

Violence more depressing than abortion



“Violence from a partner causes depression”

Unwanted pregnancy and abortion are important public health issues in Australia and often trigger heated debate.

Opponents of abortion often argue that abortion causes ‘post-abortion syndrome’ or post-traumatic stress disorder, a term used for kidnap and war veterans and rape victims. They claim a hidden ‘epidemic’.

Sceptics and public health advocates have looked for the evidence to back such claims, especially in Australia, but have found very little evidence exists.

The Victorian Law Reform Commission is about to bring down a report examining a range of evidence

in order to make recommendations to the Victorian government about whether abortion should be decriminalised.

Dr Angela Taft from La Trobe University’s Mother and Child Health Research has a new analysis of data from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health that examines the vexed question of possible links between abortion and depression.

She presented her findings to the International Congress on Women’s Mental Health at the Melbourne Convention Centre last month.

She and her colleague Lyn Watson argue that the very few previous studies which have found a connection between abortion and depression have been fundamentally flawed, as they did not take account of partner violence. They say that partner violence is a missing link.

“The evidence we have found is clear that partner violence and depression are significantly linked. Abortion is not the important factor,” Taft said.

Analysing data from 9683 young women randomly sampled from the Australian population, they modelled

the effects on depression of: abortion at a young (18-23) and older (22-27) age; having one, two or more births; and experiencing violence from a partner or from someone else. They also took women’s levels of poverty and disadvantage into account as these are known to be linked with depression.

They found that abortion had a small but statistically non-significant relationship to depression, the same as having two or more children when young. In contrast, partner violence had a strong and four-fold effect on depression.

Taft and Watson conclude there is still no good evidence that abortion causes depression, but certainly that violence, especially from a partner does.

“If we want to reduce depression among women we would be more effective reducing the unwanted pregnancies, miscarriages, adverse pregnancy outcomes and excess births linked with intimate partner violence, which we know causes depression, than by restricting women’s access to abortion services.”



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