

Abortion





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INTRODUCTION

Key Facts

- Since the Abortion Act 1967 came into force, there have been over seven and a half million abortions in the UK.
- There is a vast body of research which shows that abortion carries serious physical and mental health risks for women.
- Recent investigations into the abortion industry show that abortion laws are being flouted by many clinics and some babies are being aborted for being the wrong gender or for minor disabilities.
- Both the Bible and biological science confirm that human life begins at conception, leading Christians to believe that abortion is a serious moral wrong, as it involves the termination of a human being.
- The practice of abortion challenges what society believes about the innate value of human life.

Abortion in the UK

This booklet has been written to mark the 45th anniversary of the passing of the Abortion Act 1967. Since that time, there have been approximately seven and a half million abortions in the UK. Almost 200,000 abortions now take place in England and Wales each year, and one out of every three women in England has had an abortion. These are all deeply sobering facts.

The practice of abortion has always raised strong feelings and presented major moral concerns. Abortion is now once again in the spotlight following the publication of new studies showing how damaging it can be to the mental health of women; as well as recent investigations into the abortion industry that have uncovered doctors offering abortions based on the gender of the child and also falsifying paperwork, breaking abortion regulations and offering abortion on demand.

The time is now ripe for Christians to engage with this issue and to bring the practice of abortion into the light. At Christian Concern we believe that it is time for a major overhaul of how the abortion industry is regulated in this country, as the law is being routinely flouted.

This booklet considers abortion from a Christian point of view and examines when life begins, what the law on abortion allows, the moral arguments against abortion, the consequences of abortion and the next steps to reforming the law.

When does life begin?

Christians have historically viewed abortion as a practice that is morally wrong, as it involves ending the life of another human being.

Yet those who are in favour of abortion often downplay the status of the unborn child and portray the unborn child, or foetus, as less than fully human.

So when does life begin?

The Bible states that life begins at conception. King David wrote:

*"For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes saw my unformed body."¹*

The Bible states that God oversees our entire life, both in the womb and also after our birth. It also suggests that God knew us even before our conception. In Jeremiah 1v5, God says: *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you."*

In the foreknowledge of God, we have each been called into being by our creator. Before we were born, God thought of us and arranged for our conception and birth.

Biological science also confirms that human life begins from the moment of conception. At conception, a human embryo is created that is genetically distinct from the mother. It is a new, unique human being. All of the hereditary characteristics of this new person are established, including colour of eyes, gender and build. This is the beginning of a new human life.

¹ Psalm 139v13-16, New International Version

It is on this basis that an unborn child is a human being, and therefore the practice of abortion has always been condemned by Christians as a clear breach of the commandment: "Thou shalt not kill".²

Abortion and the law

Because our laws in the UK have historically been influenced by the Christian faith, abortion has been illegal throughout our modern history. In fact, abortion is *still illegal* in the UK under the Offences Against the Persons Act 1861, and is only now legally permissible in very limited circumstances.

The Abortion Act 1967 created exceptions to the illegality of abortion by permitting two doctors to allow an abortion to take place in certain limited circumstances i.e. where the mother's life is in danger, where continuing with the pregnancy would involve greater injury to her physical or mental health than an abortion, or where the child would suffer from a severe mental or physical handicap.

Despite these high level restrictions, it is now very easy to obtain an abortion in the UK, as the figures demonstrate. It is so easy to obtain an abortion that it is viewed as an alternative means of contraception by some women. Statistics published by the Department of Health in 2008 revealed that some young girls are repeatedly using abortion as a means of birth control and some have had up to four abortions by the age of 18.

Even financial circumstances or the career aspirations of a mother may now qualify you for an abortion according to current medical practice. A former doctor and supporter of the Abortion Act, writing in the *Daily Telegraph*, witnessed the practice of women gaining access to abortion "because they did not want their holidays spoiled" by their pregnancy.³

Yet allowing women to have abortions on demand is totally inconsistent with Parliament's original intention for introducing the Abortion Act 1967, as the Act specifically restricts access to abortion except in extremely serious circumstances.

