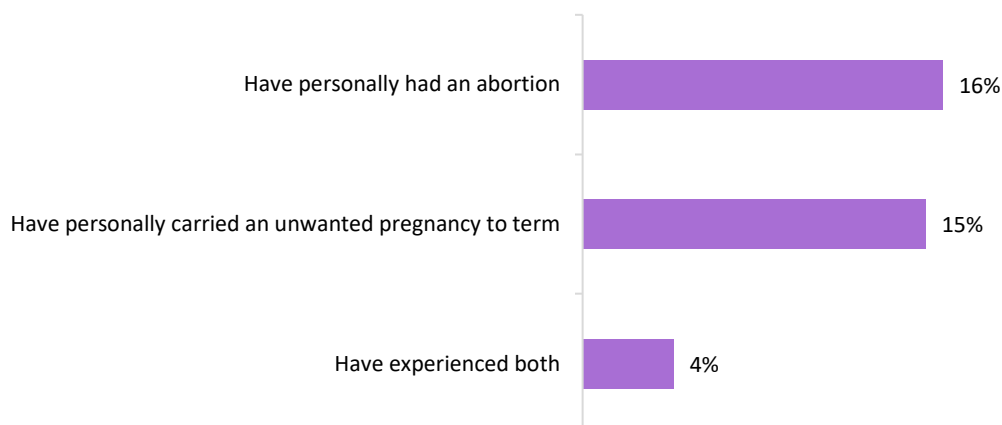
Part One: Personal experiences

Canada has neither a law enshrining nor denying access to abortion. The need – or lack thereof – for such a law has led to decades of debate. These debates, however, often fail to focus on the voices of those most personally and deeply affected: women who have faced an unexpected or unwanted pregnancy. In this first of a three-part series looking at issues surrounding abortion in Canada, the Angus Reid Institute canvassed women who have been faced with such situations, asking them to look back on their experiences and reflect on their decisions.

Note that respondents were asked only about a surgical or procedural abortion and not a medical abortion, wherein oral medications in the early weeks of abortion are prescribed. Respectful of their comfort level, respondents had the option to participate in the survey or choose not to answer ([read the questionnaire here](#)). Please also note that only respondents who identify as a woman were asked these questions.

Overall, 16 per cent of women say they have personally had a surgical abortion, while close to the same number (15%) say that they have carried an unwanted pregnancy to term.

