

mental health problems that existed before abortion, a large-scale study conducted in New Zealand found that this wasn't the case.²

The standard theory has been that women who have problems coping after abortion were probably already mentally unstable and therefore more likely to be even worse off if they continued the pregnancy.

The researchers in New Zealand thought that their study would confirm this theory, so they specifically controlled for pre-existing mental health problems. What they found, however, was that women who were mentally stable before abortion were still more likely to experience mental health problems after abortion.

More Research Needed

Although the pregnancy rate among American teens has dropped steadily in the past few decades, among developed countries the U.S. still has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and childbirth.

In her paper, Coleman highlighted a need for additional research on this issue. She pointed out that while "hundreds of thousands" of teens experience an unintended pregnancy each year, her study is one of only a few to examine the impact of abortion on women versus the impact of carrying to term, all of which have indicated worse outcomes associated with abortion.

Coleman and other researchers in this area have pointed out that medical and mental health professionals need to be attuned to the risks of abortion and present women and teens with accurate information about the physical and psychological effects of the procedure.

The findings that are emerging show that abortion leads to negative outcomes for many

women, regardless of whether the pregnancy was planned or wanted. In fact, not a single study has ever shown statistically significant benefits associated with abortion compared to birth. In terms of maximizing women's health and well-being, the scientific evidence overwhelmingly indicates that birth is preferable to abortion.

Citations

1. PK Coleman, "Resolution of Unwanted Pregnancy During Adolescence Through Abortion Versus Childbirth: Individual and Family Predictors and Psychological Consequences," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* (2006).

2. DM.Fergusson, et. al., "Abortion in young women and subsequent mental health," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 47(1): 16-24 (2006).

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Pamphlet 624

Is Abortion Better for Teens Than Unplanned Pregnancy?

Research Says Teens Face More Mental Health Risks, Even When Pregnancy Is Unplanned

Are teens who abort better off than teens who carry an unplanned pregnancy to term?

Not according to a study published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*. The study found that adolescent girls who abort unintended pregnancies are five times more likely to seek subsequent help for psychological and emotional problems compared to their peers who carry "unwanted" pregnancies to term.¹

Dr. Priscilla Coleman, a research psychologist at Bowling Green State University, also found that adolescents who had abortions were over three times more likely to report subsequent trouble sleeping and nine times more likely to report subsequent marijuana use.

The results were compiled after examining 17 other control variables, like prior mental health history and family factors, that might also influence subsequent mental health.

The data was drawn from a federally funded longitudinal study of adolescents from throughout the U.S. who participated in two series of interviews in 1995 and 1996. About 76 percent of girls who had abortions and 80 percent of girls who gave birth were between the ages of 15 and 19 during the survey, with the remainder being younger.

This study is particularly important because it examines pregnancy "wantedness,"

in addition to a large number of other control variables.

Over the last several years, numerous studies have conclusively linked higher rates of mental illness and behavioral problems associated with abortion compared to childbirth. But abortion advocates have generally dismissed these findings, insisting that while women who abort may fare worse than women who give birth to planned children, they may fare better than the important subgroup of women who carry unintended pregnancies to term. Coleman's study addresses this argument and shows that the facts don't support abortion advocates' speculations.

Teens More Likely to Have Unwanted Abortions

According to the Guttmacher Institute, which tracks abortion statistics throughout the U.S., about a quarter of the abortions that take place each year are performed on girls younger than 20.

Previous studies have found that younger abortion patients may be more likely to experience difficulties coping after abortion compared to older women. One reason behind this may be that teens are more likely to be pressured into unwanted abortions or to undergo abortions later in pregnancy, which carry a greater risk of physical and psychological complications.

A 2004 *Medical Science Monitor* study of women who had abortions found that 64 percent of American women reported that they felt pressured into abortion. Coleman said that for teens, the pressure probably comes from the fact that they are more likely to be perceived as unready to be parents and that

abortion is often seen by those around them as the best solution.

"When women feel forced into abortion by others or by life circumstances, negative post-abortion outcomes become more common," she wrote. "Adolescents are generally much less prepared to assume the responsibility of parenthood and are [therefore] the recipients of pressure to abort."

Such pressure may be even more intense for teens who are victims of sexual abuse, a situation made even more disturbing when abortion businesses carry out the abortion without asking questions or even acting to cover up the abuse.

Higher Risk Factors for Teens

Coleman pointed out that, while having a child as a teen may be problematic, "the risks of terminating seem to be even more pronounced."

Previous studies on teens and abortion have also found:

- Teens are 6 times more likely to attempt suicide if they have had an abortion in the last six months than are teens who have not had an abortion.
- Teens who abort are up to 4 times more likely to commit suicide than adults who abort, and a history of abortion is likely to be associated with adolescent suicidal thinking.
- Teens who abort are more likely to develop psychological problems, and are nearly three times more likely to be admitted to mental health hospitals than teens in general.
- Teens who abort are twice as likely as their peers to abuse alcohol, marijuana, or cocaine.

- Teens are more likely to abort because of pressure from their parents or partner, more likely to report being misinformed in pre-abortion counseling, and more likely to have greater difficulty coping after abortion.

Other Studies Find Abortion Worse Than Unintended Pregnancy

Other studies comparing outcomes for abortion versus delivery of unintended pregnancies have found higher rates of clinical depression, anxiety, and substance abuse among women who abort, while studies that did not look only at unplanned pregnancies also found that women who aborted are at increased risk for suicidal behavior, psychiatric problems, symptoms of post-traumatic stress, and sleep disorders, which are often linked to trauma.

Most recently, the authors of a recent New Zealand study (headed by a pro-choice researcher) wrote in their paper that, "There is no evidence in this research that would suggest that unwanted pregnancies that come to term were associated with increased risks of mental health problems or that abortion mitigated the risks of mental health problems in women having unwanted pregnancy."

And while previous studies have often been criticized for methodological shortcomings, studies that have come out in the last several years have been designed to address those problems and have gone through vigorous scrutiny from peer-review panels before publication.

"The scientific evidence is now strong and compelling," Coleman stated. "Abortion poses more risks to women than giving birth."

While there has been a long-standing assumption that such problems are related to