So why are there so many abortions?

According to Department of Health figures, only 1% of pregnancies are terminated

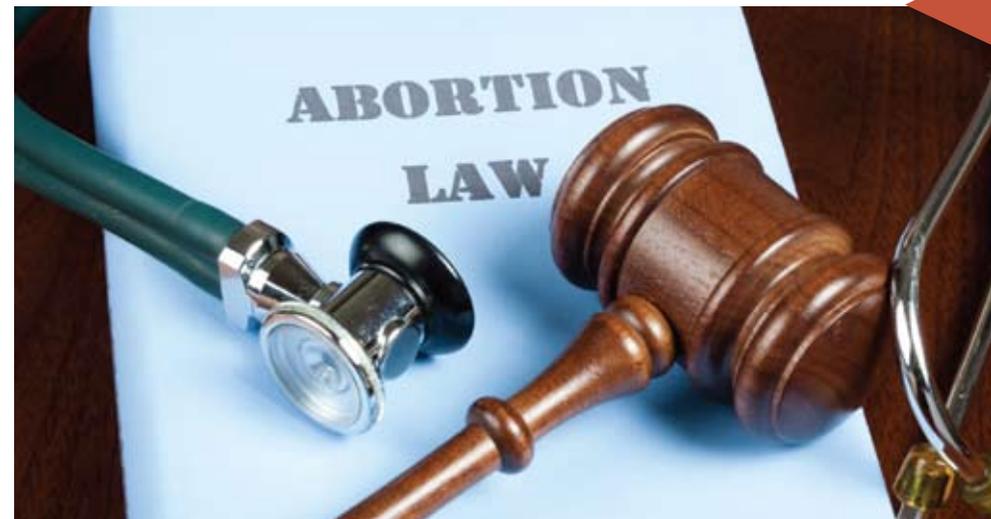
on the grounds that the child would be seriously handicapped, and less than a quarter of 1% to save the mother's life.⁴

Yet 98% of all abortions take place on the grounds that continuing with the pregnancy is more dangerous for a woman's mental or physical health than having an abortion.

Doctors have been routinely making the assumption that it is less harmful for a woman to have an abortion than to continue with a pregnancy due to the perceived emotional consequences of having an unwanted baby.

Yet the distress or inconvenience of carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term is not the same as a mental disorder, and there is now a vast body of research demonstrating that abortion carries serious consequences for women and is usually more detrimental to a woman's mental health than carrying a pregnancy to term.

This indicates that most abortions in the UK are in fact *illegal*, and that doctors have simply afforded an extremely liberal interpretation to abortion legislation in order to permit access to abortion whenever wanted by women, despite the intentions of Parliament.



2 Deuteronomy 5v17, King James Bible
3 www.telegraph.co.uk/health/women_health/9100838/Pregnant-women-have-asked-for-terminations-because-they-did-not-want-their-holidays-spoilt.html

4 "Abortion Statistics, England and Wales: 2010", The Department of Health (PDF form), page 8:
http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_127202.pdf

THE CONSEQUENCES

The cost to the unborn

As previously noted, seven and a half million lives have been terminated in the UK since the Abortion Act 1967. This represents a huge loss of human life. These individuals have had the opportunity to experience life taken away from them, without their consent. They are the greatest victims of the abortion industry.

In addition to the lives of unborn children being prematurely ended, recent studies have suggested that some unborn children may suffer pain during their terminations. The current abortion time limit is set at 24 weeks, yet a major study on foetal pain by Professor KJS Anand has shown that an unborn child is likely to feel pain from 18 weeks' gestation.⁵

There have even been signs that unborn children experience pain from as early as six weeks' gestation.⁶

The mental health risks of abortion

The cost of abortion goes beyond the death and pain of the unborn. Abortion often has a profoundly negative effect on the women who experience the procedure.

In 2008, the Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCOP) was forced to publish an official statement admitting, for the first time, that abortion may damage a woman's mental health, as more and more studies have emerged demonstrating a strong link between abortion and an array of psychological disorders, ranging from depression to post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and even suicide.

