

Crisis Pregnancy Centres

Highlighting **misinformation, bias,**
and **poor quality practice** in independent
pregnancy counselling centres in the UK

Education
↔
For Choice



Introduction by Simon Blake OBE, Chief Executive of Brook

Brook was founded in 1964 – just a few years before women could access safe, legal abortion in this country. As a charity we are dedicated to providing accurate, unbiased and non-judgemental information on pregnancy choices to the thousands of young people who access our services each year. To me, it is remarkable that almost 50 years after the introduction of the 1967 Abortion Act some people still contest a woman's right to choose.

I was saddened to read in this report many extensively documented examples of misleading, inaccurate and emotionally manipulative information disseminated by so-called 'crisis pregnancy centres' (CPCs). At Brook we have to work constantly to dispel myths about abortion that many young people believe, such as that it is linked to breast cancer, or to infertility, or to mental health conditions – myths that can cause harm to vulnerable people, especially young women.

This is not the first time that CPCs have been scrutinised and found wanting, and questions must be asked about why promised reforms to their operations – such as undertaking not to carry out directive counselling, or to hand out potentially distressing materials – have not been kept. It is simply immoral and unacceptable to masquerade as a service that helps clients make decisions through exploring choices, when the reality is – as this report based on young women's experiences shows – that at some CPCs you get a mixture of misinformation, coercion and fright tactics (I emphasise *some*, not all). Services should be upfront and honest about their ethos and the services they provide so that women can choose to access the support they require.

I would like to personally thank Laura Hurley for her determination to ensure that choice truly is a choice, two individual donors for funding this important work, and most of all the team of dedicated young investigators who gave their time freely in the hope of improving pregnancy decision support. This is an important publication, I recommend it to you.



Simon Blake OBE
Brook CEO



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Education For Choice (EFC) is a project within the national young people's sexual health charity Brook. We are dedicated to ensuring that young people can make and act on their own, informed choices about pregnancy. EFC believes that young people are entitled to accurate, evidence-based information and good quality, non-directive support around pregnancy and abortion.

www.efc.org.uk

efc@brook.org.uk

Executive summary

When faced with an unplanned pregnancy, people of all ages deserve impartial, non-judgemental and medically accurate information in order to make a fully informed decision. Unfortunately, some services in the UK offering pregnancy counselling are not providing this support but instead providing potentially damaging and obstructive misinformation relating to pregnancy and abortion.

What are 'Crisis Pregnancy Centres'?

Crisis Pregnancy Centres (CPCs) are organisations independent of the NHS that offer some form of counselling or discussion around pregnancy. Our research has identified 135 operating across the UK and over half of these centres also offer sex and relationships education (SRE) to local schools.

Unlike Government registered 'Pregnancy Advice Bureaux'¹ these centres are unregulated. Because they do not refer for abortion they are not subject to the Department of Health's 'Required Standard Operating Principles'. Counselling as a profession is not subject to regulation, although both Life and Care Confidential, the two main providers of CPCs, are currently registered with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), which requires members to abide by its Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy².

The research

135 CPCs belonging to various networks were identified using online searches. From 2012–2014 just under a quarter of these centres (33) were visited by volunteer 'mystery shoppers'. A wider audit of all the identified CPCs' websites and online materials was also carried out.

What information are CPCs giving?

The majority of centres mystery shopped were found to be giving misleading information on the mental and physical health outcomes of abortion, and/or using inappropriate language and emotional manipulation when it came to discussing pregnancy options.

- Two centres which were mystery shopped falsely linked abortion to an increased risk of breast cancer: **"the only other thing that has been reported with quite strong evidence is the increase in the possibility of breast cancer following termination of pregnancy."** Oxford Care Centre (*Life*, December 2013)
- Counsellors fabricated or misrepresented other potential physical complications of abortion, with some centres claiming that abortion causes infertility: **"There's more risk of infertility from termination than there is from giving birth ... some reports will say as low as one percent risk of infertility from termination and some will say as high as 25%."** Central London Women's Centre (*Good Counsel Network*, November 2013)

1 Department of Health, *Sexual Health General Information: Pregnancy Advice Bureaux* http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Healthimprovement/Sexualhealth/Sexualhealthgeneralinformation/DH_4063860 (accessed 07/02/14)

2 British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, *Ethical Framework* www.bacp.co.uk/ethical_framework (accessed 07/02/14)

- Ten centres associated abortion with 'Post-Abortion Syndrome', a bogus medical disorder which is unrecognised by any medical body: **"For a lot of girls it's a lot like PTSD {Post Traumatic Stress Disorder}, it's called Post Abortion Syndrome and it can come in varying degrees."** Acorn Pregnancy Centre, Stockport (Care Confidential, October 2013)
- Five of the counsellors shared religious beliefs **"I do believe that God gives a gift of a baby."** Reading Lifeline (Care Confidential, December 2013)
- Three counsellors at Care Confidential affiliated centres gave out booklets produced by U.S anti-abortion organisation Focus on the Family which were used to discuss fetal development: **"We believe, you know, from the moment of conception it's forming ... up to the first 12 weeks everything's formed in a baby."** Stillwaters Crisis Pregnancy Centre, Birmingham (Care Confidential, January 2014)
- 18 counsellors exhibited poor quality counselling, giving value judgements on abortion and adoption, or sharing personal experiences: **"I actually had an abortion when I was young."** Unnamed Centre (Care Confidential, December 2012)
- Two centres which were mystery shopped offered ultrasound scans. Their promotional materials make it clear that scans are carried out with the sole intention of persuading people not to have abortions: **"One Pregnancy Centre in the USA reported that 90% of their clients kept their babies after seeing them on ultrasound... We already can show women video footage of babies being scanned at different stages of pregnancy – but showing them their own baby is an even more profound experience, they can see that their baby is alive and kicking and that he or she is by no means a 'blob of tissue'"**. Good Counsel Network website³

