

# Drug and Alcohol Abuse after Abortion

Martha Shuping, M.D., M.A.

In a 2005 review article,<sup>1</sup> Dr. Priscilla Coleman, Ph.D. (Associate Professor of Human Development and Family Studies of Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio) examined the relationship between induced abortion and risk of substance abuse. She reported that **since the early 1970's [when legal abortion became widely available in the United States], substance abuse has increased among girls and women. Studies show that women who have had abortions have a higher rate of drug and alcohol abuse compared to women who have not had abortions. Even more troubling is an increased rate of drug and alcohol abuse during pregnancy. Research also shows the drug and alcohol abuse occurs after abortion rather than before the abortion.** The information which follows is drawn from Dr. Coleman's 2005 article and I acknowledge her assistance in preparing this brief summary.

- **In the U.S., drug dependence among girls and women has increased steadily since the early 1970's.** This was concluded based on an extensive review of the literature.<sup>2</sup>
- **For some drugs, the increase in drug abuse among females has exceeded the increase among males.**<sup>3</sup>
- **An increase in drug and alcohol abuse among women is a special concern because substance abuse during pregnancy has been linked to poor pregnancy and birth outcomes.**<sup>4,5</sup>
- **Drug and alcohol abuse during the mother's pregnancy is also harmful to the child's future development and education.**<sup>6,7</sup>
- **Mothers with a history of previous abortion are more likely to use illegal drugs and alcohol during their next pregnancy.** Compared to women who had previously given birth, women who had previously aborted were significantly more likely to use marijuana (929%), various illegal drugs (460%) and alcohol (122%) during their next pregnancy. Differences between the groups were even greater when more time had elapsed since the prior pregnancy. This U.S. study used a nationally representative, racially diverse sample, and measured substance abuse at a time when abortion-related stress is likely to be exacerbated.<sup>8</sup>
- **Other studies have also shown significantly higher rates of alcohol use and illicit drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamines, and opiates among pregnant women who have aborted compared to pregnant women who have not.**<sup>9,10,11,12,13</sup>
- **In a study of pregnant women, there was no difference in risk of substance abuse between women who wanted the pregnancy compared to those who did not want the pregnancy. But higher rates of drug abuse during pregnancy were found in women who had a previous abortion compared to women who had no prior abortion.**<sup>14</sup> This study included 1020 women who gave birth in Washington D.C. area hospitals in 1992. Those who had a past abortion history had significantly higher risk of using marijuana (201%), crack cocaine (198%), cocaine other than crack (406%), any illegal drugs (180%), and also cigarettes (100%) during their 1992 pregnancy. There was no link between drug abuse and miscarriage or stillbirth. Comparing women who said the current pregnancy was wanted and those who said it was unwanted, there was no difference in substance abuse (except for cigarette use). Only the

women who had a past abortion had the increased rate of substance during their pregnancy (other than cigarette use).

- **Teen drug abusers more likely to report past abortion:** Comparing teen-age drug users to non-users, more of the drug users reported an abortion in their past (33% compared to 16.3%). In this study, there was no link between drug use and becoming pregnant, and no link between drug abuse and other types of pregnancy loss (miscarriage or stillbirth).<sup>15</sup>
- **Among women who had unintended first pregnancies, women who aborted, when compared to those who carried to term, were twice as likely to use marijuana and reported more frequent use of alcohol after controlling for age, race, marital status, income, education, and prior psychological well-being.** This was a nationally representative sample, racially diverse sample which used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.<sup>16</sup>
- **Illegal drug use (drugs than marijuana) 6.1 times higher among women with history of abortion compared to women with no history of abortion.** This was found in a large study of more than 700 women in New York state..<sup>17</sup>
- **Substance abuse 4.5 times higher among women with past abortions.**<sup>18</sup> Among women with no previous history of substance abuse, women who had abortions were compared to women who carried their pregnancies to term. Substance abuse was 4.5 times higher with those who aborted. Eighty-nine percent of the women reported the substance abuse started within three years of the abortion.
- **Alcoholics in a detoxification center were more likely to report alcohol problems after an abortion rather than before.**<sup>19</sup>
- **Many other studies have shown significant associations between abortion and substance abuse.**<sup>20,21,22,23</sup>

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