**Abortion and unwanted pregnancy:
(Female respondents, n=921)**

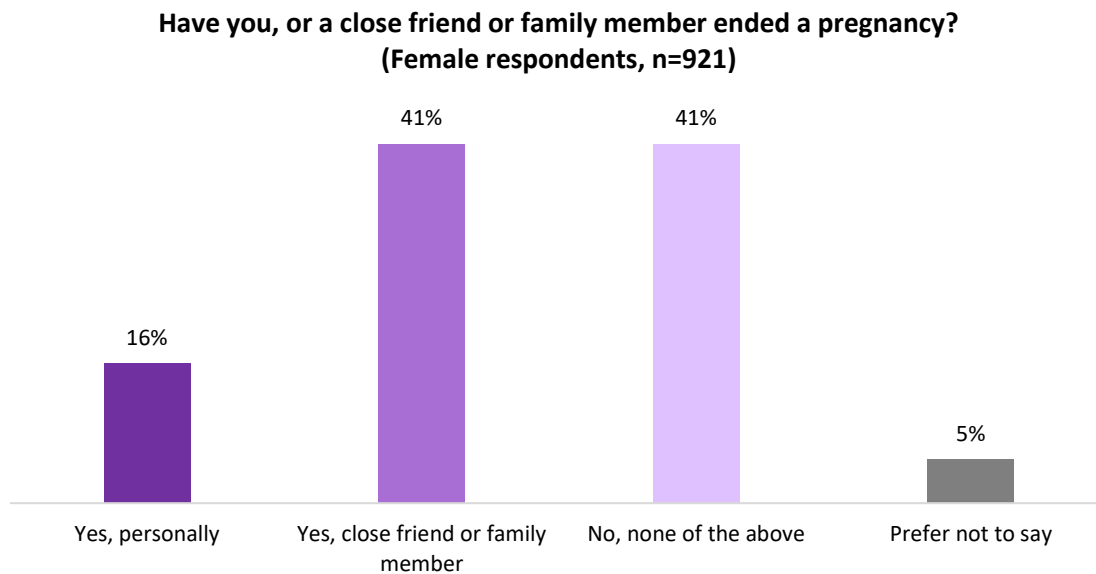


CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Proximity to abortion in the lives of Canadians

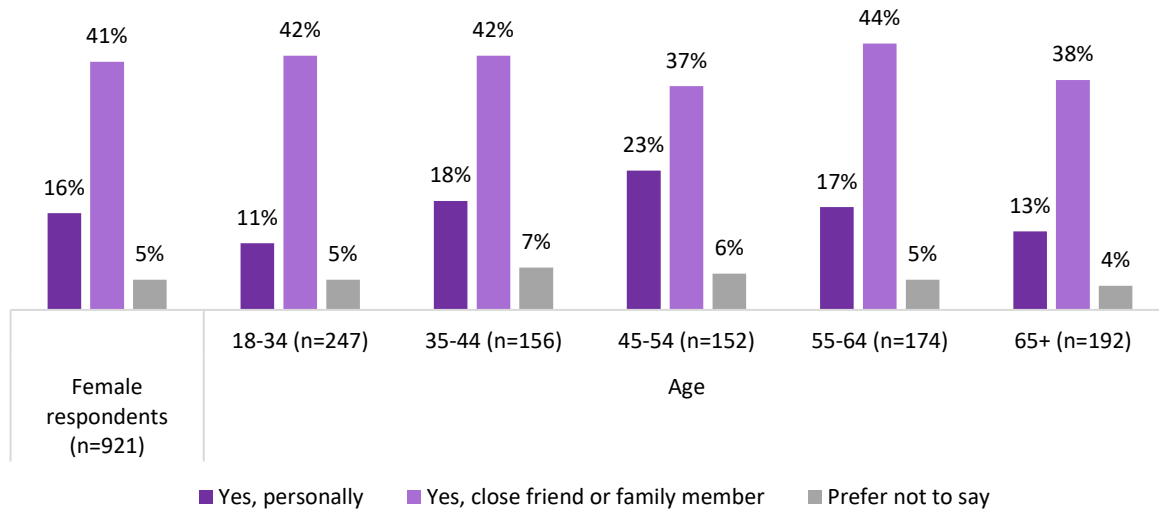
As noted, overall, 16 per cent of women say that they have personally ended a pregnancy with a surgical procedure. Exposure to this issue is much wider, however. Another two-in-five women (41%) say that they have not personally had an abortion, but a close friend or family member has. Five per cent of respondents preferred not to say, while two-in-five (41%) have neither had this experience themselves nor know another person close to them who has:



The highest proportion of affirmative personal responses come from women between the age of 45 and 54. Here, approximately one-in-four (23%) say that they have ended a pregnancy through a procedure. This age curve tends to align with the total number of [reported abortions per year](#) in Canada, which are higher between 1996 and 2011, and lower on both sides of that year-by-year trend.