Summary of findings

- The quality of services provided by centres within the same networks is extremely variable.
- Significant numbers of CPCs are spreading myths about abortion via their websites, leaflets and/or counselling sessions.
- 'Counsellors' belonging to organisations registered with professional bodies such as the BACP and the Association of Christian Counsellors (ACC) are offering poor-quality services which fly in the face of best practice guidance and counselling ethics.
- As well as being signposted to by the NHS Choices website⁴, a number of CPCs have established links with the NHS, and some claim to be receiving referrals from local GPs and hospitals. At least four Care Confidential affiliated CPCs are located in GP practices or hospitals.⁵

3 The Good Counsel Network, *Newsletter* www.goodcounselnet.co.uk/upload/Scan%20appeal%202011.pdf

4 NHS Choices, *Abortion* www.nhs.uk/conditions/abortion/pages/introduction.aspx

5 Dorchester Pregnancy Care Centre in Prince of Wales Surgery: www.careconfidential.com/Dorchester/Default.aspx

Enfield Directions in Forest Road Group Practice: www.careconfidential.com/London-Enfield/Default.aspx

Alternatives Stamford in Stamford and Rutland hospital: www.cpft.nhs.uk/services/Alternatives-Stamford.htm

Alternatives Brighton in Royal Sussex County Hospital: www.alternatives-brighton.org/royalsussexhospital.html (all accessed 07/02/14)

Conclusion and key recommendations

What this report makes clear is that there is currently no well-regulated network of independent pregnancy advice centres offering good quality, consistent support outside of conventional NHS, sexual health and abortion service-provider settings. Health commissioners and those signposting to pregnancy services should investigate fully their local service before recommending, promoting or funding them in any way.

- Commissioners should provide workforce training for all local professionals who might be providing pregnancy decision-making support and assess local services offering pregnancy counselling to ensure that they are evidence-based and impartial.
- Those providing kite-marking or accreditation of pregnancy counselling services or the information they disseminate should monitor them regularly and ensure they are compliant with best practice.
- Organisations running networks of CPCs should be transparent about their ethos, aims and motivation so that they do not mislead members of the public, funders, commissioners, schools or health providers as to the service they provide.
- Organisations that claim to be providing an impartial, evidence-based and professional service must demonstrate their commitment to monitoring their centres and ensuring that they all comply with good practice, and must take urgent action to close any centres which are not compliant.
- Those centres which are providing ethical, evidence-based pregnancy counselling services should disassociate themselves from their umbrella organisations if they do not offer consistent good quality services across their whole networks.

This report will be sent to representatives at the NHS, BACP and those coordinating the Information Standard scheme to ensure that they are aware of the poor practice which has been uncovered and encouraged to support compliance with best practice.

Full report

What are 'Crisis Pregnancy Centres'?

Crisis Pregnancy Centres (CPCs) are organisations independent of the NHS that offer some form of counselling or discussion around pregnancy. Our research has identified 135 operating across the UK. Over half of these centres also provide sex and relationships education (SRE) to local schools and some specifically market their services to young women. The NHS Choices webpage on abortion recommends Care Confidential – the largest national network of CPCs – as a provider of 'post-abortion counselling'⁶ as well as directly signposting to over 30 of its individual centres. Medical professionals and members of the public have also reported finding CPC advertising materials in GP practices and other health settings.

Unlike Government registered 'Pregnancy Advice Bureaux'⁷ these centres are unregulated. Because they do not refer for abortion they are not subject to the Department of Health's 'Required Standard Operating Principles'. Counselling as a profession is not subject to regulation, although both Life and Care Confidential, the two main providers of CPCs, are currently registered with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), which requires members to abide by its Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy⁸. Care Confidential also holds the Information Standard quality mark, a scheme commissioned by NHS England, which seeks to demonstrate that the organisation is **"demonstrating their commitment to trustworthy health and care information as well as providing assurances of the quality of their internal processes"**.⁹

Why the need for this report?

Education For Choice (EFC) is often asked by public health commissioners and health and education practitioners, whether their local CPC offers an acceptable service. Ongoing public spending cuts mean that free services will be attractive to commissioners. Local areas may be concerned about whether to signpost young women to CPCs, or whether they should provide them with the funding or publicity they are, increasingly, requesting. Care Confidential has stated that it **"recognises the opportunity for the commissioning of local centres so they routinely receive referrals from local GPs"**.¹⁰ It seems timely to provide some guidance in this area.

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- 6 NHS Choices, *Abortion* www.nhs.uk/conditions/Abortion/Pages/Introduction.aspx (accessed 07/02/14)
 - 7 Department of Health, *Sexual Health General Information: Pregnancy Advice Bureaux* http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publichealth/Healthimprovement/Sexualhealth/Sexualhealthgeneralinformation/DH_4063860 (accessed 07/02/14)
 - 8 British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, *Ethical Framework* www.bacp.co.uk/ethical_framework (accessed 07/02/14)
 - 9 The Information Standard, *What Does the Information Standard Mean?* www.theinformationstandard.org/description (accessed 07/02/14)
 - 10 Care Confidential, *The New Care Confidential (September 2011 Newsletter)* www.careconfidential.com/Newsletters/TheNewCareConfidential.aspx (accessed 07/02/14)

Full-scale research reports from the United States¹¹, Ireland¹² and Canada¹³, indicate that often CPCs do not provide impartial pregnancy decision-making support and that many are formed with a specifically anti-abortion agenda. This report outlines the first in-depth investigation of CPCs in the UK. Initial research in this area includes:

- Our own 'snapshot' of CPC activity, featured in the Guardian in 2011¹⁴
- A Channel 5 news report which gives a shocking account of the kind of false information given to those seeking help and advice with pregnancy¹⁵
- A 2011 BBC Newsnight investigation into Care Confidential's practice¹⁶
- 2012 advocacy from a feminist group in Cambridge which took action on CPCs in their area.¹⁷

This report seeks to raise awareness of poor quality practice in this area, and encourage health professionals and individuals to pay close attention to local CPCs in order to clearly determine the standard of service they are offering.

