

Tema Central 1: “La autonomía personal frente al inicio de la vida: el dilema del aborto en contextos éticos y tecnológicos”

The abortion debate centers on the tension between personal autonomy and right to life, complicated by technological advances and shaped by cultural, social, and institutional factors.

Abstract

Studies from Latin America and Europe report that personal autonomy in reproductive decision-making is a multifaceted construct. Several papers note that autonomy encompasses both individual agency and relational dimensions, with women’s choices often shaped by legal reforms, cultural traditions, and religious doctrines. For example, in-depth interviews and discursive analyses reveal that while women assert their capacity for self-determination, constrained healthcare systems and institutional resistance continue to complicate the exercise of that autonomy.

The literature documents a tension between the right to life and the recognition of personal agency. Some studies argue that ethical debates revolving around abortion deploy scientific language to obscure underlying cultural and social factors, while others highlight challenges introduced by technological advances such as prenatal diagnostics. Quantitatively, four studies focus on autonomy, five address ethical frameworks, six consider technological impacts, and five explore evolving legal and social frameworks. Collectively, these papers show that ethical and technological considerations intersect with legal and institutional practices in shaping the abortion debate.

Paper search

Using your research question “Tema Central 1: “La autonomía personal frente al inicio de la vida: el dilema del aborto en contextos éticos y tecnológicos””, we searched across over 126 million academic papers from the Semantic Scholar corpus. We retrieved the 50 papers most relevant to the query.

Screening

We screened in papers that met these criteria:

- **Ethical Framework Analysis:** Does the study examine ethical frameworks, philosophical arguments, or legal/bioethical frameworks related to personal autonomy in reproductive decisions?
- **Decision-Making Analysis:** Does the study include analysis of decision-making processes in abortion contexts through empirical research?
- **Contextual Factors:** Does the research analyze how social, cultural, or religious factors influence reproductive autonomy?
- **Technology Ethics:** When discussing medical technology in abortion contexts, does the study address related ethical implications?
- **Research Type:** Is the study either primary research, a systematic review, or a meta-analysis?
- **Substantive Analysis:** Does the study include substantive ethical analysis beyond mere opinion, commentary, or political advocacy?
- **Ethical Integration:** When discussing medical procedures, demographics, or economics, does the study incorporate analysis of ethical implications or decision-making processes?

We considered all screening questions together and made a holistic judgement about whether to screen in each paper.

Data extraction

We asked a large language model to extract each data column below from each paper. We gave the model the extraction instructions shown below for each column.

- **Study Design:**

Identify the type of study methodology used:

- Specify if it is a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods study
- Look in the methods section for explicit description of research design
- If multiple methodological approaches are used, list all (e.g., "documentary-bibliographic review with inductive-deductive method")
- If methodology is not clearly stated, write "Not clearly specified"

- **Research Focus and Perspective:**

Extract the primary perspective or lens through which the abortion topic is analyzed:

- Identify the key disciplinary perspective (e.g., legal, ethical, medical, philosophical)
- Note specific angles of analysis (e.g., personal autonomy, human rights, medical ethics)
- Quote the main research objective directly from the text
- If multiple perspectives are present, list them in order of prominence

- **Key Ethical Dimensions Explored:**

Identify and list the primary ethical dimensions or dilemmas discussed:

- Extract specific ethical principles or rights mentioned (e.g., personal autonomy, right to life)
- Note any conflicting rights or ethical considerations
- Capture nuanced ethical arguments about abortion
- If possible, provide a direct quote that encapsulates the ethical analysis

- **Legal and Regulatory Context:**

Extract information about legal frameworks or regulatory discussions:

- Specify the legal jurisdiction discussed (e.g., Ecuador, Cuba, European countries)
- Note any specific legal provisions, reforms, or judicial decisions related to abortion
- Capture any discussions about legal responsibilities or implications
- If no specific legal context is discussed, write "No specific legal context provided"

- **Technological and Scientific Considerations:**

Identify how technological or scientific factors inform the abortion discussion:

- Extract references to medical technologies (e.g., prenatal diagnostics)
- Note how scientific capabilities influence ethical decision-making
- Capture discussions about technological implications for reproductive choices
- If no technological considerations are mentioned, write "No technological factors discussed"

