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## Abortion Has Greater Impact on Parenting Than Other Forms of Pregnancy Loss, New Review Finds

A new review of studies examining various types of prenatal loss and the effects on subsequent parenting has concluded that abortion may be "particularly damaging to the parenting process."

The article, published in *Current Women's Health Reviews*, looked at already published studies on miscarriage, induced abortion and adoption. The author, Priscilla Coleman of Bowling Green State University, focused on psychological reactions to these various types of loss and discussed how they might affect a mother's relationship with children born after the pregnancy loss.<sup>1</sup>

It is now known that women usually begin feeling maternal attachment in the early stages of pregnancy. The paper notes that despite the increased responsibilities and stress involved in raising children, "numerous studies have documented positive psychological characteristics associated with motherhood including increases in life satisfaction, self-esteem, empathy, restraint, flexibility and resourcefulness in coping, and assertiveness." Losing a child before or at birth, for any reason, however, "can be a profound source of suffering."

While all forms of pregnancy loss can cause emotional distress that can impact future parenting, the available research indicates that emotional responses after induced abortion are more likely to go unresolved and to persist for a longer time period.

While "society understands that women who miscarry or relinquish a child through adoption may experience sadness and grief; however, grief after socially sanctioned because abortion is not acknowledged by our culture as a human death experience," and help to deal with the experience is usually not offered.

"In many cases, women may suppress thoughts and emotions related to an abortion, because they have not been able to process and or/openly express negative emotions," Coleman wrote, adding that the lack of acknowledgement and support after abortion gives the "covert message that others would rather not hear what we have to say, and this makes it difficult to even identify our reactions to our losses."

Finding help and support after abortion is further hampered by the belief that, unlike other forms of pregnancy loss, abortion is optional and therefore women experience less distress afterwards. However, having an abortion is "sometimes quite inconsistent with the woman's true desires" (one survey found that [64 percent of American women](#) who had abortions reported feeling pressured to abort), and many women, especially those who feel conflicted or didn't want the abortion, do feel emotional distress afterwards.

"The best evidence regarding negative effects of abortion indicates that 20-30 percent will experience serious psychological problems," Coleman wrote. "With 1.3 million U.S. abortions performed annually, a minimum of 130,000 new cases of abortion-related mental health problems appear each year."

And while abortion advocates frequently argue that abortion is better than carrying an unplanned pregnancy to term, the evidence suggests otherwise.

Studies of women with [unplanned pregnancies](#) found that women who aborted had higher risks of depression, substance abuse and anxiety, and teens who aborted an unintended pregnancy were more likely to experience negative mental health outcomes than their peers who carried to term. Further, a recent [New Zealand study](#) led by a pro-choice researcher found no evidence that abortion provided any mental health benefits to women even in cases of unplanned pregnancy.

## How Abortion Can Impact Parenting

The paper described a number of ways that a previous abortion can effect a woman's relationship with her living children:

- **Increased depression and anxiety.** Abortion has been linked to higher rates of maternal depression and anxiety before and after birth, which may effect the woman's relationship with her children. In addition, depression is a common predictor for child abuse.
- **Sleep disorders and disturbances.** Women who have had an abortion are more likely to experience sleep disorders compared to women who carry to term, and one survey found that many women attributed the sleep disorders to a past abortion. These sleep disturbances "could render the high energy demands of parenting more complicated."
- **Substance abuse.** Studies have found that women who had an abortion were more likely to engage in substance abuse, and also more likely to smoke or use drugs or alcohol while pregnant. Mothers who abuse drugs or alcohol are more likely to "engage in authoritarian and punitive parenting practices," and parental substance abuse increases the risk that the children will suffer abuse or neglect.
- **Child abuse.** Abortion has been associated with lower emotional support for one's children and with a higher risk of child abuse and neglect.

Abortion has also been linked to [higher rates of suicide](#) and to a wide range of [mental health disorders](#). Coleman was also the lead author of a study published in *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, which found that the children of women who had abortions have less supportive home environments and more behavioral problems than children of women without a history of abortion.<sup>2</sup>

While the review noted that not every woman may experience psychological problems after abortion that will carry over into their personal relationships, "some women will have carryover effects into the parenting realm." The paper pointed to a need for better screening and awareness of possible psychological problems after miscarriage, adoption and abortion, and for more research to examine the effects of abortion.

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**Learn more:** For more information on the impact of abortion, download and share our free "[Recent Research](#)" fact sheet.

### Citations

1. PK Coleman, "The Psychological Pain of Perinatal Loss and Subsequent Parenting Risks: Could Induced Abortion Be More Problematic Than Other Forms of Loss," *Current Women's Health Issues* 5: 88-99, 2009.
2. PK Coleman, DC Reardon, JR Cogle, "Substance use among pregnant women in the context of previous reproductive loss and desire for current pregnancy," *British Journal of Health Psychology* 10: 255-268, 2005.