The RCOP recommended that women should not be allowed to have an abortion until they are counselled on the risks of the procedure to both their physical and mental health, overturning the consensus that stood for decades that continuing with an unwanted pregnancy is more harmful than having an abortion.

The RCOP's new stance stands in stark opposition to its 1994 position statement in which it claimed that there was "no evidence" that abortion is damaging to a woman's mental health.

⁵ See http://www.uams.edu/neuroscience_cellbiology/faculty/details.asp?id=61

⁶ McCullagh and Saunders, "Do foetuses feel pain?", *British Medical Journal* (25 January, 1997)

In fact, the largest ever meta-analysis of the effects of abortion on women, conducted in 2011, actually concluded that abortions increase the risk of developing mental health problems by 81%.⁷

Published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, it showed that abortion increased the risk of anxiety disorders by 34%; depression by 37%; alcohol abuse by 110% and suicide behaviours by 155%. It concluded:

"Results indicate quite consistently that abortion is associated with moderate to highly increased risks of psychological problems subsequent to the procedure."

Another study published in the *British Journal of Medicine* found that women who have an abortion are at least six times more likely to commit suicide than those who carry their pregnancy to term.⁸

The risk of experiencing depression has been shown to be significantly higher in women who have an abortion compared to those who carry their pregnancy to term, even when the pregnancy was unplanned.⁹

A 2008 study by Dr. Priscilla Coleman and psychologist Dr. Vincent Rue published in the *Journal of Psychiatry* demonstrated a strong association between abortion and depression and anxiety disorders. It stated:

"Abortion was found to be related to an increased risk for a variety of mental health problems (panic attacks, panic disorder, agoraphobia, PTSD, bipolar disorder, major depression with and without hierarchy), and substance abuse disorders."

Abortion was found to increase the risk of bi-polar disorder by 167% and major depression by 45%. With regards to anxiety disorders, abortion increased the risk of panic disorders by 111%, panic attacks by 44%, post-traumatic stress disorder by 59% and agoraphobia by 95%.

An American study published in the *Journal of Pregnancy* in 2010 also reported high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms amongst women

⁷ Priscilla K. Coleman, Abortion and mental health: quantitative synthesis and analysis of research published 1995-2009", *British Journal of Psychiatry* (2011). The analysis, conducted by Priscilla K. Coleman from Bowling Green State University, Ohio, USA, is the largest study of its kind and is based on 22 published studies, with a combined number of participants totalling over 850,000.

⁸ Gissler, Hemminki & Lonnqvist, "Suicides after pregnancy in Finland, 1987-94: register linkage study," *British Journal of Medicine* 313:1431-4, 1996; and M. Gissler, "Injury deaths, suicides and homicides associated with pregnancy, Finland 1987-2000," *European J. Public Health* 15(5):459-63, 2005.

⁹ R Cogle, DC Reardon & PK Coleman, "Depression Associated With Abortion and Childbirth: A Long-Term Analysis of the NLSY Cohort," *Medical Science Monitor* 9(4):CR105-112, 2003.

who had undertaken both early and late abortions, with 52 per cent of the early abortion group and 67 per cent of the late term abortion group meeting the American Psychological Association's conditions for a diagnosis of PTSD. Furthermore, 60% of women said they felt that "a part of me died" after their abortion.¹⁰

Abortion is also commonly linked to a number of negative reactions including regret, grief, anger and sleeping difficulties. In one study of women suffering from post-abortion problems, 80% said they experienced guilt, 83% regretted their decision, 79% had feelings of "loss", 62% felt anger and 70% experienced depression.¹¹

Another study, published in the *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, found that just 8 weeks after their abortions, 44% of women reported nervous disorders, 36% experienced sleeping problems, 31% felt regret, and 11% had been prescribed psychotropic medicine by their doctor.¹²

The physical risks of abortion

Medical complications following an abortion vary from minor problems to more serious conditions such as pre-term deliveries in subsequent pregnancies, reduced fertility, cancer and even death. Post-abortive women are 2.3% more likely to suffer from cervical cancer compared to women with no history of abortion, and three times more likely to develop breast cancer in later life.¹³

