

Rape/Incest and Abortion

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Rape and incest are violent and evil crimes committed against vulnerable people. The perpetrator needs to be punished to the full extent of the law. And the victim deserves to be treated with the deepest compassion, enormous support, and special care. But what if a woman becomes pregnant as the result of a sexual assault?

Although pregnancy as a result of incest or rape is extremely rare, it does happen. In reported rapes, around 1% of rape victims become pregnant. Since rape often goes unreported, the actual percentage could be higher, with some studies estimating it as high as 5%. However, in one study of 2,190 victims, only 0.6 percent became pregnant as a result of rape.[1] In cases of incest, "considering the prevalence of teenage pregnancies in general, incest treatment programs marvel at the low incidence of pregnancy from incest." Several reports agree at 1% or less.[2]

Only a tiny fraction of abortions are done because of rape or incest. The Guttmacher Institute (the research affiliate of Planned Parenthood, named after its first president), reports that about 1% of women who have an abortion list rape as a reason (though 95 percent of these same women also listed other reasons, unrelated to rape).[3] Less than half a percent of women seeking an abortion list incest as a reason.[4] A handful of states report data on the reasons given for obtaining abortions (Louisiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota and Utah). On average, only 0.88% of abortions performed were due to rape or incest.[5]

A woman who has been raped has undergone a terrible trauma and injustice. The question is whether or not an abortion would help her. First of all, the abortion will not un-rape the woman. The tragedy has happened and nothing can change that. Second, abortion brings a trauma of its own. Such groups as WEBA (Women Exploited By Abortion), Women Pregnant by Sexual Assault, American Victims of Abortion and Victims of Choice, and the rapid growth of post-abortive healing programs, such as Project Rachel, provide ample proof that abortion hurts women.

The only two published studies that have actually tracked the choices and experiences of women who have become pregnant after rape or incest actually found that most pregnant rape victims chose to give birth rather than have abortions, even though abortion was readily available.

In 1979, rape counselor Dr. Sandra Mahkorn studied 37 women who had become pregnant through rape. Four failed to complete the study. Of the 33 who remained, 28 chose to carry to term, and only 5 – 15% – chose abortion.[6] A second study found that 73% of the women chose to give birth to their babies.[7]

Abortion creates more problems for rape and incest victims than it solves, according to the Ad Hoc Committee of Women Pregnant by Sexual Assault (WPSA). In 2004, the WPSA petitioned Congress to hear about "our unique needs and concerns," but were never heard.

In virtually every case, those people who claim to represent our interests have never taken the time to actually listen to us or to learn about our true circumstances, needs, and concerns ... We are deeply offended and dismayed each time our difficult circumstances are exploited for public consumption to promote the political agenda of others.[8]

The group is particularly concerned about the widespread misconception, even among people who generally oppose abortion, that sexual assault victims generally want or benefit from abortions. Scientific research on the matter is scarce. David Reardon, author of numerous studies on post-abortion complications, states that there are actually no published studies that have demonstrated any therapeutic benefits of abortion, either in general or in the specific case of pregnancies resulting from sexual assault.

One collection of stories of 192 women who became pregnant through sexual assault found that of 50 rape victims who reported feelings about their abortions, 88 percent stated it was the wrong choice. Forty-three percent of the rape victims surveyed reported having abortions because of pressure from others. More than 90 percent said they would discourage other victims of sexual assault from undergoing abortion. [9]

But more telling than the numbers are the attitudes of the women. As the pregnancy progressed, the women's feelings about the pregnancy moved from a more rejecting perspective to a more accepting perspective. Their feelings about themselves became more positive as well. They reported that giving birth was a positive experience, taking something the rapist had meant for evil and turning it into good.

Psychological studies have shown that, when given the proper support, most pregnant rape victims progressively change their attitudes about their unborn child from something repulsive to someone who is innocent and uniquely worthwhile.[10]

In cases of pregnancy resulting from incest, abortion is the worst option for the victim. Abortion allows the victimizer to dispose of the evidence of his crime. Many young women who have been victims of incest see their pregnancy as an opportunity to get out of their incestuous relationship. A visible pregnancy forces the perpetrator to face his illegal activities and gives the victim a chance to reveal the truth about the situation she is in. All too often, it is the victimizer who takes his victim to an abortion clinic, and all too often, the clinic sends the victim home with the relative who raped her.

The act of incest is what needs to be stopped, not the pregnancy and the life of the unborn child. Abortion ends the child's life while hiding the act of incest, while birth saves the life of the child and can help to free the mother from an incestuous relationship.

Women who have been raped or who are victims of incest need help from family and community members. These women need to know that there are pregnancy counseling centers across the country that can provide free help including food, clothes, and counseling. There are also somewhere between 40 and 90 couples waiting to adopt every newborn and there are numerous non-profit adoption agencies who can help birth mothers find loving homes for their children.

In 'hard cases' like pregnancies that result from rape or incest, we must give each person what they deserve. For the rapist, time behind bars. For the victim, support, love, care, and compassion. For the unborn child, the precious gift of life.

1 Krason, Stephen M., "Abortion: Politics, Morality and the Constitution", University Press of America, 1984

2 Maloof, G., "The Consequences of Incest," *The Psychological Aspects of Abortion*, University Publications of Amer., 1979

3 Finer, Lawrence B., Frohwirth, Lori F., et al., "Reasons U.S. Women Have Abortions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives," Guttmacher Institute, 2005. Online: www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/3711005.pdf

4 *Ibid.*

5 Johnson, William R., "Reasons Given for Having Abortions in the United States," 2008. Online: <http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/policy/abortion/abreasons.html>

6 Mahkorn, Sandra, "Pregnancy and Sexual Assault," *The Psychological Aspects of Abortion*, University Publications of America, 1979

7 Mahkorn & Dolan, "Sexual Assault & Pregnancy." *New Perspectives on Human Abortion*, University Publishers of Amer., 1981

8 On line: <http://www.afterabortion.org/news/WPSApetition.htm>

9 Reardon, David C., Makimaa, Julie, and Sobie, Amy, "Victims and Victors: Speaking Out About Their Pregnancies, Abortions and Children Resulting from Sexual Assault", Acorn Publishing, 2000.

10 Krason, *supra*.