Most support abortion ban, exceptions

By LAURA BEIL

Opinions on abortion hold few surprises in annual year-old voter poll conducted for The Advocate.

The overwhelming majority of people would allow abortion in cases of rape or incest. Four percent of the respondents said they would oppose abortion in cases of rape or incest, 9 percent said they would oppose abortion in all cases.

However, most respondents said they would allow abortion in cases where the mother's health was at risk or in cases of rape or incest.

The numbers match last year's poll almost exactly.

Eighty-two percent of those polled said they would allow an abortion if the mother's life were in danger, compared to 79 percent last year. Seventy-five percent said they would allow an abortion if the mother wanted one, 74 percent said the mother's health was at risk, and 74 percent said the abortion was a rape or incest.

The numbers match last year's poll almost exactly.

The views are not so clear in cases when a developing fetus has a severe mental or physical handicap. Forty-seven percent of the people surveyed said they thought abortion should be allowed in those cases.

Opinions vary little among different racial and religious groups. However, voters under 30 are slightly more inclined to allow abortion in all cases than those over 30 (25 versus 22 percent). Women are slightly more inclined to allow abortion in all cases than men (26 versus 24 percent), but men are more inclined to allow abortion in cases where the mother's health is at risk (78 versus 75 percent) or in cases where a developing fetus has a severe mental or physical handicap (56 versus 52 percent).

Beliefs on abortion also are associated with education level. One percent of people with some post-graduate education would allow abortion for any reason, compared to 23 percent of college graduates, 75 percent of high school graduates, and 80 percent of those who had no education past high school.

The percent of the people polled said they would not allow abortion for any reason.

Poll

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Esther McGuire, the administrator of Delta Women's Clinic, predicts the numbers might be altered in future polls by the abortion ban passed by the Louisiana Legislature in 1991.

The ban will go up in federal court and be immediately enforceable.

"You never really miss a right until it is taken away," McGuire said.

However, Sandy McDade, president of Louisiana Eagle Forum, observed that the opinion "were very much in line with the legislation that was passed." Louisiana Eagle Forum is a pro-life group.

As the Louisiana law works its way through the court system, McDade said, it might become more comfortable in the months to come.

The poll also asked voters how they feel about requiring females under 18 to get parental permission before an abortion. Seventy-eight percent of the voters favor requiring parental permission. Apologies sought to the question of people between 18 and 29 favor parental consent.

Religious and race also make little difference in a person's attitude toward parental consent.

These opinions are in line with other polls, according to McDade.

"Parents want to be involved in important decisions with their children," she said. "Most of these parents are going to be supportive."

A representative of the Delta Clinic said the poll results concerning parental permission do not surprise her.

"In an ideal world, it would be great for families to talk down and discuss the decision to have an abortion. But we don't live in an ideal world."

The survey, conducted by Ed Heimpek of Leytons University, polled 944 Louisiana voters.