Abortion also places women at a risk of developing serious life-threatening complications, such as haemorrhage, endometriosis and pelvic inflammatory disease which can all be fatal if left untreated. The latter is also a major cause of infertility in post-abortive women.¹⁴ Research has also showed that there is a significant increase in premature births amongst women who have had an abortion.¹⁵

Considering the mental and physical risks of abortion, could the vast majority of UK abortions actually be illegal because of an inaccurate assessment of the risks? We consider the answer to be a resounding "yes". Urgent reform of the law is therefore needed.

10 PK Coleman, CT Coyle & VM Rue, "Late-Term Elective Abortion and Susceptibility to Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms," *Journal of Pregnancy*, Aug. 2010.

11 D. Reardon, *Aborted Women, Silent No More* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2002).

12 Ashton, "The Psychosocial Outcome of Induced Abortion", *British Journal of Ob & Gyn.* 87:1115-1122, 1980.

13 See: http://www.abortionfacts.com/reardon/effect_of_abortion.asp

14 Ibid.

15 Rooney, B and Calhoun, BC, *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons*, 8 (2), 2003, pages 46 – 49.

Devaluing human life

In addition to the physical and mental risks, there are a range of other damaging consequences that arise from abortion. The practice of abortion itself devalues human life in the eyes of society.

The book of Genesis records that man is made in the "image of God".¹⁶ As we are all made in His image, we are separate from animals and have a unique and special value. He has created us each with great value and with a purpose in life.

The practice of abortion violates the value of human life, as it suggests that human beings have no innate or objective value, but rather are only valuable to the extent that society decides.

Allowing a woman to abort her unborn child because the baby might be an inconvenience sends a clear message to the younger generation that their lives are only worth as much as their parents are willing to be 'inconvenienced'.

It is with these considerations in mind that the practice of abortion is of such concern to those who want to honour God in the way that human life is treated.

Abortion of the disabled

A key example of the way abortion undermines the value of human life is in relation to the disabled.

Department of Health statistics reveal that doctors have continued to sanction unnecessary abortions for conditions such as a cleft lip/palate and Down's Syndrome, on the legal basis that the child would be born seriously handicapped - even though such conditions do not leave children seriously handicapped.

A cleft lip or palate is completely repairable by surgery; and even though children with Down's Syndrome have special medical needs, they are nevertheless "able to live full lives, take part in further education, have jobs and relationships, and live independently."¹⁷

Despite this, 482 unborn children were aborted for Down's Syndrome in total in 2010,¹⁸ while another 26 have been terminated on the grounds of a cleft palate since 2002, including one at 28 weeks gestation.¹⁹

16 Genesis 1v27, New International Version

17 See: "Living with Down's Syndrome", BUPA Website:

<http://www.bupa.co.uk/individuals/health-information/directory/d/downs-syndrome#textBlock190796>

18 Department of Health England and Wales Statistics for 2010

19 See: "The lives that should not have been lost" *The Telegraph*, Joanna Jepson, 9 July 2011

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/features/8627825/Abortion-the-lives-that-should-not-have-been-lost.html>

Allowing abortion for these conditions sends a clear message to the disabled – that they are not as valuable as non-disabled people to society. This is not acceptable.

Abortion of unborn girls

Once society stops recognising the objective moral value of all human beings, some unborn children become less 'valuable' than others, even just for being the 'wrong gender'.

This is not just something that happens, as is well reported, in China. An undercover investigation by the *Daily Telegraph* in early 2012 revealed that British doctors in both private and NHS hospitals will sometimes agree to provide women with abortions purely on the basis of their child's gender, even though sex-selection terminations in England and Wales are illegal.²⁰

Three clinics were secretly filmed by the *Daily Telegraph* agreeing to provide an abortion after the sex of the child was given as the only reason for requesting a termination.

