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Sleep Disorders Increase After Abortion

A new Elliot Institute study published in *Sleep*, the official journal of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies, has found that women who experienced abortion were more likely to be treated for sleep disorders or disturbances compared to women who gave birth.

The researchers examined medical records for 56,284 low-income women in California who gave birth or underwent an abortion in the first six months of 1989. They excluded women who had been treated for sleep disturbances or disorders in the 12 to 18 months prior to abortion or delivery.

The data showed that, up to four years later, women who underwent abortions were more likely to be treated for sleep disorders afterwards compared to those who gave birth. The difference was greatest during the first 180 days after the end of the pregnancy, when aborting women were approximately twice as likely to seek treatment for sleep disorders. Significant differences between aborting and childbearing women persisted for three years.

Sleep Disorders Linked to Trauma

Numerous studies have shown that trauma victims will often experience sleep difficulties. The authors believe their findings support a growing understanding that some women may have traumatic reactions to abortion. In a 2004 study of American and Russian women who had abortions:

- 65% of American women reported multiple symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which they linked to their abortions,
- Over 14% reported all the symptoms necessary for clinical diagnosis of abortion-induced PTSD,
- 30% reported nightmares, and
- 23% reported sleeping disorders that they attributed to their abortions.

Elliot Institute director Dr. David Reardon, a co-author of both studies, said the prior study was limited by its reliance on women's self-reported symptoms. "This new record-based study examines actual treatment rates for sleep disorders after abortion and childbirth which have been confirmed by the treating physicians and employs an appropriate control group," he said.

Reardon pointed out that the new study was limited by the fact that the authors did not have access to data on sleep disorders among women who had not been pregnant. He also said more research is needed to see if women who have abortions are more likely to experience specific symptoms of sleep disturbance and whether those symptoms may be markers for PTSD and other psychiatric problems.

The authors encouraged mental health care providers to regularly inquire about prior pregnancy loss, as identification of unresolved grief issues may improve treatment of sleep disorders, anxiety, and other psychiatric problems linked to abortion.

Sources

DC Reardon and PK Coleman, "Relative Treatment Rates for Sleep Disorders and Sleep Disturbances Following Abortion and Childbirth: A Prospective Record Based-Study," *Sleep* 29(1): 105-106, 2006.

VM Reardon et. Al., "Induced abortion and traumatic stress: A preliminary comparison of American and Russian women," *Medical Science Monitor* 10:SR5-16, 2004.



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