

## 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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