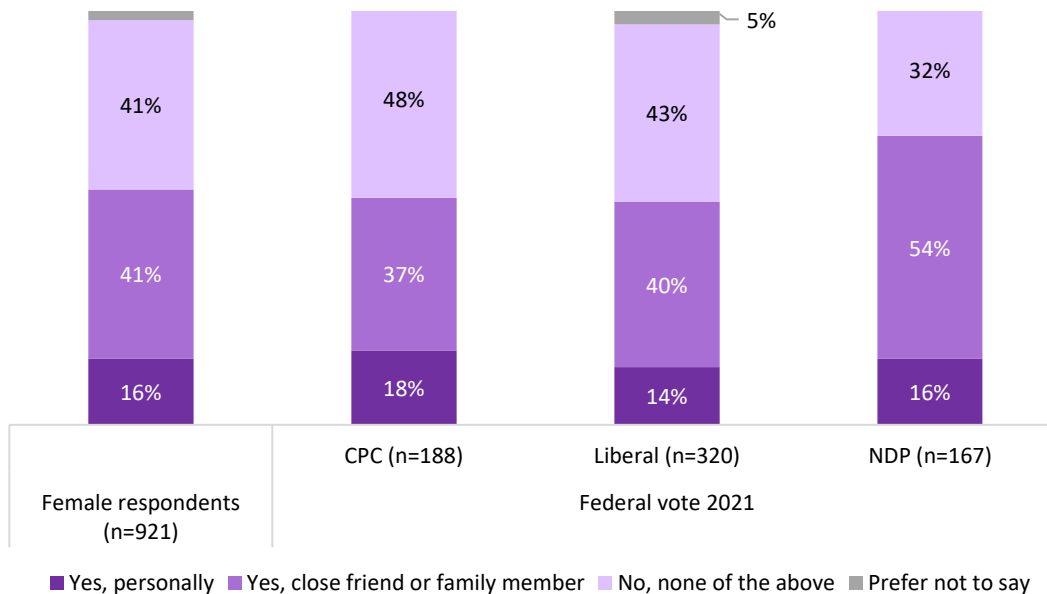
Proximity to this issue is high across all generations. Even for those youngest and oldest women who have not had this experience personally, two-in-five know of a close friend or family member who has. More than half in every age group have ended a pregnancy through procedural means themselves or know someone close to them who has:

Have you, or a close friend or family member ended a pregnancy?



As with many issues, abortion is politicized in Canada. Candidates for some parties have been compelled to attest that they are pro-choice as a condition of membership, while others have been “dogged” by questions about their views that they were unwilling to share. Proximity and personal experience however, touches Canadian women across the political spectrum:

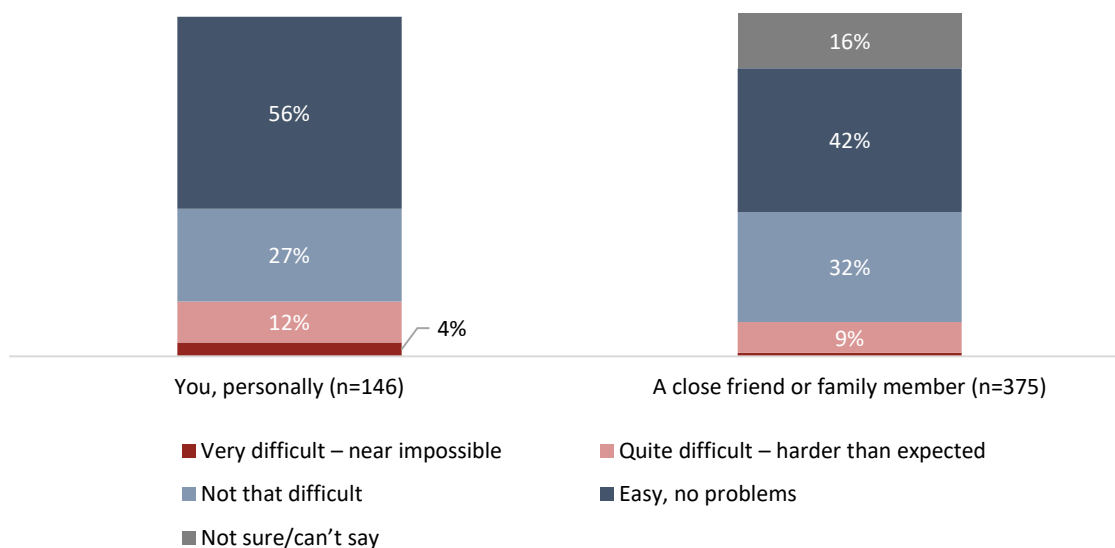
Have you, or a close friend or family member ended a pregnancy?



