

Uncovering RSE and Exposing Harms

Abortion Handout

Website: <https://www.brook.org.uk/resources/>

This can only be downloaded by entering name and e-mail.

Aims: “Brook provides free resources which can be used to supplement relationship and sex education (RSE) lessons.”¹

Age/Audience: under 16s. Included as part of Brook’s free RSE supplementary resources.²

Production: Brook (charity).

Year of Publication: Undated but current.

Main concerns & highlights:

Right to abortion?

- Brook conveys an apparently misleading legal message that there is an unfettered right to abortion, implied by the decision said to be ‘yours’ and nobody else’s: “If you decide to have an abortion, you should be treated without judgement, because it’s your decision.”³ Abortion remains a criminal offence under English law, though the Abortion Act 1967 provides conditions, any of which, if properly satisfied, will render an abortion legal.⁴

Is abortion safe?

- “Is it safe? Yes. The earlier the abortion, the safer it is. There are lots of myths about abortion causing mental health problems, breast cancer or making it harder to get pregnant in the future.”⁵

As for risks to mental health, it is untrue and wrong on the facts to claim with confidence that abortion is risk-free for all women. Mainstream experts, when not relying on slogans, don’t even claim this.⁶ An [NHS webpage devoted to the risks of abortion](#), sets out a range of possible complications that may be had in cases of medical or surgical abortions. Abortion at any stage carries risk. For example, in ‘surgical’ abortions after 14 weeks, there is a risk of “very heavy bleeding” in up to 10% of women.⁷

We know that blanket statements claiming ‘no risk’ in mental health outcomes are misleading and dangerously simplistic. Whilst the research in support of such risks is not supported by an overall consensus, there is growing and

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credible evidence to show why some women do suffer adverse, post-abortion mental health outcomes.⁸ It is irresponsible for any health provider to be silent about such risks.

Is it legal?

- Under, “Is it legal?” for England and Wales, abortions are said to be legal, when the fetus is under 24 weeks: It states: “Legal up to 24 weeks of pregnancy (if two doctors agree).” In being silent on which conditions doctors must satisfy in order for an abortion they authorise to be legal, access to lawful abortion is presented as something provided with few, if any, strings attached. This reinforces the popular view that there is a human right to an abortion.

Parents and Carers

- In a section entitled, “Do My Parents/Carers Have to Know”,⁹ it is stated if: “you are at risk or in danger, your information may be shared with others (e.g. social services). But, they will talk to you about this first.” However, this standard of disclosure does not appear to include parents in such cases. More generally, the law excludes parents from the stakeholder process: they have no requisite right to be informed about, and provide consent for, an abortion: “You can have an abortion without telling your parents, even if you’re under 16. You’ll be encouraged to tell them, but this is your choice.”¹⁰
- The erosion of parental roles in the lives of their children can be seen as part of a wider strategy to exclude parents from bringing up their children according to their wishes, and their responsibilities. For a child’s wellbeing and safety, and given the risks inherent in abortion, e.g., haemorrhaging, parents should always be involved in this kind of decision – similarly with the provision of contraception, especially implants. Both abortion and some kinds of contraception may have medical repercussions requiring - possibly urgent - treatment. If a child is rushed into hospital and parents don’t know the full circumstances, they will be unable to give full information to the medical staff, meaning their child may not receive appropriate and timely treatment.

Brook referrals & support:

- “Brook does not provide abortions, but we can refer and support you into other services that do: brook.org.uk/find-a-service”.¹¹

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References

¹ See this statement at the head of the page: <https://www.brook.org.uk/resources/> (Accessed 21 September 2020).

² Ibid.

³ p. 1.

⁴ Abortion Act 1967. For an explanation of the conditions, see: Termination of Pregnancy: An RCN Nursing Framework, Royal College of Nursing, June 2017, p. 4.

⁵ p. 1.

⁶ See for example the systematic review developed for the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges by the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, *Induced Abortion and Mental Health: A Systematic Review of the Mental Health Outcomes of Induced Abortion, including their Prevalence and Associated Factors*, December 2011 (London). https://www.aomrc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Induced_Abortion_Mental_Health_1211.pdf

⁷ <https://www.bpas.org/abortion-care/abortion-treatments/the-abortion-pill/remote-treatment/> (Accessed 14 October 2020).

⁸ See: *Abortion and Women's Health: An evidence-based review for medical professionals of the impact of abortion on women's physical and mental health*, by Dr Greg Pike.

https://www.spuc.org.uk/Portals/0/ThemePluginPro/uploads/2020/9/24/Abortion%20and%20Women's%20Health_taster.pdf

Also, see *Abortion and Mental Health Outcomes: What do the Studies Say?* produced by the Lords and Commons Family and Child Protection Group, in "Relationships and Sex Education: The Way Forward".

<https://vfjuk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/RSE-report-2018-webv2.0.pdf>

⁹ p. 1.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.