

Abortion and Adolescents

In the United States, 18% of females who elect to abort are adolescents with .4% of all abortions performed on teens younger than 15 years of age, 6% performed on teens aged 15 to 17, and 11% on teens aged 18 to 19.¹

A majority of states now require some degree of parental involvement (i.e. parental consent and/or notification) prior to the obtainment of abortion by a minor child. Parental involvement has been deemed constitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court for three main reasons: (1) most pregnant teens do not voluntarily disclose their abortion intentions to their parents and thus are at increased risk of making a poorly considered abortion decision; (2) to help protect minors from their immaturity, lack of decision making experience, and limited cognitive and psychosocial development; and (3) to protect the rights and duties of parents to guide and counsel their minor children. In those exceptional cases when parental involvement is not warranted, a judicial waiver of parental notification and/or consent can be obtained through a confidential hearing before a judge. The judicial bypass allows her to obtain an abortion without parental involvement if she is deemed by the court to be sufficiently mature and if an abortion is in her best interests, or if she is the victim of parental abuse. It also serves to expose such maltreatment.

Adolescents who experience induced abortion may be at greater risk for psychological harm than adult women for the following reasons:

- 1) Adolescents tend to engage in more risky decisions² and to make less mature decisions than adults.³
- 2) Adolescents, compared to adults, are more likely to delay making the decision to abort and therefore are exposed to the increased risks associated with later term procedures.^{4, 5, 6}
- 3) Adolescents are less likely than adults to be satisfied with their abortion decisions.^{7, 8}
- 4) Adolescents are more likely to feel pressured or forced to choose abortion.^{9, 10} Coercion has been identified as a predictor of psychological distress after abortion.¹¹
- 5) Adolescents are more likely to perceive pre-abortion counseling as inadequate¹²

Several studies have reported potential negative outcomes associated with abortion during adolescence including the following:

- Increased risk for psychological stress^{13, 14}
- Increased substance abuse¹⁵
- Increased delinquent behaviors¹⁶
- Greater anxiety¹⁷
- Increased risk of suicide^{18, 19}

Prepared by the *Alliance for Post-Abortion Research & Training*

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- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Coleman, P.K. (2006). Resolution of unwanted pregnancy during adolescence through abortion versus childbirth: Individual and family predictors and psychological consequences. *The Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 35, 903-911.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
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