

NIH Admits US Lacks Data Needed to Study Abortion and Depression

Mark Adams

March 22, 2006

Officials at the National Institutes of Health conceded that the data necessary to replicate a New Zealand study linking abortion with depression do not exist in America. The admission came in a reply to a letter from Rep. Mark Souder (R-IN) seeking the NIH's "advice on searching out the best US research data on the effects of abortion on women in the United States."

March 22, 2006
Volume 3, Number 33

By Mark Adams

Officials at the National Institutes of Health conceded that the data necessary to replicate a New Zealand study linking abortion with depression do not exist in America. The admission came in a reply to a letter from Rep. Mark Souder (R-IN) seeking the NIH's "advice on searching out the best US research data on the effects of abortion on women in the United States."

Souder's letter was occasioned by a New Zealand study released in January that showed a strong link between having an abortion and experiencing several mental illnesses. That study is thought to be highly credible because it is based on data from a 25 year longitudinal survey that followed more than 500 girls from birth to age 25.

In his letter Souder asked whether there were "any studies of comparable methodological rigor published on U.S. women?" The NIH responded that they had "not funded any prospective longitudinal birth cohort studies on the effects of abortion on mental health." Regarding the 25-years worth of data collected in New Zealand, the NIH said that they were "not aware of any similar data sets that currently exist in the United States."

Souder also asked the NIH "what line of research do you suggest NIH consider funding" to address the question of abortion's effect on women's mental health. The NIH responded by saying they recently began soliciting proposals for research on women's mental health during and following pregnancy. According to Patrick Fagan, the William H. G. Fitzgerald Research Fellow at the Heritage Foundation, such postpartum research would not really encompass the kind of research that is needed to understand the relationship between abortion and mental health. "It's slightly off topic," he said.

Fagan said the letter from the NIH amounts to a startling admission of not only ignorance but indifference on the question of abortion and depression. "On the



CULTURE of LIFE
FOUNDATION®

1413 K Street NW
Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20005
Tel: 202-289-2500
Fax: 202-289-2502
info@culture-of-life.org
www.culture-of-life.org

Briefs

single biggest social change in this country's history the government research bodies and their social science agendas have studiously avoided studying its effects," he said. "The NIH letter says we have no good data, we cannot compare with anybody else's data and we don't have any specific suggestions for acquiring this data. In other words, we are blind and intend to stay blind."

In their response the NIH was careful to avoid giving any credence to the New Zealand study. "This is also problematic, because this research is occurring in a different societal and cultural context than that found in the United States, and therefore is not directly applicable to the US population," the letter said. "In addition, numerous studies have shown that abortion is under-reported in self-report studies, which makes it difficult to then determine any relationship between mood disorders and abortion." Fagan said that while it is true that in such research the exact results will vary if conducted in different countries, the general findings typically remain the same. "You can expect the same results but the numbers may be different," he said.



**CULTURE of LIFE
FOUNDATION®**

1413 K Street NW
Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20005
Tel: 202-289-2500
Fax: 202-289-2502
info@culture-of-life.org
www.culture-of-life.org