Pregnancy Advisory Centre

Information for Students and Researchers on Unplanned Pregnancy and Abortion

The Pregnancy Advisory Centre has developed this resource to assist students, researchers or anyone interested in understanding the South Australian, Australian and global circumstances of unplanned pregnancy and abortion.

The following information provides links to resources, services, organisations and their websites, where indicated, to access the most current information available. Some of the earlier information contained here remains as relevant today as when it was written and/or published.

Facts and Figures

Unplanned and unwanted pregnancy is the primary reason for abortion. It is estimated that half of all pregnancies in Australia are unplanned and that half of those are terminated.

Between one quarter and one third of Australian women will experience an abortion in their lifetime.


Unplanned pregnancy occurs due to contraceptive needs being unmet, e.g. failure of or limited/no access to appropriate contraceptive information/options.

The World Health Organisation reports that if all contraceptive users used contraception perfectly in every sexual encounter, there would still be six million unintended pregnancies each year, (WHO 2010).

Pregnancy Outcomes for all pregnancies in South Australia, including terminations of pregnancy can be found at the Pregnancy Outcome Unit for South Australia here

Every year the South Australia Abortion report committee report is tabled in the South Australian Parliament.

Further Facts and Figures related to unplanned pregnancy and abortion can be found at:

> Unplanned Pregnancy in Australia
> Reproductive Choice Australia
> Children By Choice

Abortion – A Global Issue

There are 208 million pregnancies worldwide; 74 million of these are unplanned. (Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion worldwide in 2008: levels and trends, Lancet, 2012)


215 million women worldwide have an unmet need for modern contraceptives. (Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion worldwide in 2008: levels and trends, Lancet, 2012)

> Public Health Association of Australia Policy at a glance: Abortion Policy, September 2014 Available online
> Guttmacher Institute: Induced Abortion Worldwide 2018 fact sheet
> Centre for Reproductive Rights. The World’s Abortion Laws
> Centre for Reproductive Rights 2011 Abortion Worldwide: Seventeen Years of Reform
Legal Status of Abortion in South Australia and Australia

In South Australia, abortion is legal if two doctors agree that a woman’s physical and/or mental health endangered by pregnancy, or for serious foetal abnormality. Unlawful abortion is a crime.

South Australian Criminal Law Consolidation Act 1935, Division 17- Abortion. Sections 81-82A

Summary of Australian and South Australian Abortion Laws

Reproductive Choice Australia Australian Abortion Laws infographic


Women’s experience of unplanned pregnancy and abortion

Some reasons women consider in their decision about abortion include, spacing of pregnancies, financial resources, emotional and physical well-being, non-consensual sexual abuse, and violent relationships.

“Decisions were made in the context of their lives as a whole; influences were usually contingent and multiple. Reasons related to the woman herself, the potential child, existing children, her partner and other significant relationships, and financial matters.”

Reasons women give for contemplating or undergoing abortion: a qualitative investigation in Victoria, Australia - Kirkman, M., Rosenthal, D., Mallett, S., Rowe, S., Hardiman, A. 2010 Copyright © 2010 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved. Full article available for purchase.


Marie Stopes International, 2005

Late abortion: a research study of women undergoing abortion between 19-24 weeks gestation

Royal Women Hospital Victoria - Stories from women

The Turnaway Study is ANSIRH’s (Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health) prospective longitudinal study examining the effects of unintended pregnancy on women’s lives. The major aim of the study is to describe the mental health, physical health, and socioeconomic consequences of receiving an abortion compared to carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term.

All online publications related to The Turnaway Study

Domestic and family violence and unplanned pregnancy

The relationship between domestic violence and poor reproductive health outcomes is well established. Please see information at Children By Choice for more information about the links between unplanned pregnancy and violence and issues related to reproductive coercion.

Safety of abortion – physical

Abortion in Australia and in other developed countries has for many years been established as a safe and common health care procedure.

The World health organisation states: “Whether abortion is legally restricted or not, the likelihood that a woman will have an abortion for an unintended pregnancy is about the same. Unsafe abortion and associated morbidity and mortality in women are avoidable. Safe abortion services therefore should be available and accessible for all women”.

RANZCOG Position statement on Termination of Pregnancy

Myths and Facts about abortion

Safety of Abortion - overview of facts

Safety of abortion – mental health and emotional wellbeing

The majority of women cope well emotionally following an abortion. Some women experience a range of emotions following abortion.

The perception of stigma that exists around abortion perpetuates the idea that if you do choose to have an abortion that it should be followed by a negative emotional response, in particular regret, and yet this is not supported for the majority of women.

The best scientific evidence published indicates that among adult women who have an unplanned pregnancy the relative risk of mental health problems is no greater if they have a single elective first-trimester abortion than if they deliver that pregnancy.

To meta analyse or not to meta analyse: Abortion, birth and mental health (2012)

The most reliable predictor of post abortion mental health problems was having a prior history of mental health problems.


National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health for the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (2011): Induced Abortion and Mental Health: A Systematic Review of the Mental Health outcomes of induced abortion, including their prevalence and associated factors.


Societal and community attitudes to abortion

Reliable opinion polling consistently shows that around 80% of Australian adult’s support a woman’s right to choose. Information available at: Children by Choice.

Australian attitudes to early and late abortion (2010), De Crespigny, L., Wilkinson, D., Douglas, T. and Savulescu, J., View full article.


Attitudes to Abortion which cites the 2003 Victorian survey.

Social and political issues

Abortion is not a political issue, it is a woman’s.

Abortion and the full humanity of women Jo Wainer (2007), Sexual Health., Vol. 4 No. pages 219-221 Published 8 November 2007. View full article.

Understanding and Responding to Anti-choice Women Centred Strategies View abstract.


Further information and useful links on unplanned pregnancy and abortion

> South Australian Abortion Support Services website links to more information about Abortion in South Australia 2019
> South Australian Abortion Action Coalition Facts Sheets
Disclaimer

The Pregnancy Advisory Centre produces and reviews this resource and links to other websites and articles as an educative resource only. The resources listed here are aimed at health/welfare/community professionals and students who are interested in learning more about abortion in Australia and globally.

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Every effort is made to ensure information is current; however the Pregnancy Advisory has no responsibility or authority for links and websites contained in this resource.

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For more information

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www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/AbortionSupportServices