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Abortion and the Health of the Mother

By Congressman Joe Pitts

On January 22, 1973, the United States Supreme Court handed down its now infamous ruling in the *Roe vs. Wade* case, paving the way for abortion-on-demand across America.

The intervening three decades between that day and today have allowed for many turns in the course of the abortion debate in America.

Those of us who have been making the case for the unborn child's inalienable right to life during the 33 years since *Roe* have seen science support our cause on numerous occasions.

Advances in ultra-sound technology have provided undeniable visual evidence of an unborn child's physical development, even within the first trimester of pregnancy, soundly rebutting the image of the fetus as a shapeless blob of tissue.

Medical studies over the years have also produced startling evidence of an unborn child's ability to feel pain during an abortion procedure.

These developments take the debate outside of the moral context and provide concrete empirical evidence that argues loudly for the right to life.

In recent years, research has shed light on still another side of this ongoing debate: the effect abortion has on the mental health of the mother.

In fact, two studies released in recent months have added to the growing body of evidence showing a clear link between abortion and women's mental health.

A New Zealand researcher and self-described pro-choice atheist recently published a peer-reviewed study in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* showing that women who had abortions were at a higher risk for suicide, major depression and anxiety disorders, and drug dependence.

A December 2005 article published by the *BBC* describes a study conducted by researchers at the University of Oslo that also shows increased likelihood of negative psychological effects in post-abortive women.

The article quotes an official with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists as saying, "The decision to terminate [a pregnancy] may bring with it long-standing feelings of anxiety and guilt."

The anecdotal evidence also supports the notion of a link between abortion and mental health. Counselors dealing with women who have had abortions report widespread feelings of depression, regret, and general mental anguish in their patients.

And though studies like these do provide evidence supporting a link between abortion and mental health, perhaps the most surprising aspect of this field of research is that it hasn't been explored further.

If the premise is indeed true, as the current scope of information certainly seems to indicate, women deserve to be fully informed about it.

In fact, Dr. David M. Fergusson, the pro-choice New Zealand researcher cited above, was led to do his study for this very reason. He felt there was a lack of existing information on the subject.

According to a Culture of Life Foundation article, Dr. Fergusson told an Australian radio station, "The whole topic has been remarkably under-researched…there's been a lot of debate about whether abortion does or does not have harmful effects, but the amount of research into the harms of abortion…has been very limited."

I happen to agree with him on this point. That is why I will be introducing legislation this year in Congress that will encourage greater research on this topic.

I believe women deserve to know the whole truth about abortion. Not just what it means to their unborn babies, but also what it means to their own health.

For too long, we have allowed the full truth about abortion and all of its consequences to remain obscured. As we head into the 34th year of a post-*Roe* America, we must work to bring the truth out into the light.

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