Why does good pregnancy decision-making support matter?

Provision of evidence-based, impartial, non-directive information and support is the foundation of good practice in clinical and counselling settings. Good quality pregnancy decision-making support has positive public health outcomes. Those who are able to make an informed decision are more likely to be satisfied with their decision, whatever they choose – coercion and ambivalence in decision-making is associated with negative emotional outcomes.¹⁸ The American Psychological Association's report on mental health and abortion suggests that stigmatisation of abortion may create problems in itself:

“A sociocultural context that encourages women to believe that they ‘should’ or ‘will’ feel a particular way after an abortion can create a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby societally induced expectations can become confirmed”.¹⁹

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- 11 United States House of Representatives Special Investigations Division (2006) *False and Misleading Health Information Provided by Federally Funded Pregnancy Resource Centers* www.chsourcebook.com/articles/waxman2.pdf and NARAL Pro-Choice America Foundation, *The Truth about Crisis Pregnancy Centers* www.prochoiceamerica.org/media/fact-sheets/abortion-cpcs.pdf (both accessed 07/02/14)
- 12 Irish Family Planning Association, *Rogue Crisis Pregnancy Agencies in Ireland* www.ifpa.ie/sites/default/files/documents/media/publications/rogue_agency_factsheet.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)
- 13 Pro-Choice Action Network (2009) *Exposing Crisis Pregnancy Centres in British Columbia* www.prochoiceactionnetwork-canada.org/Exposing-CPCs-in-BC.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)
- 14 Ben Quinn, The Guardian (2011) *Abortion: Pregnancy Counselling Centres Found Wanting* www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/aug/02/abortion-pregnancy-counselling-found-wanting (accessed 07/02/14)
- 15 YouTube, *5 News Undercover* http://youtu.be/-ecV_qVr4FU (accessed 07/02/14)
- 16 YouTube, *Care Confidential Say Abortion is “Wickedness”* www.youtube.com/watch?v=brkgRnLWbZ8 (accessed 07/02/14)
- 17 Feminist Action Cambridge, *Press Release: Cambridgeshire Pregnancy Advice Centres Misleading Women* <http://feministactioncambridge.wordpress.com/2012/12/14/press-release-cambridgeshire-pregnancy-advice-centres-misleading-women> (accessed 07/02/14)
- 18 Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (2011) *Induced Abortion and Mental Health* www.nccmh.org.uk/reports/ABORTION_REPORT_WEB%20FINAL.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)
- 19 American Psychological Society (2008) *Report of the Task Force on Mental Health and Abortion* www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/abortion/mental-health.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

Providing misinformation and delaying access to abortion for those who have chosen it is unethical as it can increase stress and anxiety.²⁰ Abortion is safer the earlier in pregnancy it takes place, there is likely to be a greater choice of abortion method and anaesthesia, and less need to travel. The health benefits of early abortion are widely recognised,²¹ and facilitating early access to abortion (and antenatal services) without delay should be a key criterion of counselling services. Those who are fully supported through the pregnancy decision-making process should also receive information about protecting themselves against STIs and accessing contraception, to prevent subsequent unintended pregnancies.

Who runs CPCs in the UK?

We identified 135 CPCs operating in the UK. Some are independently run, as charities, often with church backing, and others belong to more established networks. For example, the anti-abortion organisation Life runs 26 pregnancy counselling centres across the UK and Care Confidential oversees a network of just under a hundred independently run centres from Plymouth to Aberdeen.

The CPCs featured in this report were found using internet searches and listings sites like Yell.com, mostly appearing under the 'abortion advice and services' or 'pregnancy testing' categories. The centres visited represent the two main independent pregnancy advice networks – Care Confidential and Life, as well as centres managed by smaller religious groups such as The Good Counsel Network and Image.

Life:

The charity Life was established in 1970 **“to uphold the utmost respect for human life from fertilisation (conception) until natural death”**.²² As well as providing pregnancy counselling at its 'Care Centres' Life provides school speakers, claiming, in its 2012 accounts, to have reached over 30,000 young people in that year.²³ In the summer 2012 newsletter, a Life school speaker talks about signposting a young woman to one of their Care Centres:

“I was telling a story a counsellor had shared with me and an incredibly brave girl stood up in front of the whole year group and said: ‘That’s exactly how I feel, I had an abortion two weeks ago.’ Thankfully, I was able to put her in contact with our counselling service”.²⁴

Life claims that its Care Centres provide **“non-directive counselling and support for anyone facing an unplanned pregnancy”**²⁵ but its most recent accounts state that the service is not 'flourishing as it should':

“Many of our Care Centres, while often doing admirable work in providing material support to needy mothers with unborn or born children, are not reaching many who are the prime ‘target’ of our service, namely, women in danger of going down

20 World Health Organisation (2012) *Safe Abortion: Technical and Policy Guidance for Health Systems* www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK138197 (accessed 07/02/14)

