

IOTA Statement on Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization Supreme Court Ruling and the Upcoming Special Legislative Session in Indiana

On June 24th, 2022, the United States Supreme Court ruled to end federal rights to abortion services, overturning Roe V. Wade (1973). Later that same day, Governor Eric Holcomb announced he would call for a special session of the General Assembly beginning on July 26th, 2022 to address tax reform and now abortion restrictions.

As a state association, IOTA is non-partisan and notes the importance of communicating to its members the effects this legislation may have on occupational therapy consumers, practitioners, and settings and to provide members with resources in anticipation of this special legislative session.

In an official brief submitted to the court on the ruling, The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, American Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Nursing, and American Academy of Pediatrics, and other leading healthcare organizations, states "The medical community recognizes abortion as a safe and essential component of women's health care," and that abortion restrictions will "endanger the physical and psychological health of pregnant patients." (American Medical Association et al. Amicus Brief in Supreme Court re. Dobbs v. Jackson).

Abortion restrictions affect occupational therapy consumers and practitioners. At an immediate level, abortion restrictions are likely to increase the number of children and birthing parents seeking occupational therapy services, such as pre- and post-natal care, mental health, early intervention, and outpatient services. However, abortion restrictions are also likely to lead to loss of life and increased number of occupational therapy consumers experiencing grief over the loss of parents, partners, family members, and friends. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2022a) expects increased symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression following legislation enacting abortion restrictions; these are all symptoms that impact function and participation in daily life and may require occupational therapy services.

Indiana does not have comprehensive prenatal care available to all Hoosier women- including occupational therapy. Indiana has the 46th highest maternal mortality rate in the United States averaging 41.4 deaths per 100,000 births. This means that 33-36 Hoosier women die each year in preventable childbirth related deaths, more than double the national average. This is compounded by the fact that the US has the highest maternal mortality rate of all developed nations at 20.7 preventable deaths per 100,000 births and is the only developed nation with a consistently rising maternal mortality rate. Restricting abortion could lead to up to 21% increase in maternal mortality rate nationwide for the general population, and a 33% increase for non-hispanic black people (Stevenson, 2021).

APA President, Frank Worrell, PhD, states: "A person's ability to control when and if they have a child is frequently linked to their socioeconomic standing and earning power. Therefore, restricting access to safe, legal abortions is most likely to affect those living in poverty, people of

color, and sexual and gender identity minorities, as well as those who live in rural or medically underserved areas.” (APA, 2022b).

Reproductive healthcare and abortion are directly related to occupational therapy scope of practice. In a statement from the newly elected president of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), Alyson Stover, MOT, JD, OTR/L, BCP states: “Occupational therapy was the first profession to identify sexual activity as an activity of daily living (ADL), and we emphasize the value of this ADL in our scope of practice” (Stover, 2022). Additionally, reproductive healthcare and abortive services are a health management occupation, and affect role loss/transitions, pelvic health, mental health, safety, and autonomy.

Two of the core values put forth in AOTA’s code of ethics (AOTA, 2020) directly relate to abortion restrictions. *Freedom*, “each person’s right to exercise autonomy and demonstrate independence, initiative, and self-direction,” and *justice*, “the pursuit of a state in which diverse communities are inclusive and are organized and structured so that all members can function, flourish, and live a satisfactory life regardless of age, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, origin, socioeconomic status, degree of ability, or any other status or attributes.” (AOTA, 2020). In the ethical principle of *Autonomy*, the code of ethics directly addresses individuals’ “right to make a determination regarding care decisions that directly affect their lives.” (AOTA, 2020).

Abortion restrictions interfere with an individual’s freedom and ability to function, flourish, and live a satisfactory life regardless of reproductive abilities and choice. Becoming a parent and experiencing pregnancy is one of the biggest occupational changes an individual can experience: in addition to increased roles and occupational responsibilities, parents/pregnant individuals experience physical changes, mental changes, role loss/strain, and sleep and routine disruption.

IOTA will continue to provide updates about specific legislation affecting occupational therapy consumers and practitioners as the special legislative session in Indiana begins. As a reminder, your legislators represent and serve you as their constituent. We encourage you to contact your legislators to express your thoughts and opinions on this and any other issues that are being addressed in the special session. You can find your representatives and their contact information here: <http://iga.in.gov/legislative/find-legislators/>.

References

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