



FACTS IN FOCUS

Mental Health Risks of Abortion During Adolescence

Nearly 25% of U.S. abortions are performed on adolescents [1].

Younger women when compared to older women are particularly vulnerable to experiencing post-abortion emotional difficulties [2,3].

Increased psychological vulnerability is likely due to various factors:

- Adolescents are more likely than adults to delay decision-making (based on their relative inability to recognize pregnancy, admit being pregnant, and afford the cost of care) ultimately resulting in a higher proportion of later term abortions that entail more physical and emotional risk [4-7].
- When women feel forced into abortion by others or by life circumstances, adverse mental health outcomes become more common [6,8]. Adolescents are generally much less emotionally and financially prepared to assume the responsibilities of parenthood and they are more often pressured to abort.

The risks of abortion are apparently greater than the risks of unintended pregnancy delivered.

- Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, a large nationally representative sample, Coleman [9] published a study demonstrating that abortion poses a more significant risk to teens' mental health than delivering an unintended pregnancy.
 - For every five adolescents who had aborted and sought counseling for psychological or emotional problems, only one adolescent who delivered an unintended pregnancy sought counseling.
 - Compared with adolescents who delivered their child, almost four times as many adolescent with an abortion history reported frequent sleep disturbances.
 - Adolescents who aborted were more than six times as likely to report frequent marijuana use compared to adolescents who carried an unanticipated pregnancy to term.

In a study of nearly 7000 adolescents, Hope and colleagues [10] compared negative behavioral outcomes of those who aborted (30.1%) and those who kept their babies (68.7%). Adolescent mothers exhibited delinquency levels equivalent to their never pregnant peers.

Compared to adolescents who ended their pregnancies through abortion, those who kept their babies experienced a dramatic reduction in smoking and marijuana use.

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