21 NHS Choices, *Abortion: When it is Carried Out* www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Abortion/Pages/When-should-it-be-done.aspx (accessed 07/02/14)

22 Life, *Mission* www.lifecharity.org.uk/mission (accessed 07/02/14)

23 Life (2012) *Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 30 June 2012* http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends55/0001128355_AC_20120630_E_C.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

24 Life (2012) *Lifenews Summer 2012 Issue 63* www.lifecharity.org.uk/files/LIFENEWS_63.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

25 Life, *Care* www.lifecharity.org.uk/care (accessed 07/02/14)

the abortion road. In short, we are not saving lives on the scale that we used to do. This is very worrying, all the more so since we have not been able yet to find the route to recovery.”²⁶

This desire to 'save lives' by targeting women who are considering abortion, does not cohere with Life's claim that its counselling is 'non-judgemental' and 'non-directive'. Life is an organisational member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) which requires members to exhibit a **“commitment to consistency between what is professed and what is done.”²⁷**

The charity currently sits on the Government's Sexual Health Forum²⁸ – the appointment in 2011 caused some controversy in the press regarding Life's expertise and suitability to advise on matters of sexual and reproductive health.²⁹ Since gaining this position, Life has removed much of its online content which gives overt misinformation relating to contraception and abortion. However, Life's 'After Abortion' leaflet³⁰ falsely links abortion to mental health problems, increased risk of suicide, breast cancer, placenta praevia and ectopic pregnancy (all of which are discounted by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists' professional guidelines on abortion).³¹

In 2013 Life received £292,000 from the Big Lottery Fund, in part towards its counselling work.³²

Care Confidential:

Care Confidential became an independent charity in July 2011. It was originally a project within an organisation named Christian Action Research and Education (CARE) which has a history of anti-abortion campaigning and lobbying against LGBT equality.³³ The school education programme Evaluate³⁴ still functions under the auspices of CARE³⁵ but is currently offered by a number of Care Confidential affiliated centres, suggesting some ties remain between the two organisations.

Care Confidential has been awarded the 'Information Standard' quality mark, and, according to the website this standard evidences that the **“organisation has undergone a rigorous assessment and that the information they produce is clear, accurate, impartial, evidence-based and up-to-date.”³⁶**

26 Life (2012) *Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 30 June 2012* http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends55/0001128355_AC_20120630_E_C.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

27 British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, *Ethical Framework* www.bacp.co.uk/ethical_framework (accessed 07/02/14)

28 Gov.UK, *Policy Advisory Group: Sexual Health Forum* www.gov.uk/government/policy-advisory-groups/sexual-health-forum (accessed 07/02/14)

29 Ben Quinn, *The Guardian* (2011) *Anti-Abortion Group Drafted in as Sexual Health Advisor to the Government* www.theguardian.com/society/2011/may/24/abortion-sexual-health-coalition (accessed 07/02/14)

30 Life, *After Abortion* www.lifecharity.org.uk/files/pdfs/Flyer_abortion_web.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

31 The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (2011) *The Care of Women Requesting Induced Abortion: Evidence Based Clinical Guideline 7* www.rcog.org.uk/files/rcog-corp/Abortion%20guideline_web_1.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

32 Life, *Life Wins Big Lottery Fund Grant* www.lifecharity.org.uk/lottery-funded (accessed 07/02/14)

33 Wikipedia, *Christian Action Research and Education* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Action_Research_and_Education (accessed 07/02/14)

34 Evaluate: Informing Choice, *Welcome* www.evaluate.org.uk/Groups/16649/evaluate_informing_choice.aspx (accessed 07/02/14)

35 CARE, *Evaluate* www.care.org.uk/getinvolved/evaluate (accessed 07/02/14)

36 The Information Standard, *What Does Information Standard Certification Mean?* www.theinformationstandard.org/description (accessed 07/02/14)

Previous mystery shopping of Care Confidential's services showed that centres in London and Coventry were giving ill-informed and misleading information about abortion.³⁷ These centres no longer appear to be operating.

Care Confidential is also an organisational member of the BACP and, like Life, some of its centres have received Lottery funding (such as Plymouth Pregnancy Crisis Centre³⁸ and Choices Aberdeen).³⁹

Further information on three other organisations which run CPCs is given in Appendix Two.

The research

Information audit

135 CPCs were identified using online searches. Information was collated from individual centres' websites and details available on the Charity Commission website. There may be more centres which were not captured by this audit.

Mystery shopping

Volunteers were recruited across the country to 'mystery shop' CPCs in their local area. Mystery shoppers were advised to be as natural and neutral as possible, and to present as someone who was pregnant and unsure or undecided about their options. Where possible, each visit was recorded and transcribed and selected quotes (which do not name mystery shopper or counsellor) have been included in this report. We have referred to 'counselling' and 'counsellors' in this report, even though, arguably, many of these centres are not providing a professional counselling service.

All mystery shopping visits included in this report are from 2012–2014. In total, just under a quarter (33) of centres identified were visited. The visits were carried out in areas where there were willing volunteers, and there was an attempt to include centres representing a range of organisations, and geographical locations. The majority of visits took place in England.

What advice and information are CPCs giving?

There was a range of quality in terms of the service offered by different centres, but unfortunately the majority of those which were mystery shopped were found to be giving misleading information and/or biased and unprofessional counselling.