Results

Characteristics of Included Studies

Study	Study Type	Focus Area	Methodology	Key Context	Full text retrieved
Etcheberry Rojas, 2023	Qualitative exploratory study	Healthcare discourses on abortion and euthanasia	In-depth interviews, content and discourse analysis	Chile; post-2017 Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy (IVE) law; focus on autonomy, vulnerability, and gender	Yes
Gomes and Menezes, 2008	Documentary-bibliographic review	Legislative and cultural debates on abortion and euthanasia	Review of legislative projects, policy analysis	Brazil; focus on cultural, religious, and political factors	Yes
Bosio et al., 2018	Qualitative study	Catholic women's abortion decisions	Exploratory interviews, qualitative analysis	Latin America (unspecified); intersection of religion, feminism, and autonomy	No
Piekarewicz Sigal, 2015	Not clearly specified (narrative/discursive)	Bioethics, abortion, and public policy	Discursive/narrative analysis	Latin America; focus on scientific bioethics and gradualism	Yes
Biroli, 2014	Theoretical/philosophical analysis	Autonomy and justice in abortion debates	Documentary-bibliographic review	Brazil; feminist and philosophical perspectives	Yes
Morán Faúndes, 2014	Not clearly specified (critical analysis)	Moral status of the embryo in abortion debates	Critical analysis	Latin America (unspecified); focus on legal and ethical constructs	No

Study	Study Type	Focus Area	Methodology	Key Context	Full text retrieved
Lamas, 2004	Not clearly specified (legal/ethical analysis)	Legal reforms and ethical dilemmas in abortion	Legal and ethical analysis	Europe (esp. France); focus on prenatal diagnosis and state responsibility	No
Morales-Pilataxi et al., 2023	Mixed-methods (documentary-bibliographic, inductive-deductive)	Legal analysis of women's autonomy and abortion	Documentary review, analytic-synthetic method	Ecuador; focus on legal reforms and human rights	Yes
Lugo, 2017	Qualitative bibliographic review	Ethical dilemmas in abortion for congenital malformations	Literature review	Cuba; focus on medical ethics and genetic counseling	No
Angulo et al., 2012	Not clearly specified (legal/philosophical analysis)	Right to life of the unborn	Legal and philosophical analysis	Colombia; focus on Sentencia C-355/2006 and constitutional law	Yes

Summary of Study Types:

- 2 studies used qualitative empirical methods (interviews and qualitative analysis).
- 2 studies used documentary or policy review approaches.
- 1 study used a narrative/discursive approach.
- 1 study used a theoretical/philosophical approach.
- 1 study used critical analysis.
- 1 study used legal/ethical analysis.
- 1 study used mixed-methods.
- 1 study used legal/philosophical analysis (not clearly specified).

Summary of Focus Areas:

- 2 studies focused on abortion and euthanasia discourses or debates.
- 1 study focused on abortion decisions among Catholic women.
- 1 study addressed bioethics and public policy.
- 1 study examined autonomy and justice in abortion debates.
- 1 study analyzed the moral status of the embryo.
- 1 study discussed legal reforms and ethical dilemmas in abortion.
- 1 study provided a legal analysis of women's autonomy and abortion.

- 1 study addressed ethical dilemmas in abortion for congenital malformations.
- 1 study focused on the right to life of the unborn and constitutional law.

Geographical Context:

- 2 studies were conducted in Brazil.
- 1 study in Chile.
- 1 study in Ecuador.
- 1 study in Cuba.
- 1 study in Colombia.
- 1 study in Europe (France).
- 3 studies were set in Latin America but did not specify a country.

Thematic Context (not mutually exclusive):

- 4 studies focused on autonomy.
- 2 studies addressed gender or feminism.
- 3 studies focused on legal reforms or human rights.
- 1 study addressed medical ethics and genetic counseling.
- 1 study focused on cultural, religious, or political factors.
- 1 study addressed scientific bioethics and gradualism.
- 1 study focused on the moral or legal status of the embryo.

We didn't find mention of the country context for 3 studies beyond "Latin America (unspecified)." We didn't find any studies using quantitative or experimental designs.

