



## Victory - what victory?

Melinda Tankard Reist

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A great "victory" for women has apparently been won. There are cheers and celebrations, champagne and strawberries. The teary victors are "euphoric" saying it's a great day for our daughters and granddaughters. One group stated this single event will lead to the end of all discrimination against women.

Wow, it must be something really wonderful. An end to all violence against women perhaps? The eradication of poverty which blights the lives of so many women? The easing of burdens which weigh disproportionately on them?

Well, no, actually.

This glorious great leap for womankind is not about any of these things.

It is about a drug women may soon be able to take to end their pregnancies - pills which cause you to bleed away the remnants of what would have been your child. (And if you're one of the women for whom the chemical abortion didn't work, you get the surgical one thrown in.)

This is the crowning achievement of our female politicians? This is "V" Day? This is the best we can offer women?

How can giving women pregnancy destroying chemicals ever be seen as a victory? A real victory would be a change in the conditions - violence, poverty, threats to education and work - that cause many women to seek abortion in the first place.

What we are seeing is yet another sign of failure - failure to provide what women themselves say they need. Where is triumph in saying, "Here's another way to get rid of the child beginning in you"?

It's all about death and endings and sadness, not something to be euphoric about with strawberry juice dribbling down your chin. "RU486 Drinks" read the signs in the corridors of Parliament House after last week's vote, with an arrow pointing to where to go if you wanted to join the toast.

How can you celebrate a woman going through this lonely ordeal, spread over days or sometimes weeks, in the "privacy of her own home"? How can you toss streamers about for that?

Research by our organisation, Women's Forum Australia, shows that many abortion decisions are motivated by a lack of emotional, social and material support. Financial concerns are a major motivator for abortion.

Women feel their school or workplace will be unsupportive if they continue their pregnancy. Abortion is strongly associated with domestic violence and abuse.

An Australian study of 1,014 women found abused women had a higher incidence of two or more pregnancy terminations. Lack of commitment from a male partner, or physical, psychological and sexual violence, appear to be a major contributor to abortion.

So a woman, bullied and beaten down by abuse, a victim of coerced sex and a partner who will punish her more for being pregnant, goes to the clinic and is told, "Boy, have we got some good

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news for you!” and handed pills and a paper cup. And she better be grateful.

Abortion causing drugs like RU486 don't change the circumstances women find themselves in. They help facilitate and perpetuate the social conditions that conspire against genuine choice. It's just easier to throw pills at women than address the difficulties that find them on the abortion clinic step in the first place.

It wasn't a “great day” for the daughters in other countries who died after taking RU486. Their parents don't think they died victoriously (although Senator Lyn Allison seems to think a “few deaths” is a small price to pay).

The quaffers of champagne may soon have even more “good news” to share. Already there is pressure from an international consortium to free up over-the-counter sales of RU486 around the world. That could be the next step. Remember how the Therapeutic Goods Administration approved the “Morning After Pill” strictly on prescription alone? Not that long after, it opened up sale of this drug over the counter, removing important health safeguards for women.

If RU486 is a “victory” what language is left for something that would really be positive for women - like the choice to have a real live baby rather than an unwanted abortion?

**Melinda Tankard Reist is a Canberra-based writer and researcher with a special interest in women's health, new reproductive technologies and medical abuses of women. She is author of *Giving Sorrow Words: Women's Stories of Grief after Abortion*. She also consults on bioethical issues.**