The results of the mystery shopping reflected misinformation found using an information audit of individual centres' websites and materials. Overall, 38 out of 135 CPCs gave some form of misinformation about physical health and abortion,

37 Ben Quinn, *The Guardian* (2011) *Abortion: Pregnancy Counselling Centres Found Wanting* www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/aug/02/abortion-pregnancy-counselling-found-wanting (accessed 07/02/14)

38 The Plymouth Herald (2012) *Two Community Projects Scoop £10,000 Lottery Funding Windfall* www.plymouthherald.co.uk/community-projects-scoop-pound-10-000-lottery/story-17044799-detail/story.html (accessed 07/02/14)

39 The National Lottery, *Your National Lottery Good Causes* www.lotterygoodcauses.org.uk/project/choices-aberdeen-pregnancy-counselling-centre-ltd (accessed 07/02/14)

and 53 centres mentioned 'post-abortion syndrome' (a set of mental health symptoms unrecognised by medical bodies) in their materials or counselling sessions.

As well as providing educational workshops to local schools (often free of charge) some CPCs specifically market their services directly to young (or otherwise vulnerable) women. For example, Alma Pregnancy Advisory Service has a '16 and Pregnant' tab on its website,⁴⁰ and Alternatives in Watford runs 'Girl About': **"lunch time clubs in five of Watford's twelve secondary schools every week (coming into contact with around 120 girls each week)"**.⁴¹ The Central London Women's Centre, which has been found to be giving extremely inaccurate and biased information about abortion, has a 'teen pregnancy service' and offers a special phone number for 'Irish visitors'.⁴²

We have included sample extracts from some of the mystery shopping visits below to illustrate some of the poor-quality practice which has been uncovered:

Misinformation about abortion

Some counsellors gave inaccurate information about abortion which is at odds with scientific evidence on reproductive health. This misinformation is likely to affect someone's ability to make an informed choice about their pregnancy, and may make them reluctant to seek further medical care. In certain cases, misinformation can cause direct harm – for example, the myth that abortion causes infertility has been found to be common amongst young people and **"can be a major factor in unintended pregnancies"**, with young women failing to use contraception following abortion, believing that they were unable to get pregnant again.⁴³

Misinformation about physical health and abortion

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) states that **"There are no proven associations between induced abortion and subsequent ectopic pregnancy, placenta praevia or infertility"**.⁴⁴ In spite of this, approximately a third of CPCs visited linked abortion to **infertility** and/or presented infrequent complications without context or likelihood.

Two Care Confidential centres gave out an old leaflet (with the CARE registered charity number on it) which lists 'relative infertility' as a possible outcome of abortion.

A counsellor at the Central London Women's Centre, run by a religious anti-abortion organisation called The Good Counsel Network said:

"There's more risk of infertility from termination than there is from giving birth. Depending again, one of the problems with everything, depending what report you read, some reports will say as low as one percent risk of infertility from termination and some will say as high as 25%, which is massive."

40 Alma Pregnancy Advisory Service, *16 and Pregnant?* www.almapregnancy.org.uk/16andPregnant.aspx (accessed 07/02/14)
 41 Alternatives Watford, *Girl About* <http://alternativeswatford.co.uk/index.php/girlabout> (accessed 07/02/14)
 42 <http://wcn.vpweb.co.uk/default.html>
 43 Government Office For London (2010) *Young People in London: Abortion and Repeat Abortion* www.bpas.org/js/filemanager/files/tpyoungpeopleinlondonabortionandrepeatabortion.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)
 44 The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (2009) *Induced Termination of Pregnancy and Future Reproductive Outcomes* www.rcog.org.uk/induced-termination-pregnancy-and-future-reproductive-outcomes-%E2%80%93-current-evidence (accessed 07/02/14)

**Parenting
Adoption
Abortion**

what shall I choose?

There may be some risks involved:

- Infection
- Bleeding
- Damage to the cervix or womb
- Relative infertility

Afterwards, some women feel an initial sense of relief but, later on, may feel:

- A sense of loss
- Grief
- Guilt or regret
- Anger

Some women also experience: tearfulness, wanting another baby, problems on anniversary dates, relationship problems, bad dreams and problems being near babies.

You are more likely to experience these reactions if:

- You are being pressurized into an abortion
- You feel you have no choice
- You have strong maternal feelings
- You have had depression
- You have a late abortion for a diagnosed abnormality
- You don't feel comfortable with the idea of abortion

It's important that you have both practical and emotional support. An advisor from your local pregnancy centre can help you develop your support network.

CareConfidential
For pregnancy and post-abortion support

Leaflet title:
Care Confidential
Parenting
Adoption and
Abortion leaflet
Given out:
Anchor
Pregnancy
Counselling
Centre,
Woking 2012 and
Pregnancy
Helpline,
Manchester 2012

The Good Counsel Network states on its website that:

“Physically, there are many threats to a woman’s future ability to carry a pregnancy to term. Miscarriages, ectopic pregnancies and sterility are often reported following abortions. Damage to the cervix, infections and heavy bleeding are common complications.”⁴⁵

A counsellor at The Grove in Bedford (Care Confidential) claims that:

“they tend not to do surgical terminations because there’s an increased risk of damage to the woman’s cervix [...] it can lead in future pregnancies to err to, the pregnancies falling through the cervix.”

Cancer Research UK has confirmed that abortion does not increase the chance of developing **breast cancer**.⁴⁶ Despite this, a purported link has been promoted by anti-abortion organisations, including Life.⁴⁷

A Life counsellor stated the following:

“Counsellor: So, the only other thing that has been reported with quite strong evidence is the increase in the possibility of breast cancer following termination of pregnancy.”

Mystery shopper: Really?