Thematic Analysis

Personal Autonomy and Self-Determination

- Centrality of Autonomy: Several studies (Etcheberry Rojas, 2023; Biroli, 2014; Morales-Pilataxi et al., 2023) highlight autonomy as both an individual and relational construct, emphasizing the importance of recognizing women's agency in reproductive matters.
- Negotiation within Religious Frameworks: Bosio et al. (2018) explores how autonomy is negotiated within religious contexts, showing the interplay between personal beliefs, community norms, and institutional authority.
- Relational Autonomy: Etcheberry Rojas (2023) reports a shift toward recognizing relational autonomy and the ethics of care, moving beyond strictly individualistic frameworks.

Ethical Frameworks and Life Valuation

- Conflicting Rights: Studies variously prioritize the right to life (Angulo et al., 2012; Morán Faúndes, 2014), personal autonomy (Biroli, 2014; Morales-Pilataxi et al., 2023), or a balance between the two (Gomes and Menezes, 2008; Piekarewicz Sigal, 2015).
- Critique of Scientific Language: Morán Faúndes (2014) critiques the use of scientific language to justify moral or legal positions, suggesting it can obscure social and cultural factors.
- Ethics of Care vs. Justice: The ethics of care and relational approaches are contrasted with justice-based frameworks in several studies.

Technological Advances and Prenatal Diagnosis

- Complicating Ethical and Legal Decisions: Advances in prenatal diagnostics and reproductive technologies are identified as complicating ethical and legal decision-making (Lamas, 2004; Gomes and Menezes, 2008; Piekarewicz Sigal, 2015).
- Access and Disparities: Biroli (2014) and Lugo (2017) note that access to medical technologies affects health outcomes and ethical choices, especially for marginalized populations.
- Societal Willingness and Legitimacy: Studies raise questions about the legitimacy of seeking anomalies, societal willingness to support individuals with special needs, and the timing and justification for abortion.

Legal and Social Implications

- Diversity and Evolution of Legal Frameworks: Studies document the diversity of abortion laws and ongoing contestation of rights and responsibilities (Etcheberry Rojas, 2023; Morales-Pilataxi et al., 2023; Angulo et al., 2012).
- Barriers to Access: Barriers such as conscientious objection, lack of training, and institutional resistance are reported as persistent challenges.
- Influence of Religious and Political Actors: The role of religious and political actors in shaping policy is a recurrent issue.
- Intersection with Technology: Legal, ethical, and technological considerations intersect, especially in contexts with ongoing or contested reforms.

Theme	Key Findings	Supporting Studies	Implications
Personal Autonomy and Self-Determination	Autonomy is central but contested; relational and collective dimensions are increasingly recognized; autonomy is shaped by legal, social, and religious contexts	Etcheberry Rojas, 2023; Biroli, 2014; Morales-Pilataxi et al., 2023; Bosio et al., 2018	Policy and practice must account for both individual and relational aspects of autonomy; interventions should be context-sensitive
Ethical Frameworks and Life Valuation	Conflicting rights (autonomy vs. right to life); critique of scientific language as masking social/cultural factors; ethics of care vs. justice	Angulo et al., 2012; Morán Faúndes, 2014; Gomes and Menezes, 2008; Piekarewicz Sigal, 2015; Etcheberry Rojas, 2023	Ethical analysis must move beyond binary oppositions and consider broader social, cultural, and scientific contexts
Technological Advances and Prenatal Diagnosis	Prenatal diagnostics and reproductive technologies complicate ethical/legal decisions; access to technology is uneven; scientific advances influence definitions of life and personhood	Lamas, 2004; Gomes and Menezes, 2008; Piekarewicz Sigal, 2015; Biroli, 2014; Lugo, 2017; Angulo et al., 2012	Policy must address technological disparities and the ethical implications of new capabilities; informed consent and access are critical

Theme	Key Findings	Supporting Studies	Implications
Legal and Social Implications	Legal frameworks are diverse and evolving; barriers to access persist; religious and political actors shape policy; legal reforms often lag behind social realities	Etcheberry Rojas, 2023; Morales-Pilataxi et al., 2023; Angulo et al., 2012; Biroli, 2014; Lamas, 2004	Legal reforms must be responsive to social needs and technological advances; ongoing monitoring and advocacy are needed