Access a challenge for more than one-in-seven

Criticism of access to abortion services in Canada is a well canvassed issue and one that [some advocates decry](#). Asked about their own experience, 16 per cent of those women who have had an abortion say that it was difficult or impossible to access. The majority either had no problems (56%), or said it was “not that difficult” (27%):

And can you tell us, how easy or difficult was it to access that abortion service for you, or this close friend or family member?



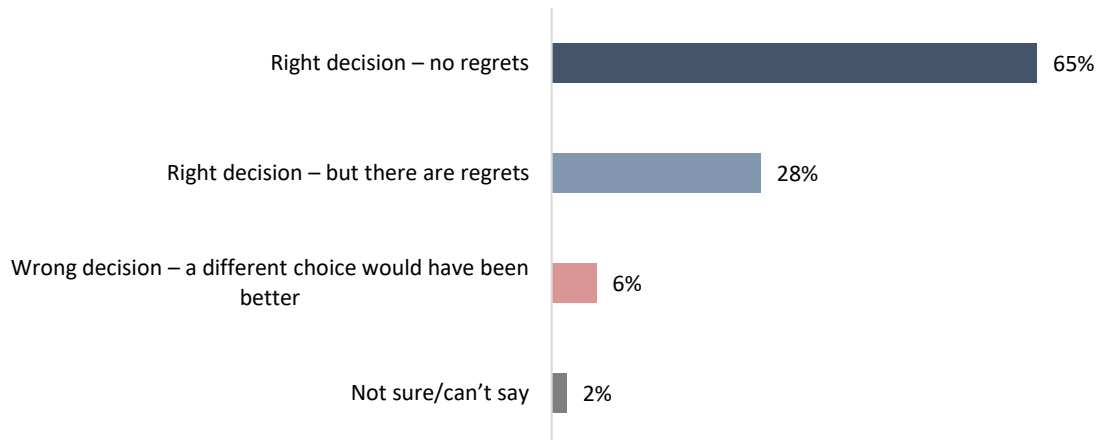
Regrets exist, but vast majority stand by decision

The decision to end a pregnancy can generate myriad emotions, from relief to grief, to shame and anxiety, to empowerment and confidence. Two-thirds of those who report having had a surgical or procedural abortion say that ultimately it was the right choice for them, they have no regrets. Among three-in-ten (28%) regrets linger, but not enough to make them second guess their decisions. Six per cent say a different choice would have been better for them:

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

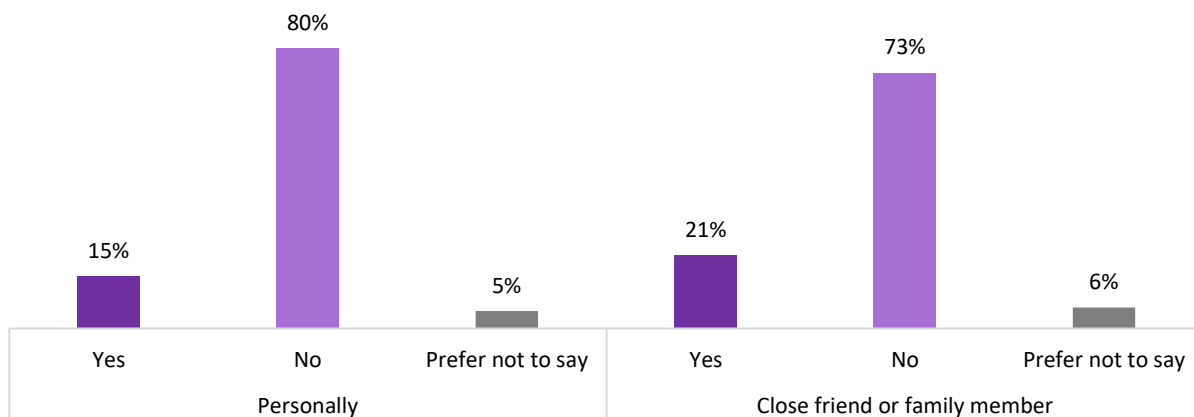
**Looking back, all things considered, how did you feel about it all? (The decision to have an abortion)
(n=146)**



