
Abortion Paper in British Journal of Psychiatry Triggers Panel Resignation



BBC News has been informed that an independent panel resigned amid a dispute over controversial research concerning the impact of abortion on the mental health of women.

The research, which is currently used in US legal cases related to restricting abortion access, was initially published in the British Journal of Psychiatry in 2011.

Last year, the panel established to address complaints regarding the paper, and advised for it to be withdrawn. However, the Royal College of Psychiatrists decided to override the recommendation, stating that the research had already undergone a full investigation.

The 2011 systematic review conducted by U.S. Psychologist, Prof Priscilla Coleman, concluded that there was an 81% increased risk of developing mental health issues after having an abortion.

When Prof Coleman's paper was first published in 2011, it received significant scrutiny, with 10 letters sent to the British Journal of Psychiatry criticising the quality of the research, calling for the paper to be retracted.

One signatory, Prof Julia Littell, an expert at Bryn Mawr College, stated that she did not believe the results were reliable or credible, and the study did not meet the best practice standards of that time.

In 2022, as the research continued to influence women's healthcare decisions in the U.S., some of the same scientists urged for the work to be retracted.

In response, the British Journal of Psychiatry formed an independent panel to thoroughly investigate the complaints. The panel dedicated four months to evaluate the research and raised significant doubts regarding the methodology employed. Specifically, they were concerned that the data had been combined in a way that the same women were counted multiple times, potentially skewing the results.

Eventually, the independent panel recommended that the paper should be retracted, however this never materialised.

Panel member and Harvard psychiatrist, Dr Alex Tsai, told the BBC, "Our recommendation basically disappears into the ether".

The situation surrounding the paper appears to be complex and has raised concerns about the potential influence of legal threats on the actions of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

When the British Journal of Psychiatry approached Prof Coleman with the intention of putting a notice on her article to raise awareness about possible issues with the research, there were strong objections from her lawyers.

A spokesperson for the Royal College of Psychiatrists said that the decision to reject the request for the article to be retracted appears to have been made after careful consideration of several factors, including the fact that the article has already been subject to a full investigation.

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Published on : Wed, 26 Jul 2023