In one instance, a woman was booked in for an abortion after telling a Manchester consultant that she didn't want the baby because it was a girl. The consultant, who works for Pall Mall Medical in Manchester, responded by saying: "I don't ask questions. If you want a termination, you want a termination."

She later told a colleague that the abortion was "for social reasons" and that the woman "didn't want any questions asked."

Infanticide

If the value of human life is reduced to what each life can offer society, or whether it is wanted and/or convenient, then we open the door to serious moral darkness.

Infanticide, the putting to death of a newborn baby, provides a good example. Whilst illegal and not yet accepted in the vast majority of civilised nations, this practice already enjoys robust support in some academic circles and is promoted by some of the foremost 'ethicists' in the world.

²⁰ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/9099511/Abortion-investigation-doctors-filmed-agreeing-illegal-abortions-no-questions-asked.html>

Two medical ethicists, doctors Francesca Minerva and Alberto Guibilini, recently claimed in an article published by the *British Medical Journal* in 2012 that doctors should be allowed to kill disabled or unwanted newborn babies because they are "not actual persons".

They argued that parents should be given the choice to end the lives of their children shortly after they are born because, at this stage, they are "morally irrelevant" and have "no moral right to life." They suggested that infanticide is no different morally to abortion since both a foetus and a newborn baby were only "potential persons".

"Both a foetus and a newborn certainly are human beings and potential persons, but neither is a person in the sense of subject of a moral right to life," the authors claimed.

They went on to suggest that the practice of infanticide, which they termed as "after-birth abortion", should even be permissible where a child was perfectly healthy if the birth was unwanted, inconvenient or too expensive for the parents.

These doctors have come to such chilling conclusions because they have followed the premise that it is society that determines the value of human life, rather than God.

Sadly, it is the same principle that pervades our culture and which, in its highest stage of development, has led to some of the most oppressive and Godless societies in the history of the world.

Cost

The financial cost of abortion is huge. In England, the NHS spent £118 million on abortions in 2010, of which £75 million went to private clinics.

The NHS even pays for multiple abortions resulting from women using the procedure as a last-ditch means of contraception. The NHS spends more than £1 million pounds a week on repeat abortions alone.²¹

²¹ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2143936/NHS-spends-1m-week-repeat-abortions-Single-women-using-terminations-form-contraceptive.html?printingPage=true>

Statistics show that of the 189,000 abortions that were carried out in 2010:

- 64,000 abortions were on women who had undergone the procedure before;
- Almost 100 repeat terminations were carried out on women who were under the age of 20; and
- 85 women were on their eighth abortion.

Department of Health statistics for 2008 showed that some teenage girls were having up to four abortions by the age of 18, indicating that many are relying on abortion as a safety net in case contraception fails.²²

All of this is a significant cost for the taxpayer. Worse than that, it is dangerous - as teenagers, and women who have had multiple abortions, are at a greater risk of developing abortion-related medical complications.²³



²² Article by the Daily Mail entitled, "Girls using abortion as birth control and having up to four terminations by the age of 18", by Beezy Marsh, 27th December 2009:
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1238612/Girls-using-abortion-birth-control.html>
²³ See: http://www.abortionfacts.com/reardon/effect_of_abortion.asp and "Teen Abortion Risks Factsheet":
http://www.abortionfacts.com/reardon/effect_of_abortion.asp

WHAT NOW?

A corrupt industry

The controversies surrounding the practice of abortion have intensified recently in the UK, and the abortion industry is under scrutiny in a way that is has never been before.

Further to the findings of the *Daily Telegraph* investigation into sex-selective abortions, the Health Secretary, Andrew Lansley, ordered raids on more than 250 private and NHS clinics in March 2012.

The raids revealed that a large number of abortion clinics were flouting abortion laws and offering abortion on demand. Doctors in 50 of the clinics were falsifying paperwork, and many patients were not receiving acceptable levels of advice and counselling.²⁴

The raids discovered piles of "pre-signed" abortion consent forms, breaking laws which require the signatures of two doctors who have agreed that the abortion falls within one of the exemptions provided in the Abortion Act 1967. Pre-signing such forms is a serious criminal offence.

