



## VIDEO COMPANION GUIDE

# EXPLAINED: Abortion Research & Policy

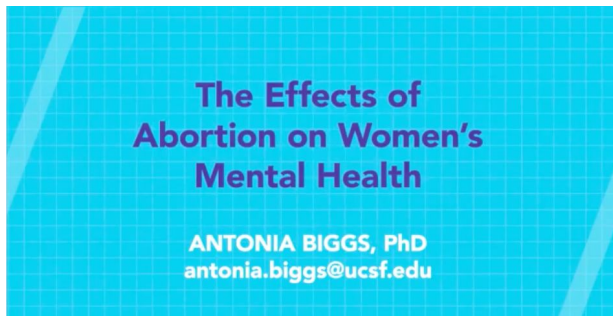
## *The Effects of Abortion on Women's Mental Health*

### Learning Objectives:

By the end of the session, learners will be able to:

- Describe the impact of having or being denied a wanted abortion on mental health and well-being.

### Video Lecture:



The Effects of Abortion on Women's Mental Health  
Presented by Antonia Biggs, PhD

Available at: [InnovatingEducation.org/Explained](http://InnovatingEducation.org/Explained)

Joyce TJ et al., *The Impact of State Mandatory Counseling and Waiting Period Laws on Abortion: A Literature Review*, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2009

### Suggested Readings:

- Biggs MA, et al. "[Mental Health Diagnoses 3 Years After Receiving or Being Denied an Abortion in the United States.](#)" *Am J Public Health*. 2015;105(12):2557-63.
- Biggs MA, et al. "[Does abortion increase women's risk for post-traumatic stress? Findings from a prospective longitudinal cohort study.](#)" *BMJ Open*. 2016;6(2):e009698.
- Biggs MA, et al. "[Does abortion reduce self-esteem and life satisfaction?](#)" *Qual Life Res*. 2014;23(9):2505-13.
- Biggs MA, et al. "[Women's Mental Health and Well-being 5 Years After Receiving or Being Denied an Abortion: A Prospective, Longitudinal Cohort Study.](#)" *JAMA Psychiatry*. 2016.
- Foster DG, et al. "[A comparison of depression and anxiety symptom trajectories between women who had an abortion and women denied one.](#)" *Psychol Med*. 2015;45(10):2073-82.



## Lesson Plan in a Flipped Classroom Setting *EXPLAINED: The Effects of Abortion on Women's Mental Health*

Using a flipped classroom model, this lesson plan will use the video lecture and additional resources to provide learners with an engaging learning environment. Here's [how to use this course in a "flipped-classroom"](#) at your own institution.

### Teaching Points

- Past research that looked into the effects of abortion on women's psychological outcomes used flawed research methods, and because of this, some have drawn erroneous conclusions about the relationship between mental health and abortion.
- The Turnaway study improved on prior study designs by taking into account pre-existing mental health conditions and examining both possible outcomes of an unwanted pregnancy—getting the abortion and carrying the unwanted pregnancy to term. The study has found that:
  - Denying a woman an abortion had more negative consequences to her mental health than allowing her to get the abortion she wants.
  - In terms of anxiety and self-esteem, women who were denied an abortion were worse off than women who had their wanted abortions in the short term.
  - In terms of depression, post-traumatic stress, and life satisfaction, there were no differences between women had abortions and women who were denied abortions.
  - For all outcomes, both women who were denied and those who had their abortions improved over the five-year study period on all measures.
- Women who experienced post-traumatic stress symptoms identified prior history of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse and the overall experience of pregnancy and decision-making, not the abortion itself, as sources of their stress.
- It is imperative to ensure that any information we give women regarding the effects of abortion on their mental health be the most accurate and up-to-date.

### Time Required

*Total Time of Video Lectures: 10 minutes*

*Estimated Independent Prep Time Required by Learner: 30 minutes*

*Total Estimated Time Required for In-Classroom Activity: 30 minutes*

### Materials Required and Instructor Preparation

- Learners will need internet access with enough bandwidth to view streaming videos.
- The instructor should print copies of the small group activity quiz (page 4) included in this packet.