Part Two: Experiences of those who carried an unwanted pregnancy to term

While approximately one-in-six women say they have had a surgical abortion, nearly the identical number (15%) say that carried an unwanted pregnancy to term. Another one-in-five Canadian women say they have a close friend or family member who has carried an unwanted pregnancy to term:

**We'd like to know if you, or a close friend or family member ever experienced an unwanted pregnancy that was carried to term
(Female respondents, n=921)**

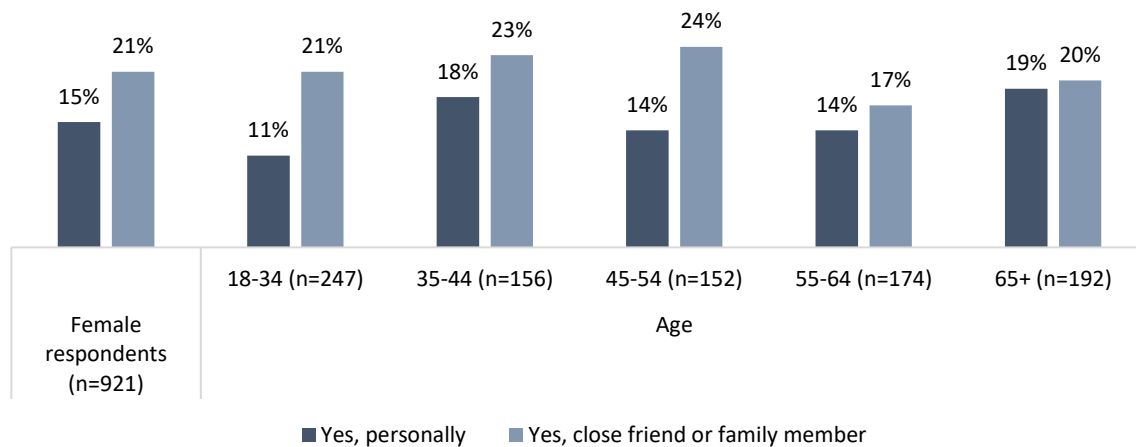


CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

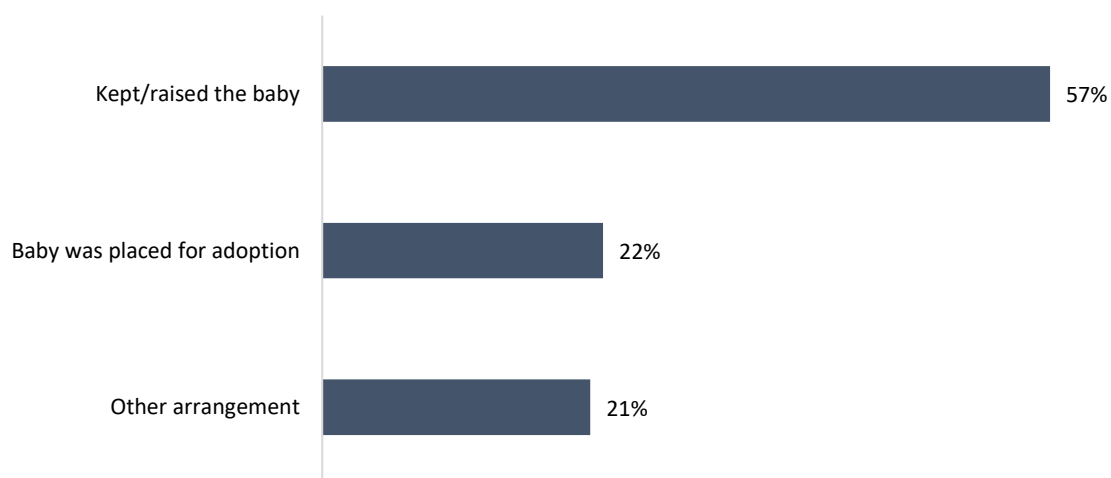
Personal experience is highest for those over the age of 64 and those between the ages of 35 and 44, but exposure to this issue in some way exceed three-in-ten across all age groups:

We'd like to know if you, or a close friend or family member ever experienced an unwanted pregnancy that was carried to term



Asked what they did after birth, most of those who personally carried the child to term (57%) say they kept the baby and raised it. One-in-five (22%) placed the child for adoption, while another one-in-five say they made other arrangements.

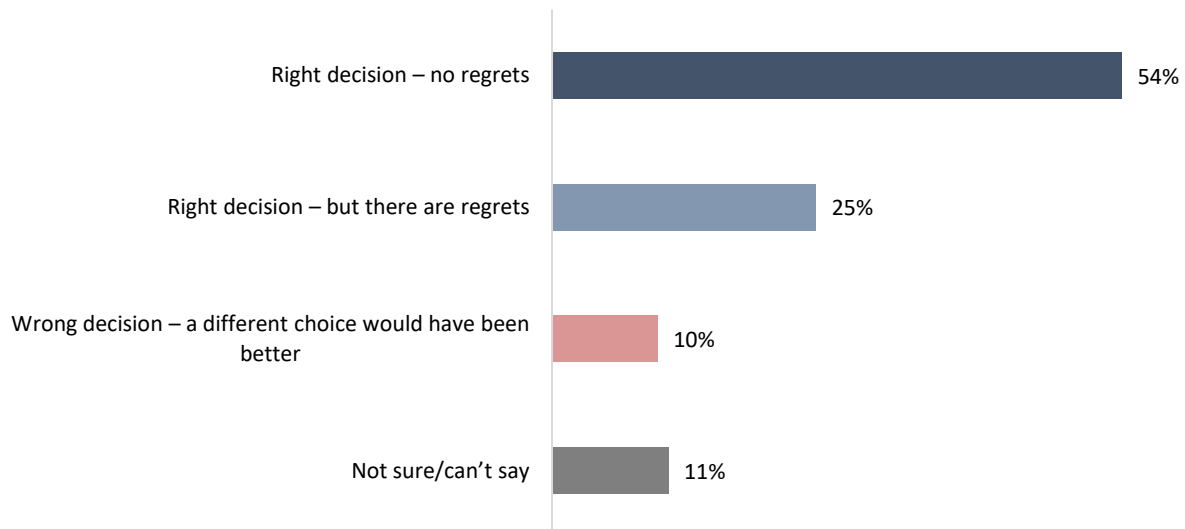
**And can you tell us what happened?
(Personally carried unwanted pregnancy to term, n=139)**



As with the case with women who chose an abortion, the majority who chose to carry their pregnancy to full term look back on that decision as ultimately the right one. For more than half (54%), there are no

regrets, while one-quarter express regrets but still believe they made the right choice. One-in-five are either unsure (11%), or would have done things differently (10%):

**And looking back, all things considered, how did you feel about that decision?
(Personally carried unwanted pregnancy to term, n=139)**



Coming Up Next:

In Part Two and Three of this series we will explore the issue of abortion in Canada further, asking Canadians whether this country needs a law to guarantee or restrict access, whether they consider themselves pro-life, pro-choice, or somewhere in between, and much more.

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org