45 The Good Counsel Network, *About Good Counsel* www.goodcounselnet.co.uk/About-Good-Counsel.html (accessed 07/02/14)


46 Cancer Research UK (2004) *Pregnancies that end in Miscarriage or Abortion do not Increase a Woman’s Risk of Developing Breast Cancer* www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-us/cancer-news/press-release/pregnancies-that-end-in-miscarriage-or-abortion-do-not-increase-a-womans-risk-of-developing-breast (accessed 07/02/14)

47 Life, *After Abortion* www.lifecharity.org.uk/files/pdfs/Flyer_abortion_web.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

Counsellor: That’s usually mostly if you have breast cancer in the family and if there’s a predisposition in the family to it and it’s because the breast cells are sort of turned on during pregnancy and if they’re not turned off by going through the whole process and producing milk, preferably breast feeding, but at least finishing the pregnancy, the fact they’re sort of turned on proliferating can increase the risk.”

A Care Confidential CPC in Essex claims on its website that **“some studies show a higher susceptibility to breast cancer”** (for someone who has had an abortion).⁴⁸ A visitor to a Care Confidential centre in Harrow was given an older CARE leaflet stating **“possible risk of breast cancer”** under the heading ‘abortion risks’.

Parenting Adoption Abortion



..... what shall I choose?

Abortion: what’s involved?

- Abortions are done for free under the NHS, either in the hospital or private clinics.
- There are various methods of abortion and you will need to sign a consent form to say that you agree to the procedure.
- If you are under 35 and less than 9 weeks pregnant, you may be offered RU486. You are given a tablet to take, followed later by a vaginal pessary which lead to an abortion.
- More usually, up to the 14th week of pregnancy, you are given a general anaesthetic and a suction abortion.
- Later abortions mostly involve going through labour and delivery, but you will have to check this as it varies from hospital to hospital.

There may be some risks involved:

- Infection
- Bleeding
- Damage to the cervix or womb
- Possible risk of breast cancer

Afterwards, some women may experience:

- A sense of loss
- Grief
- Guilt or regret
- Anger

continued →

Leaflet title:
CARE What shall I choose?
Given out:
Crossroads Crisis Pregnancy Centre, Harrow 2012

Other counsellors were clearly ill-informed and **lacked accurate information about abortion procedures** and **used language which betrayed a lack of neutrality** or evidence-based approach. For example, when asked about medical abortion a Life counsellor in Oxford told a mystery shopper that **“it is possible that you will be on your own when you abort your baby, you know, possibly in the toilet, that’s what usually happens”**. Similar language was used by a Foundation For Life counsellor in Tyneside who spoke of medication which **“removes the baby from the womb”** or, in later surgical abortion where **“they’d use forceps to remove the baby”**.

At a Care Confidential centre in Newmarket the counsellor reads from a list of possible complications but clearly has very little knowledge of the practical information around abortion:

“There’s more danger with the medical than with the surgical one that some bits will be left and then you have to have a D and C, they scrape the inside of the womb, that’s quite common, people have it for all sorts of different reasons, I’ve never had

48 The Lighthouse Family Trust, *Abortion* www.lighthouseft.org.uk/abortion.php (accessed 07/02/14)

one myself so I don't know what it's like, I don't think it's all that comfortable, but you know it's not a ghastly thing [...] I'm not medical you'll have gathered that. [...]

Further surgical intervention when the abortion is incomplete, 1 in a 100, so that's quite a lot isn't it, infection, untreated STIs, perhaps we might talk about that. There's likely to be a higher risk of miscarriage and preterm labour but they haven't put any, there's no stats for that. So treat that with a pinch of salt, for the moment".

At more than one centre the counsellor got the abortion time limit wrong and encouraged the mystery shopper to 'Google' abortion methods they were unsure about. Unfortunately an unguided internet search for abortion is likely to result in a number of misleading websites offering false information and potentially distressing images:

"Google it as well ... OK? Cos I think that up to 9 weeks is the tablet. And between 9 and 12 there is something ... I don't know if it's a D and C and then 12 weeks is the vacuum suction. But ... I mean you ... you can have an abortion up to 20 something weeks in this country".

Care Confidential, Birmingham

Misinformation about mental health and abortion

Most women have little alternative but to bury these painful feelings in order to survive. The abortion is sometimes a secret. The woman herself may fear being judged or misunderstood.



If family or friends do know, they are often uncertain how to react or talk about it without hurting her feelings.

This buried pain is sometimes called post-abortion stress.

If you are suffering following an abortion, help is available.

Some of the most regularly repeated untruths our mystery shoppers heard from counsellors were those involving inflated claims of mental health risks following abortion, namely related to **'post-abortion syndrome'**,⁴⁹ a bogus medical disorder which has been discredited by, amongst others, the American Psychological Association.⁵⁰ In 2011 the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (UK) published a systematic review of the mental health outcomes of abortion which found that **"the rates of mental health problems for women with an unwanted pregnancy were the same whether they had an abortion or gave birth"**.⁵¹

42% of all CPCs mentioned post-abortion trauma/stress/syndrome in their materials. Of those mystery shopped, ten out of 33 centres mentioned 'post-abortion trauma/stress/syndrome' as a potential risk of abortion:

"There aren't really statistics; they reckon it's something like 25% of women who've had abortions need quite long term counselling after it. Sometimes immediately, sometimes years on if something's triggered. And some men. There aren't really, there are get outs for abortion is fine, who are ... who would deny that women suffer from what's called Post Abortion Stress but that's because they don't want to acknowledge it". *Life, Reading*

Leaflet title:

CARE/Care Confidential

Have you experienced an abortion

Given out:

Pregnancy Helpline, Manchester 2012

49 Education For Choice (2011) *Mythbusting Monday: 'Post Abortion Syndrome is a Recognised Medical Condition'* <http://educationforchoice.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/myth-busting-monday-post-abortion.html> (accessed 07/02/14)

50 American Psychological Society (2008) *Report of the Task Force on Mental Health and Abortion* www.apa.org/pi/women/programs/abortion/mental-health.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

51 Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (2011) *Induced Abortion and Mental Health* www.nccmh.org.uk/reports/ABORTION_REPORT_WEB%20FINAL.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

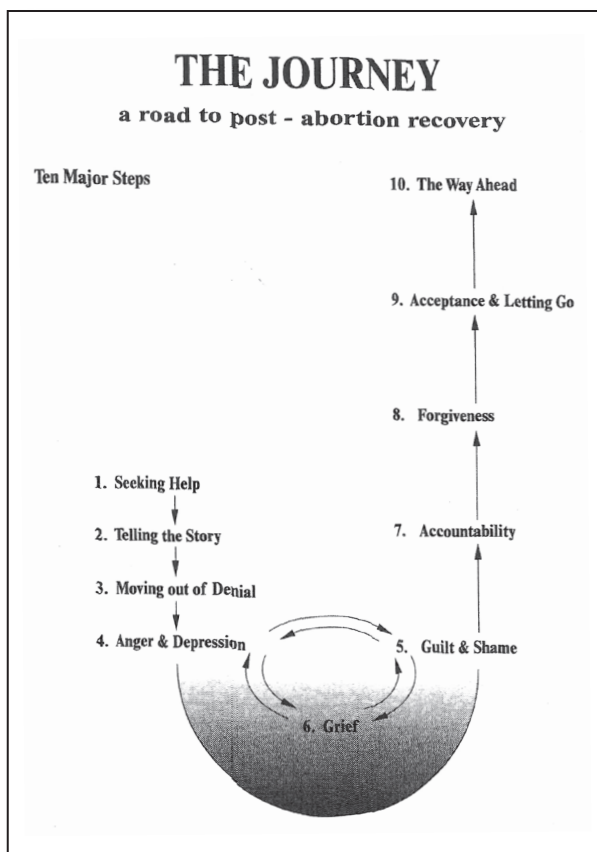
“The other thing with abortion is the psychological effect umm ... of post abortion trauma ... of ... the grieving that you lost, ‘cause you know at the moment for some girls it seems like a very quick option, you know and it’s a half day you go in, you’re out but you are left with the emotional turmoil of what you’ve done”
Care Confidential, Birmingham

Counsellors gave misleading information on mental health outcomes following abortion, claiming it would lead to **depression, trauma** and various other problems:

“Not necessarily of course but there’s an increased risk of depression in women who’ve had an abortion compared to women who’ve had a baby or aren’t pregnant at all... Post natal depression tends to be fairly time limited for a period of months and then it passes whereas the depression from an abortion could be longer term. Some women find themselves looking back or having flashbacks, thinking what would it have been like, some women find it hard to be round children”. *Tyneside Pregnancy Advice Centre, Foundation For Life*

One counsellor even claimed that abortion is linked to crime:

“And if suddenly if you are having a termination then you will feel really angry and depressed, then you know why ... rather than thinking ‘oh you know what, I’m suddenly feeling like this...’ and as an extreme we understand that termination has been linked to crime.” *Chelmsford, Care Confidential*



Care Confidential centres routinely offer 'The Journey' – a ten week programme of post-abortion counselling which takes a woman through various steps such as “**Accountability: After the grieving process, a woman may become more open to the part she played in the abortion, and willing to face its consequences**”.⁵²

Poor quality/biased counselling

Through mystery shopping CPCs, volunteers discovered that a number of those offering ‘impartial’ or ‘non-directive’ counselling were doing no such thing. In addition to offering misinformation on abortion, many of those claiming to act as counsellors did not adhere to best practice in this field. This was particularly concerning in the case of Life and Care Confidential counsellors as both of these organisations are members of the BACP.

Leaflet title:

The Journey process

Given out:

Lighthouse Centre, Chelmsford 2014

52 Options Wimbledon, *Curious About Our 'Journey Programme'?* <http://optionswimbledon.org/blog/post/curious-about-our-journey-programme> (accessed 07/02/14)

A worrying number of the **counsellors gave personal information** about their own experiences, or those of their family. This flies in the face of appropriate behaviour in a counselling setting:

“I mean all these things I’m just telling you this because I actually had an abortion when I was young and nobody taught me anything and I just wish they had at the time so I had had an informed decision that I could make.”

Care Confidential Centre (we have not named this centre in order to protect the identity of the counsellor)

Counsellors also shared religious views. Although at least 25 Care Confidential centres are based in church buildings, Care Confidential claims to be a secular organisation.

“I do believe that god gives a gift of a baby, but I also believe ... and Christians speak of a pardoning god, who understands the dilemmas we’re in, and our human frailty. That we can, either perhaps feel a sense of needing to apologise to him for, and find freedom from. If you were a Christian, that’s what a Christian would do.” *Reading, Care Confidential*

“It’s a crisis to us but from God it’s kind of a gift. So we need to get used to what God has given you instead of him getting used to our way of working. Do you see what I mean?” *Birmingham, Care Confidential*

As well as sharing their own opinions and experiences, some counsellors displayed particular judgements when it came to pregnancy and abortion. Some CPCs exhibited a **clear bias towards adoption** regardless of the client’s own account of what might be best for them. Adoption was often presented not just as a valid option to consider with its own benefits and disadvantages, but as the moral option, and one that a better, braver, more generous person would choose.