### Activity

*Independent Preparation (conducted by learner before in-classroom activity)*

- Learners should independently view the video lecture.
- Learners may be assigned any of the relevant readings (determined by instructor's desired learner work-load) as outlined in the "Suggested Readings" section on page 1.

*In-Classroom Activity (Small Group Activity)*

- Divide the classroom into small groups and distribute the small group activity quiz (page 4-5). Instruct learners spend 15 minutes and work together to answer the questions provided.



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- At the end of this activity, convene the class. Present the questions and have learners share their answers and discuss.
- Write the correct answers on the board for the class to see. Collect each handout from learners.
  - The instructor can reference the answer sheet on page 6.

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Names



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### *EXPLAINED: The Effect of Abortion on Women's Mental Health* *Small Group Activity*

In your group, answer the following questions referencing the video lecture assigned before class. Be prepared to turn in this handout at the end of class.

#### Questions

1. Which is NOT a negative mental health consequence of being denied an abortion?
  - For all outcomes, women who had their wanted abortions experienced greater improvements over the five-year study period than those who were denied an abortion.
  - Initially, women who were denied an abortion were worse off than women who had their wanted abortions in terms of anxiety and self-esteem.
  - In terms of depression, post-traumatic stress, and life satisfaction, there were no differences between women had abortions and women who were denied abortions.
  - None of the above.
  
2. List at least three sources of post-traumatic stress among women seeking abortions.
  - i.
  
  - ii.
  
  - iii.
  
3. The primary challenge of conducting rigorous research on the topic of abortion and mental health outcomes is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - finding enough participants willing to be a part of the study
  - determining an appropriate follow-up time
  - finding an appropriate unit of analysis for mental health outcomes
  - finding an appropriate comparison group to women who had an abortion



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### Open-Ended Question

In previous years, policy decisions regarding abortion access have more often than not been based on assumptions rather than science. For example, in 2007, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote in the *Gonzales V. Carhart* majority opinion which supported a ban on a specific later abortion procedure: “While we find no reliable data to measure the phenomenon, it seems unexceptionable to conclude some women come to regret their choice to abort.... Severe depression and loss of esteem can follow.” What other assumptions have been made about abortion, and how do you think that has affected the dialogue surrounding abortion and abortion policy?



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# *EXPLAINED: The Effect of Abortion on Women's Mental Health* Quiz Answer Sheet

### Questions and Answers

1. Which is NOT a negative mental health consequence of being denied an abortion?
  - ✓ For all outcomes, women who had their wanted abortions experienced greater improvements over the five-year study period than those who were denied an abortion.
  - Initially, women who were denied an abortion were worse off than women who had their wanted abortions in terms of anxiety and self-esteem.
  - In terms of depression, post-traumatic stress, and life satisfaction, there were no differences between women had abortions and women who were denied abortions.
  - None of the above.

Explanation: The study has found that denying a woman abortion had more negative consequences to her mental health than allowing her to get the abortion she wants. However, both women who were denied and those who had their abortions experiences general improvement over the five-year study period for all mental health outcomes.

2. List at least three sources of post-traumatic stress among women seeking abortions.

Answer: (Other responses may also be acceptable)

1. The abortion clinic experience.
  2. Prior history of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse.
  3. The stigma of having an abortion.
3. The primary challenge of conducting rigorous research on the topic of abortion and mental health outcomes is \_\_\_\_\_.
    - finding enough participants willing to be a part of the study
    - determining an appropriate follow-up time
    - finding an appropriate unit of analysis for mental health outcomes
    - ✓ finding an appropriate comparison group to women who had an abortion

Explanation: Most previous studies have compared the mental health outcomes of women who had an abortion to women who miscarry or who have pregnancies that are carried to term. The trouble with comparing these two groups of women is that their experiences and circumstances are inherently different. When studies compare these two groups, they may erroneously attribute any differences to the abortion, when in fact these differences more likely stem from a woman's circumstances around the time she decides to have an abortion or carry to term.