

Having an abortion does not lead to depression

May 30 2018



Credit: George Hodan/Public Domain

Having an abortion does not increase a woman's risk for depression, according to a new study of nearly 400,000 women published today in *JAMA Psychiatry*. While previous research has found abortion does not harm women's mental health, studies claiming that it does continue to be published and state policies that restrict access to abortion in the United States have been justified by claims that abortion causes women

psychological harm.

To better understand the relationship between having an abortion and women's [mental health](#), Dr. Julia R. Steinberg, from the University of Maryland School of Public Health, and colleagues analyzed data on Danish women born between 1980-1994. The information included abortions, childbirths and antidepressant prescriptions as recorded by the Danish National Registries. It is the first study to explore the risk of antidepressant use around an abortion as a proxy for depression.

The study concludes that the risk of antidepressant use did not change from the year before to the year after an abortion and that the risk of antidepressant use decreased as more time after the abortion elapsed.

"Policies based on the notion that abortion harms women's mental [health](#) are misinformed," said Dr. Steinberg, who is an assistant professor of family science. "Abortion is not causing depression. Our findings show that women were not more likely to suffer from depression after an abortion compared to beforehand."

Compared to women who did not have an abortion, those who did have an abortion had a higher risk of antidepressant use. But Dr. Steinberg stresses this higher risk was the same for both the year before and the year after the abortion, indicating that the higher risk is not due to the abortion but to other factors such as preexisting [mental health problems](#) and other adverse experiences.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, at least eight states, including North Carolina and West Virginia, mandate that women considering an abortion receive information that emphasizes the purported negative psychological effects of having an abortion. Women in 27 [states](#) are required to wait a specified period of time, from 24-72 hours, between when they receive counseling and the abortion procedure is performed,

and such policies are often justified by the claim that abortion harms women's mental health. For those in regions of the country without a nearby abortion provider, this can be a significant burden.

With an increasing number of laws being enacted throughout the United States that aim to limit women's access to abortion, the findings from the study Examining the Association of Antidepressant Prescriptions With First Abortion and First Childbirth provide important new evidence that can inform policy. They also support the recent National Academies of Science report "The Safety and Quality of Abortion Care in the United States" which concludes that "...having an [abortion](#) does not increase [women's](#) risk of depression, anxiety or PTSD."

More information: Julia R. Steinberg et al, Examining the Association of Antidepressant Prescriptions With First Abortion and First Childbirth, *JAMA Psychiatry* (2018). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2018.0849](#)

Provided by University of Maryland

Citation: Having an abortion does not lead to depression (2018, May 30) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-05-abortion-depression.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--