

# Fact Sheet

Q&A: 'POST-ABORTION SYNDROME'

ABORTION  
LAW  
REFORM  
ASSOCIATION  
NEW ZEALAND

PO Box 28-008 Wellington 6150, New Zealand | [safeandlegal@gmail.com](mailto:safeandlegal@gmail.com) | [www.alranz.org](http://www.alranz.org)

## **Question**

*Does abortion cause 'post-abortion syndrome'?*

## **Answer**

*No. There is no such thing as 'post-abortion syndrome'.*

## **Facts**

No scientific evidence exists to support the idea that women who have abortions experience so-called "post-abortion syndrome." Because of the lack of scientific evidence, the American Psychiatric Association does not recognize "post-abortion syndrome" as a legitimate mental health diagnosis (APA 2002).

Rigorous literature reviews analyzing the quality of studies that examine the mental health consequences of abortion conclude that the highest quality studies find few, if any, differences among women who had abortions and women who had not had abortions in terms of long-term mental health outcomes (Vignetta et al. 2008, Ney and Wicket 1989, Thorp et al. 2005). The American Psychological Association also supports these conclusions (APA 2008).

Reputable scientific studies also conclude that rates of psychiatric disorder are the same for women after abortion as after childbirth (Gilchrist et al. 1995); that women who abort are no more likely to be clinically depressed than women delivering an unwanted pregnancy (Schmiege and Russo 2005); and that violence, specifically rape, is associated with unwanted pregnancy and abortion (Coker 2007, Garcia-Moreno et al. 2005, Goodwin et al. 2000); as well as anxiety and other mental health problems (Adams and Bukowski 2007).

Put simply, while many women experience sadness, grief, and a feeling of loss after an abortion, few develop a serious psychiatric illness that was not present before the abortion. Indeed, there may be psychological benefits. For many women the abortion brings relief from the stress that accompanies an unplanned and unwanted pregnancy and the abortion can be a learning experience and an opportunity to reassess priorities.

*Continued Next Page*

The range of reactions following an abortion depends on a multitude of factors: What were the circumstances that led to the pregnancy? Was it a normal pregnancy? What sort of relationship were they in? What was the social environment in which the abortion took place?

The latter is important. Stigmatising abortion may directly contribute to negative outcomes of shame, secrecy, and guilt. Anti-abortion propaganda, picketing abortion clinics, and calling women murderers or baby-killers is definitely not conducive to good mental health. Furthermore, a hostile society that makes women believe that they should or will feel a particular way can create a self-fulfilling prophecy. In contrast, social and cultural messages that convey expectations of resilience may have the opposite effect.

Women's abortion experiences are diverse and vary across socioeconomic, religious and cultural contexts. Attempts to define all women's experiences as homogenous deliberately disregard the personal ways in which each individual woman lives, experiences and interprets her pregnancy and abortion.

***For More Information:***

National Abortion Federation (U.S.):

[www.prochoice.org](http://www.prochoice.org) Click on "About Abortion" > "Abortion Myths"