

Chapter 17 Summary: Psychological outcomes: abortion and family formation

One aspect of legalized abortion that has received surprisingly little attention from media and academic sources is its impact on families. Contrary to popular belief, the legalization of abortion is correlated with an increase in single-parenting. While the annual rate of abortions among unmarried women rose from 100,000 to 1.25 million with the legalization of abortion, the annual birth rate among unmarried women also rose from 322,000 to 715,000.¹ Researchers suggest that the legalization of abortion changed the societal perception of premarital sexual relations and marriage.² This led to an increase in premarital sexual relations and in pregnancies, both generally and among women who would not obtain an abortion but were pressured into premarital sex by society's expectations. Furthermore, access to abortion made it less likely that a man would marry his pregnant girlfriend if she chose to keep the baby.³

Abortion may have a substantial impact on relationships and marriages. It increases the odds of separating, divorcing, never marrying, or marrying older.⁴ Surprisingly, legalized abortion also appears to have contributed to an increase in child abuse. This may be for several reasons, including the psychological effects of abortion such as grief, guilt, or mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.⁵ Another striking if counter-intuitive finding is that "unwanted" children (whose mothers were denied abortion) fare almost as well as those who are "wanted".⁶

Finally, abortion may have affected family formation through the "feminization of poverty". Poverty has been and continues to become an increasing problem among women, with three-quarters of the poor being women and children. This has especially been the case after the legalisation of abortion, which has led to an increase in single-motherhood and psychological problems.

¹ Akerlof GA, Yellen JL, Katz ML. An analysis of out-of-wedlock childbearing in the United States. *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 1996; 111(2): pp. 277-317.

² *Ibid.*, p. 280.

³ Brake E. Fatherhood and Child Support: Do Men Have a Right to Choose? *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 2005 March; 22(1): 55-73, p. 56.

⁴ Barnett W, Freudenberg N, Willie R. Partnership after induced abortion: a prospective controlled study. *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 1992 October; 21(5): pp. 443-55.

⁵ Coleman PK, Rue VM, Coyle CT, Maxey CD. Induced Abortion and Child-Directed Aggression among Mothers of Maltreated Children. *Internet Journal of Pediatrics and Neonatology* 2007; 6(2), <http://www.ispub.com/journal/the-internet-journal-of-pediatrics-and-neonatology/volume-6-number-2/induced-abortion-and-child-directed-aggression-among-mothers-of-maltreated-children.html>.

⁶ Schüller V, Stupkova E. The unwanted child in the family. *International Mental Health Research Newsletter* Fall 1972; 14(3): 2-16, p. 8.