

# ***Induced Abortion and Mental Health***

## ***A systematic review of the mental health impact of induced abortion***

### **Responding to the Review**

The Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych) is carrying out a major review of the mental health impact of abortion on women.

**This review is of great significance because it will strongly influence future Government policy and advice on the health consequences and care of women post-abortion.**

The public consultation on their draft review provides us with a unique opportunity to influence the official position of the RCPsych on this topic and therefore, by implication, government policy and statutory guidelines. Indeed, the Department of Health is funding the RCPsych to carry out this review.

It is therefore essential that as many organisations and individuals as possible comment on their draft review. The **deadline of 29<sup>th</sup> June is fast approaching. However we would really encourage you to respond to this if you possibly can. Even a very brief response with just one or two comments would be better than none.**

We are fortunate at CMF to be able to draw upon a wealth of expertise on this topic from amongst our members, therefore we have now prepared a detailed response to the draft review, making some general points of concern as well as more detailed specific concerns.

If you are able to respond to this review in any way, you will find it helpful to download a copy of the draft review from the RCPsych website and also email [Philippa Taylor](#), Head of Public Policy at CMF, for more information. Links and contact information are at the end of this page.

### **Background to the Review**

In 2010 nearly 190,000 women in England and Wales had an abortion. The vast majority of these abortions were reported as being performed because of a risk to the woman's mental health if the pregnancy continued. The prevalence of psychological risks post-abortion has long been a controversial topic in both the research literature and policy. However, with so many thousands of abortions per year the occurrence of even small detrimental effects could impact on significant numbers of women.

The Department of Health is funding the RCPsych to carry out this major review of the mental health impact of abortion on women.

Interestingly, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has also been reviewing its official position on the guidance of the care of women after abortion but this appears to have been put on hold, presumably until after the RCPsych reports.

*"The focus of the [RCPsych] review is to consider the question from a woman's point of view, that is, if a woman considering an abortion were to ask what the risks are to her mental health, what answer would be given?"* (RCPsych draft review p.16).

The review grades research data that studies mental health outcomes for women more than 90 days post-abortion. Three review questions were used to guide the analysis of the data. At the end of each section, there are several summary 'evidence statements'. These are significant as many people will only read these, and not the analysis on which they are based. The final discussion and conclusion section collects the evidence statements together.

The questions on which the review is structured, are:

1. How prevalent are mental health problems in women who have an induced abortion?
2. What factors are associated with poor mental health outcomes following an induced abortion?
3. Are mental health problems more common in women who have an induced abortion, when compared with women who deliver an unwanted pregnancy/or who delivered a live birth?

Comments can be made on the methodology and the research used, the evidence statements and/or the steering group.

### **Summary of CMF findings**

Overall, we have concerns that:

- There is insufficient transparency in the selection, exclusion and rating of research papers;
- A key paper by Fergusson was re-analysed by the reviewers, producing a finding that contradicted his published paper;
- Several summary evidence statements are more definitive and stronger than the actual evidence suggests;
- Claims that there is 'no evidence' of an elevated risk of mental health post-abortion compared to post pregnancy are not justified by the data presented.

We highlight these concerns here to give you an idea of one or two of the issues that we will be raising in more detail in the CMF response. However the website states that if a significant number of similar comments are received they will be grouped together and summarised, therefore it is important that your response draws on your own particular expertise and experiences as far as possible, so that there is variety in the responses submitted.

We encourage you to get in touch with us if you would like some guidance in producing a response.

### **How to respond**

Responses to the draft review **MUST** use the standard online response form, be submitted by the **deadline of Wednesday June 29, 5pm** (otherwise they will be ignored). Whilst individuals can and should respond, their names will not be posted on the review website. However names of organisations who respond will be posted on the website and made public.

The web address for the RCPsych review and comment form is at:  
<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/members/nccmh/consultations.aspx>

Philippa Taylor, who is coordinating the CMF response to this review, can be contacted at [philippa.taylor@cmf.org.uk](mailto:philippa.taylor@cmf.org.uk)