

New Zealand Abortion and Mental Health Study Exposes Unfounded Claims of Pro-Abortion Organizations

Although published seven months ago, a comprehensive study led by New Zealand researcher Dr. David Fergusson that linked abortion to various mental health problems continues to spark heated discussion by scientists, health care professionals, news media, and activists throughout the world.

It is not as though Dr. Fergusson's study, published in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines*, was the first to document abortion's negative mental health consequences for women. There have been many.

Fergusson and colleagues showed that compared both to women who carried a pregnancy to term and to those who had never been pregnant, young women who aborted were at a greater risk for depression, anxiety, suicidal behaviors, and substance-use disorders. Dr. Fergusson and his colleagues sternly challenged the American Psychological Association's now 17-year-old conclusion that "well-designed studies of psychological responses following abortion have consistently shown that risk of psychological harm is low."

However, this study has commanded far more attention due to the self-acknowledged "pro-choice" perspective of the lead researcher, the methodological strengths of the study, and the courage and determination of the research team in getting the findings published against much resistance.

Fergusson told the *New Zealand Herald* (January 5), "I'm pro-choice but I've produced results which favor a pro-life viewpoint. It's obvious I'm not acting out of any agenda except to do responsible science about a difficult problem."

In an ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) interview on January 3, Fergusson said, "We were indeed surprised by the results." According to Fergusson (as reported in *Christianity Today*, February 14), his team initiated the study "expecting to find the results to confirm that any mental health problems found after abortion would be traceable to prior mental illness or other pre-disposing factors."

He was even more candid with the *Washington Times*, telling the newspaper, "I might rather not have found what we did, but we found it and you can't be intellectually honest and only publish the results you like."

The researchers developed a sophisticated study design that allowed them to rule out other explanations for associations between abortion and compromised mental health. For example, they took into account social background, education, previous mental health, exposure to sexual abuse, and many other characteristics and experiences and still identified strong, independent effects of abortion. As Fergusson told an ABC radio host on the 7:30 Report (March 1), "the results appear to be very robust because they persist across a series of disorders and a series of ages."

The study also brought to light the professional bias against and obstacles to publishing results that challenge the pro-abortion political agenda. Fergusson told the *Herald*, "Journals we would normally have expected to publish them just declined the paper, and I think it's because

the debate is so very hot, and I think this is particularly so in the U.S., and it is notable that our paper was published in a British journal.”

“It borders on the scandalous that one of the most common medical procedures performed on women is so poorly researched and evaluated,” Fergusson told the Washington Times (January 21). “If this were Prozac or Vioxx, reports of associated harm would be taken much more seriously with more careful research and monitoring procedures.”

According to the New Zealand Herald, 98% of the abortions in New Zealand were carried out to preserve women’s mental health. Commenting on this, Dr. Fergusson stated the law allows for abortion if continuing a pregnancy endangers a woman’s mental health and is “based on a conjecture” since the costs and benefits were never examined scientifically. According to Fergusson, “the health aspect was always secondary to personal choice.”

The American Psychological Association’s empirically unsupported position is that not having access to abortion is more hazardous to mental health than having one. Amazingly a professional science organization would take this position without supportive evidence and continues to make the claim that abortion is a harmless procedure despite a wealth of evidence to the contrary.

According to Fergusson, “Abortion is a traumatic life event; that is, it involves difficulties. And the trauma may, in fact, predispose people to having mental illness” (ABC, 7:30 Report, March 1).

Fergusson is a strong advocate for more research and believes women and health care professionals should not blindly accept the unsupported claim that abortion is psychologically benign or beneficial. His position mirrors what the pro-life movement has said for years.

It is noteworthy that the American Psychological Association, the Alan Guttmacher Institute, and Planned Parenthood, among other organizations with a pro-abortion agenda, have had little to nothing to say about this impressive study by an admirably honest scientist. What can they say after spending years trying to convince us otherwise?

In an interview with NRL News, Dr. Priscilla Coleman of Bowling Green State University noted similar struggles publishing findings showing adverse mental health consequences associated with abortion “We have had a much easier time publishing in British and other European journals,” she said.