

Abortion and crime rates have been linked

She wanted to party.

Her parents said she should stay at home and take care of her child. One sister was already out, she would be no help. Another sister accused her of "always taking advantage". In desperation she tried to phone her "Ex". No answer. In frustration and anger she threw her infant against the living room wall.

I believed her when she said she was genuinely sorry for what she did. I also believed her when she said she was too young, too wild, and not ready for a child. Frankly, I did not think that she would be ready for the responsibility of parenthood for a long time. I wondered what would happen to "Baby John" who was already showing signs of attachment disorder.

Traditional psychology focuses on the individual. What was wrong with this woman? Can counselling help her? Perhaps.

What about "Baby John"? What will he be like when he grows up? Will he be anti-social? Will he engage in crime? How will he treat his children? Will counselling help him?

This column is not about counselling. It is about an experiment in social psychology U.S.America unwittingly performed on itself. This column is about abortion and its effect on crime.

In Canada the crime rate has been steadily dropping for the past 30 years. We believe this has something to do with the social safety net, the aging of the population and, perhaps, improved rehabilitation and training programs. But, as anyone who has taken my statistics class knows, correlation does not prove causation. Just because it can be shown that the average age of people in Canada has increased while the crime rate has dropped does not mean the two facts are directly connected.

The U.S. experienced a big drop in the crime rate from 1991 to 1997: 30% in murder, 20% in violent crime, 15% in property crime. The crime rate in "states" with similar demographics dropped but at different times. In effect, states whose crime rate did not drop until much later acted as "controls" for the other states. If two neighboring states are similar for unemployment, age and social programming yet the crime rate of one drops while the other remains constant, then causation may be inferred.

Stanford University's John Donohue III and University of Chicago's Steven Levitt refused to let this opportunity slip by. The prestigious U.S. Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology described their research entitled "The Impact of Legalized Abortion on Crime," as "a remarkable piece of scholarship".

Five states legalized abortion by 1970 and they experienced a drop in crime ahead of all other states. The U.S. Supreme Court made abortion legal throughout the U.S. in 1973 but abortions were not immediately available everywhere. Donohue and Levitt found that states in which

abortions were readily available in 1973 experienced their drop in crime two years before those who had abortions readily available in 1975. Donohue and Levitt estimate that legalized abortion during the 1970s was responsible for almost half of the drop in crime in the U.S. during the 1990s.

When something controversial is published in science, it is put up for review for other scientists. Other scientists have vigorously attacked the research but have been unable to find substantial problems with it. The question is not whether legalized abortion has had an effect on crime rates but whether the effect is as great as Donohue and Levitt have estimated.

By 1980 the number of abortions performed in the United States reached 1.6 million annually. Most mothers who sought abortions did not want, or were not ready for, children. The result has been fewer unwanted children. This results in fewer children who, thru no fault of their own, are born into "Baby John"-like dysfunctionality. These "Baby Johns" are more likely to grow up conduct disordered. Delinquency in youth often becomes criminality in adulthood.

The message in all this is that every child should be a wanted child. Those who still want to make abortions illegal have a problem here. They will need to find some new way of making every child a wanted child or they will be condemning their own children to life in a more violent and crime-filled society.