

old man took the girl to a Planned Parenthood abortion clinic in 1998, but Planned Parenthood did not notify authorities until the girl returned six months later for a second abortion. A lawsuit alleged that the girl was subjected to repeated abuse and a second abortion because Planned Parenthood failed to notify authorities of possible abuse when she had her first abortion. Her abuser was sentenced to five years in prison and lifetime probation.¹⁰

Conclusion

Unfortunately, there are few safeguards currently in place to protect teenagers from coerced abortions. For example, in states where parental consent is needed for an abortion, the judicial bypass system is seriously flawed.

Without a mechanism to provide for cross-examination of witnesses and the introduction of witnesses who would testify that the abortion is not in the girl's best interests, how can judges make an informed decision? How can we be sure that the adults seeking permission for the young girl to abort without notifying her parents are not themselves manipulating, pressuring or even forcing her to seek an abortion? The only way to protect these teens is to pass laws that will make abortionists liable for failing to screen women and teens for coerced and unwanted abortions.

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Pamphlet 623

A Generation at Risk How Teens Are Manipulated and Coerced Into Abortion

Gaylene was 14 when she became pregnant. She turned to her high school guidance counselor for advice. She writes:

[The school counselor] was sympathetic and understanding. He felt there was no need to worry my family. He also explained about having a child, how tough it would be on me and that I wouldn't be able to do what I wanted to do. He said that the child would suffer because I was much too young to be a parent. He pointed out that the best thing for me to do was to abort the fetus at this stage so no one would be hurt. No mention was made of talking to my parents about this or carrying the baby to term. He indicated that adoption would be difficult and not an option for me.

. . . I felt as though I had no control over what was happening to me. I started to question what I was doing, but in my logic I'd refer back to what the counselor had told me, and then I would think he was right. But still today, I feel like I did not decide to have the abortion.¹

Gaylene's traumatic reaction to her abortion experience included suicide attempts, alcoholism, drugs, crime, involvement in a cult and a major break with her family.

Sadly, Gaylene's story is not unique. For teens, the possibility of developing psychological and emotional problems after abortion is substantially higher than for more mature women.² One reason that teenagers are more vulnerable is because their psychological defense mechanisms are not fully developed. Their emotional immaturity leaves them more susceptible to events and circumstances that can profoundly damage their view of the world, other people, and themselves. Consequently, abortion can be especially harmful for teens because this major, traumatic experience occurs at a critical time in the development of their self-identity.³

Researchers have found that teenagers who have abortions face a number of higher risks. For example,

teens are more likely to feel pressured into abortion, to report being misinformed in pre-abortion counseling and to experience more severe psychological stress after abortion.⁴ They are also more likely to experience more intense feelings of guilt, depression and isolation after an abortion.⁵ Teens who abort are 6 times more likely than their peers to commit suicide.⁶

Further, a study of teens with "unwanted" pregnancies found that teens who aborted were more likely to have subsequent trouble sleeping, to report using marijuana after abortion and to undergo treatment for psychological and emotional problems compared to those who carried to term.⁷

Manipulation and Coercion

Many teens are simply not mature enough to understand the information they need to make such a life-impacting choice. As a result, they are extremely vulnerable to manipulation and coercion by counselors, medical personnel, and other adults in positions of authority.

Even some pro-abortion groups have acknowledged that teenagers need extra guidance when it comes to abortion. For example, a Planned Parenthood counseling guide stated that teenagers have few or limited problem solving skills; are more likely than adults to lack responsibility; are more vulnerable; are more anxious and distrustful; are lacking in knowledge; and have difficulty in communicating. As a result, "counselors need to be aware of and appreciate the fact that pregnancy counseling with teenagers can be very different from counseling adults . . . pregnancy counseling with teens is often a crisis situation."⁸

Unfortunately, while Planned Parenthood counselors recognize the vulnerability of teens, they oppose laws that would require parents to be informed before their minor daughter undergoes an abortion. For counselors who seek to promote abortion as the best or even only solution, keeping teens away from loved ones who might support continuing the pregnancy is an important part of maximizing their own influence.

This situation leaves teens vulnerable to pressure, abuse, manipulation and coercion to abort.

Over and over, women who had abortion as teenagers use phrases like the following to explain how they ended up having an unwanted abortion.

My school counselor (abortion clinic counselor, teacher, pastor, boyfriend's mom, etc.) told me that if I didn't want my parents to find out, I would have to have an abortion.

My boyfriend threatened me if I didn't abort.

Everyone told me I was too young to have a baby and that my only alternative was abortion.

My parents locked me in the house and made the appointment.

I wasn't given any information about fetal development or alternatives to abortion.

The situation is further exacerbated when a teen is involved in a sexually abusive relationship. The "don't ask, don't tell" policy of many abortion businesses and the documented failure of clinic staff to report cases of suspected abuse means that sexual predators can use abortion to hide the abuse and, in many cases, continue preying on their victims.

The Harmful Effects of Secret Abortions

If a teen has an abortion in secret, this disrupts family relationships. A teen who has a secret abortion must hide feelings of depression, sadness, and even thoughts of suicide that might otherwise alert their parents to the problem. If they cannot repress these feelings, the source must remain hidden or their emotions transformed into anger and rebellion. This overarching need for secrecy accentuates their feelings of shame and will often lead to withdrawal from family intimacy and excursions into drugs, alcohol and destructive relationships.

Any of these problems can dramatically exacerbate normal family tensions. Kept in the dark, parents cannot know that their child is struggling to cope with his or her abortion experience. With no frame of reference for understanding their child's disturbed behavior, parents are likely to become increasingly frustrated at being held at a distance. In turn, the parents' frustrations are likely to fuel the distrust or rebellious nature of the teen because she feels alone and unsupported by those around her.

If a teen experiences physical complications from abortion, keeping the abortion secret may have deadly consequences. The teen may be afraid to seek medical help or hide symptoms for fear that their parents will find out about the abortion. There have been several reported cases of teens who died from complications after undergoing abortions that their parents did not know about.

Targeting Teens

Unfortunately school counselors, social workers and others in positions of authority can exert tremendous influence over a vulnerable teenager, steering and even coercing her into an unwanted abortion.

For example, William Hickey, a high school guidance counselor in Hatboro, Pennsylvania, was sued by the parents of a 16-year-old girl for circumventing the state's parental consent law by arranging for the teen to have a secret abortion in New Jersey. The girl's parents subsequently filed a lawsuit against Hickey and the Hatboro-Horsham school district, charging that Hickey pressured their daughter to have an abortion despite her expressed doubts and beliefs against abortion.

The parents said that Hickey "engaged in a course of conduct which was inherently coercive, was intended to and did exert undue influence upon [a minor], and ensured that she refrain from discussing with her parents her pregnancy and whether to obtain an abortion." They said that when their daughter told Hickey she had doubts about undergoing an abortion, he told her, "Someday you'll look back on this and laugh."

The lawsuit also stated that school officials refused to cooperate when asked to investigate the situation. Instead, the parents say they were told that the school district "has deep pockets" to defend itself from a lawsuit. The case was eventually settled out of court.⁹

Other examples of manipulation and coercion abound. In 2002, a judge found Planned Parenthood negligent for failing to report the case of an abortion performed on a 13-year-old girl who was being sexually abused by her foster brother. The 23-year-