Summary of Thematic Support:

- Personal Autonomy and Self-Determination: 4 studies
- Ethical Frameworks and Life Valuation: 5 studies
- Technological Advances and Prenatal Diagnosis: 6 studies
- Legal and Social Implications: 5 studies

Three studies (Etcheberry Rojas, 2023; Biroli, 2014; Angulo et al., 2012) were cited in three different themes each. Four studies (Morales-Pilataxi et al., 2023; Gomes and Menezes, 2008; Piekarewicz Sigal, 2015; Lamas, 2004) were cited in two themes each. Three studies (Bosio et al., 2018; Morán Faúndes, 2014; Lugo, 2017) were cited in only one theme each. We didn't find any studies cited in all four themes.

Key findings were grouped into 12 distinct categories, with each category appearing in only one theme.

The most common types of findings addressed were:

- The centrality and contestation of autonomy (4 studies)
- The complexity of ethical frameworks and valuation of life (5 studies)
- The impact of technological advances and disparities in access (6 studies)
- The diversity and evolution of legal and social frameworks (5 studies)

We didn't find any studies cited only in the "Implications" column, and we didn't find any overlap in specific key finding categories across themes.

Contextual Considerations

Healthcare System Implications

- Several studies report that healthcare systems are central to the implementation of abortion laws, provision of prenatal diagnostics, and management of conscientious objection (Etcheberry Rojas, 2023; Lugo, 2017).
- Barriers to access, lack of training, and institutional resistance are recurrent challenges.
- The ethical conduct of healthcare professionals, especially in genetic counseling and end-of-life care, is highlighted as a key consideration.

Societal Impact

- Societal attitudes, shaped by religion, politics, and cultural norms, influence both individual decisions and policy outcomes (Gomes and Menezes, 2008; Bosio et al., 2018; Morales-Pilataxi et al., 2023).
- Socioeconomic disparities affect access to safe abortion and reproductive technologies, with marginalized groups facing greater risks and fewer options.

Factor	Impact on Autonomy	Ethical Considerations	Legal Framework
Healthcare system barriers	Limits access to safe abortion; increases vulnerability	Raises issues of justice, equity, and professional ethics	Varies by country; conscientious objection and lack of training are key issues
Societal/religious norms	Shapes individual choices; can reinforce stigma or support autonomy	Intersects with moral reasoning, discrimination, and care ethics	Influences legal reforms and policy implementation
Technological access	Enables informed choices but is unevenly distributed	Informed consent, equity, and the legitimacy of prenatal selection	Legal standards for prenatal diagnostics and abortion vary
Legal reforms and judicial decisions	Can expand or restrict autonomy; often reactive to social pressures	Balances competing rights and ethical principles	Highly variable; ongoing reforms in many contexts

Summary of Factors Affecting Autonomy:

- Limiting autonomy or increasing vulnerability was noted for healthcare system barriers.
- Shaping individual choices, reinforcing stigma, or supporting autonomy was noted for societal/religious norms.
- Enabling informed choices, but with uneven distribution, was noted for technological access.
- Expanding or restricting autonomy, often in response to social pressures, was noted for legal reforms and judicial decisions.

Ethical Considerations Identified:

- Justice and equity concerns
- Professional ethics
- Moral reasoning, discrimination, and care ethics
- Informed consent, equity, and legitimacy of prenatal selection
- Balancing competing rights and ethical principles

Legal Framework Observations:

- Variation by country for healthcare system barriers and legal reforms
- Conscientious objection and lack of training as key issues
- Influence on legal reforms and policy implementation for societal/religious norms
- Legal standards for diagnostics and abortion vary for technological access
- High variability and ongoing reforms for legal reforms and judicial decisions

We didn't find additional factors or impacts on autonomy outside of these four categories in the table.

References

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- M. Bosio, María Cecilia Johnson, and Maria Marcela Frencia. ““Disidencia Religiosa y Libertad de Conciencia”: Católicas Que Deciden Abortar,” 2018.
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- N. Lugo. “Dilemas Éticos En La Interrupción Del Embarazo Por Malformaciones Congénitas,” 2017.