The Health Secretary said that he was "shocked" by the findings of the raid. He said:

"I was appalled. Because if it happens [pre-signing consent forms], it is pretty much people engaging in a culture of both ignoring the law and trying to give themselves the right to say that although Parliament may have said this, we believe in abortion on demand."

Many of the clinics will now face police inquiries and some may be stripped of the licences that allow them to offer abortions. The scandal has led to more calls for reform of the abortion industry.

The practice of abortion still has much support in Parliament, and any reform of the law will meet strong opposition. However, there are many ways in which the law can be tightened and the numbers of abortions reduced.

²⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/9161735/One-in-five-abortion-clinics-breaks-law.html>

Ultimately, if the church fully and prayerfully engages with this issue, then the practice of abortion can be brought to an end in this nation.

Independent Counselling

One area where major reform to the law is possible is that relating to the counselling that women receive prior to deciding whether to have an abortion.

At present, women considering an abortion are usually given the option of receiving counselling from the same abortion provider that will then perform the abortion.

However, there is a huge conflict of interest involved in this scenario, as private abortion clinics rely heavily on providing abortions for their income. Abortion is a £60 million pounds a year industry, and private providers have a substantial financial interest in women choosing abortion over other alternatives.

There is therefore a real danger that women are not receiving impartial advice on the mental and physical risks of abortion, and that alternative options such as childbirth and adoption are not being adequately explored.

Some women have complained that, once inside an abortion clinic, during a confused and vulnerable time in their lives, they were put on an "abortion conveyor belt", and felt pushed into having an abortion, which they bitterly regretted afterwards.

Conservative MP Nadine Dorries has been campaigning to remove this conflict of interest and ensure that women presenting with an unplanned pregnancy are given the offer of independent counselling. She is seeking to ensure that there is a separation between those giving the counselling and those providing the abortions, who often have a vested financial interest in the woman's choice.

Her proposed amendment to the Health and Social Care Bill, aimed at giving women with unplanned pregnancies access to independent counselling, was lost by 118 votes to 368 in September 2011.²⁵

However, the Government has now suggested that it supports the idea of independent counselling, and a full consultation is being held on the issue.

²⁵ See: <http://righttoknow.org.uk/>

The introduction of independent counselling to give women a 'breathing space' before any decision to have an abortion, and to give them more impartial information, could reduce the number of abortions by one third.

In 2008, the Christian Medical Fellowship carried out a study of abortion rates in European countries, and discovered that those with 'right to know' legislation (offer of counselling, advice, information about alternatives) had, on average, abortion rates that were 30% lower than those (like Britain) which didn't.²⁶

The clear message is that many women, given proper advice and support, choose not to abort.

Help us to stop abortion

At Christian Concern we actively campaign against the practice of abortion and we aim to inform women of its dangers. We believe that every unborn child should have their right to life protected, and we want to see the church rise up and passionately engage with this issue.

Please join us on one of our many initiatives as we campaign to reduce, and ultimately end, the practice of abortion in this nation. You can do so by joining more than 65,000 people who support the work of Christian Concern and the Christian Legal Centre. Please visit www.christianconcern.com to find out more and join our e-mail list.

Please also join the Christian Concern led 'Choose Life' campaign, which is a rallying point for pro-life campaigning, at www.chooselifecampaign.org. Choose Life holds conferences on abortion and also holds rallies outside Parliament on behalf of the unborn.

²⁶ <http://www.cmf.org.uk/publicpolicy/early-life/abortion/informed-consent/>

About Christian Concern and the Christian Legal Centre

Christian Concern is a campaign group and a policy and legal resource centre that seeks to promote Christian truth in the public sphere.

The team of lawyers and advisers at Christian Concern conduct research into, and campaign on, legislation and policy changes that may affect Christian freedoms or the moral values of the UK.

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Christian Concern has a sister organisation, the Christian Legal Centre, which takes up cases affecting Christian freedoms and supports individuals who have been persecuted for their faith. www.christianlegalcentre.com

