



Published in "The Post-Abortion Review"  
Vol. 13, No. 3  
July – Sept. 2006

A Publication of **Rachel's Vineyard Ministries**  
[www.RachelsVineyard.org](http://www.RachelsVineyard.org)

## **New Study Confirms Higher Substance Use Rates Among Pregnant Women After Abortion**

A new study published in the *British Journal of Health Psychology* has found that women with a history of induced abortion are three times more likely to use illegal drugs during a subsequent pregnancy.

The study supports a growing body of evidence which suggests that later pregnancies may arouse unresolved grief over prior abortions which women may seek to suppress by increased reliance on drugs and alcohol.

Researchers from Bowling State University, the University of Texas, and the Elliot Institute examined data from a study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

The data included 1,020 women who gave birth in one of eight Washington, D.C. area hospitals during 1992. Analyses of the data revealed that while women who had induced abortions were significantly more likely to engage in substance abuse during subsequent pregnancies, women who had experienced miscarriages or stillbirths were not.

"Most women have deeply conflicting feelings about their past abortions", said Elliot Institute director Dr. David Reardon, one of the authors of the new study. "Later pregnancies may arouse or aggravate unsettled emotions".

"Some women will experience increase anxiety, perhaps about the health of their unborn baby", he added. "Others are so awed by the life within them that they begin to question their past choice and feel drowned in self-blame. Still others may find that they have a tone of unmourned grief related to a past abortion which is interfering with their ability to enjoy and bond with their new baby".

Whatever the individual experience, Reardon said, "it is clear that pregnant women with a history of abortion are at greater risk of trying to suppress their turbulent emotions by relying on more alcohol, cigarettes, or illegal drugs".

Substance use during pregnancy is an increasing public health concern. Alcohol and drug use has been linked to numerous problems in infants such as congenital birth defects, low birth weight, developmental and learning problems, and death.

This new study confirms a study recently published in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* that also revealed higher rates of substance use during later pregnancies among women with a history of induced abortion.

“Medical professionals should be aware of these issues so they can more easily identify which pregnant women are at greater risk of substance use”, Reardon said. “Referral to post-abortion counseling and substance abuse programs may not only help protect her unborn child from exposure to dangerous substances, but it may also help the mother to resolve issues related to the traumas of a past abortion”.

### **Other Risks Increase With Abortion**

Previous studies have found that women with a history of abortion are subsequently at increased risk of depression, generalized anxiety disorder, suicidal tendencies and psychiatric hospitalization. At least 21 previous studies have linked abortion with increased rates of subsequent drug and alcohol abuse.

An Elliot Institute study published in the June 2004 issue of the *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse* compared women who had unintended first pregnancies and found that, an average of four years later, women who had undergone abortions reported more frequent and recent use of alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine compared to women who carried their pregnancies to term.

\* \* \*

### **Study Citation**

Priscilla K. Coleman, David C. Reardon, and Jesse R. Cogle, “Substance use among pregnant women in the context of previous reproductive loss and the desire for current pregnancy”, *British Journal of Health Psychology* 10, 255-268 (2005)

*For more information on other Elliot Institute studies, visit [www.afterabortion.info](http://www.afterabortion.info)*



**Rachel's Vineyard Ministries**  
808 N. Henderson Rd.  
King of Prussia, PA 19406  
610-354-0555—1-877-HOPE-4-ME