

Study Reveals Women Want Information on Abortion Risks

By NRL News Staff

Only a few years ago, it was an article of faith repeated uncritically by the "mainstream media" that abortion is essentially problem-free and almost completely devoid of physical, emotional, or psychological risk for women. However, a wave of methodologically sound research published in impeccable medical journals has laid that myth to rest.

Dozens of studies published in top peer-reviewed medical and psychology journals throughout the world have now documented that abortion increases risk for depression, anxiety, suicide ideation, sleep disturbances, and substance use. This is the kind of information women deserve and, judging by an article published in early August in a leading medical ethics journal, it is information they want.

"Women's preferences for information and complication seriousness ratings related to elective medical procedures" appears in the August edition of the *Journal of Medical Ethics*. Written by Priscilla Coleman, David Reardon, and Matthew Lee, the study of a diverse sample of 187 largely low-income women seeking obstetric and gynecological services found that they overwhelmingly wanted to be informed of all known risks associated with elective procedures in general and with abortion in particular.

Once women had consented to participate, they were given a short survey while in the waiting room. The goals of the researchers included "to measure female patients' preferences for information regarding elective medical procedures"; "to assess how seriously women viewed a wide range of possible complications associated with elective medical procedures"; and "to compare women's preferences for information related to elective obstetric or gynecological procedures with other elective procedures."

The study revealed that 95% of the women surveyed at the St. Joseph Regional Medical Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, expressed a desire to be informed of all possible complications associated with elective medical procedures, including abortion. This was found to be true regardless of how common or uncommon the particular complications were.

Participants in the study ranked the seriousness of different kinds of physical and mental health complications associated with an elective medical procedure. Interestingly, these women rated the well-established psychological risks of abortion (such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, and suicidal thoughts) as very serious. In fact, women rated mental health consequences only slightly below the risk of death or heart disease.

The 187 women also indicated that they would like to receive the same amount of information for an abortion as they would for any other elective medical procedure. Moreover, women do not want doctors to screen information about abortion risks.

The importance of being informed of risks of complications associated with elective medical procedures was rated higher than the importance of being informed of the likelihood that the treatment would be a complete success, according to the survey. Knowledge of complications was likewise rated as more critical than being informed of the cost of treatment.

The results also revealed that 65% of the participants would want to be informed of all possible alternative treatments beforehand, including those not necessarily endorsed by the attending physician.

According to the authors, "Doctors should anticipate that most women desire information on every potential risk, even risks that doctors may judge to be less serious or inconsequentially

rare, and they will generally consider this information to be relevant to their decisions regarding elective procedures.”

One of the authors, David Reardon, elaborated on the women’s expressed desire not to have information screened in comments he gave to Lifesitenews.com. “Our survey shows that most women ... want to judge the evidence for themselves,” he said. “They clearly prefer to be fully informed about all possible complications, even if abortion providers insist that the causal links between abortion and these statistically linked complications have yet to be fully proven to the abortionist’s satisfaction.”

In an interview with NRL News, Dr. Coleman, another of the authors, noted that while the women were predominantly low income with limited formal education, “the sample was diverse.” These women, Dr. Coleman said, “are among those most vulnerable to abortion and are often erroneously assumed by the medical profession to be unable to benefit from information.”

But as demonstrated by the survey, she said, “their voices are clear: they would very much like to have the benefit of more information and more power in this situation.”

The authors further noted in their report that supplying adequate information to patients and insuring proper informed consent is likely to require disseminating risk information through new expanded means such as Internet-based mechanisms.

While the abortion industry may view various risks of abortion as insignificant and irrelevant to abortion decision-making, the vast majority of women will take information pertaining to risks of complications into consideration when contemplating an abortion. The information is available and women want it.

Abortion providers in this country and elsewhere have been operating under two terribly false assumptions. First, that there is no evidence linking abortion to psychological problems. Second, that women would rather not receive information outlining risks associated with the procedure as it will be upsetting to them.

Science has now proven them wrong on both accounts.

The full study can be read at <http://jme.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/abstract/32/8/435>.