A Care Confidential counsellor in Bedford repeatedly refers to adoption as a ‘loving option’ whilst talking negatively about abortion:

“The nurses will say to us you know we hate to do abortions because we know that half of these young people will regret it afterwards and they’ll wish that they’d given their child life even if they can’t look after the child themselves, so you know it’s a very good option ... you have got this sort of generous heart that you seem to feel that you could carry the baby and place it for adoption that would be a wonderful thing to do because you would be giving that baby life. Er, which is a wonderful gift isn’t it?”

“It’s certainly a very kind and generous option when there are many people who are desperate to have babies and, you know, if you feel you’re not in a position to look after a baby”. *Oxford, Life*

“And obviously adoption is a very brave option... You have given the baby many chances and there are so many people wanting to adopt babies but can’t because of the abortion rights”.

Chelmsford, Care Confidential



If you are pregnant, now you have the facts you need to make informed decisions to ensure a healthy pregnancy for you and your baby. You'll want to talk to your health care provider about getting regular prenatal care, making healthy nutritional choices, and deciding what kind of exercise will keep you feeling fit. As concerns come up, and they will, talk to your health care provider so that you can have confidence that you are taking good care of yourself and your baby. Of course, babies set their own timetables, and every pregnancy is different, but isn't it amazing to consider the incredible development that happens in the first nine months of life?

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Leaflet title:
Focus on the Family – The First Nine Months

Given out:
Options Pregnancy Crisis Centre, Ashford 2014
Options Wimbledon Resource Centre, London 2012
Pregnancy Helpline, Manchester 2012

Some counsellors showed **images of fetal development** to mystery shoppers, in three Care Confidential centres a leaflet entitled 'The First Nine Months'⁵³ produced by U.S anti-abortion organisation Focus on the Family⁵⁴ was given out:


“So you’ll probably be about 14 weeks so that’s sort of what its little hands will be like, that’s 14 weeks, that’s so the baby’s able to urinate and swallow, it’s three inches long, and its body is rapidly growing and you can see the beginnings of fingernails and toenails. It’s coordinated enough to suck its thumb, so it develops really really rapidly so you know don’t think it’s a blob of jelly ‘cause it won’t look like that, so you know you just need to be warned really.”
Bedford, Care Confidential

The counsellor at Tyneside Pregnancy Advice Centre (administered by 'Foundation For Life') also showed images of fetal development and told the mystery shopper she could come back next week for an **ultrasound scan**. A promotional leaflet for this centre states:

“Our fully-trained nursing staff are able to offer an ultrasound scan to those who attend, enabling a mother to see her baby’s heartbeat from 6 weeks’ gestation.

Focus on the Family estimate that up to 75% of women who see a scan of their baby will decide to proceed with the pregnancy... We have heard of about 20 women who have decided to keep their baby after their visit to the Centre – some have already given birth. How encouraging to think that these lives have been spared and mothers protected from the trauma of abortion.”

53 Options For Women/Focus on the Family, *The First 9 Months* www.optionsforwomen.net/Downloads/Brochures/First_Nine_Months.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)
54 Focus on the Family www.focusonthefamily.com (accessed 07/02/14)



Ultrasound

Our fully-trained nursing staff are able to offer an ultrasound scan to those who attend, enabling a mother to see her baby's heartbeat from 6 weeks' gestation.

Focus on the Family estimate that up to 75% of women who see a scan of their baby will decide to proceed with the pregnancy, compared with 15% who receive counselling only.

We have heard of about 20 women who have decided to keep their baby after their visit to the Centre – some have already given birth.

How encouraging to think that these lives have been spared and mothers protected from the trauma of abortion.

The Good Counsel Network, which administers The Central London Women's Centre, also makes its intentions clear when describing the centre's ultrasound service:

“We now have London's first pro-woman, pro-life ultrasound scanning service, aimed at offering women who are considering abortion a free scan of her baby. As you may remember from our Christmas Newsletter we were looking at more ways of saving babies from abortion. As we stated then one Pregnancy Centre in the USA reported that 90% of their clients kept their babies after seeing them on ultrasound... We already can show women video footage of babies being scanned at different stages of pregnancy – but showing them their own baby is an even more profound experience, they can see that their baby is alive and kicking and that he or she is by no means a ‘blob of tissue’”.⁵⁵

Links to the NHS

Worryingly, a number of CPCs have established links with the NHS, and some claim to be **receiving referrals from local GPs and hospitals.**

A counsellor at the Manchester Care Confidential centre (which is also affiliated with anti-abortion organisation Image) states that she works as a ‘nurse in gynaecology’ at the local hospital and that the counselling centre receives referrals from there:

“We have GPs and also from the hospital 'cause I work there I can get referrals from the nurse practitioners there... We're trying to get into the GPs because they haven't got time to sit for hours because I can sit with you for hours if you need me because that's what we do, because we're concerned for you girlies that you're going through these crises”.

The counsellor at Huntingdon Care Confidential claims that **“the hospital usually give our cards”** and in Bedford Care Confidential the counsellor implies that their counselling service is provided through the local hospital:

“I work at the hospital at the abortion clinic talking to young ladies who aren't sure what they want to do, they're very very upset.”

At least four Care Confidential affiliated **CPCs are located in GP practices or hospitals.**⁵⁶

55 The Good Counsel Network, *Newsletter* www.goodcounselnet.co.uk/upload/Scan%20appeal%202011.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

56 Dorchester Pregnancy Care Centre in Prince of Wales Surgery: www.careconfidential.com/Dorchester/Default.aspx
 Enfield Directions in Forest Road Group Practice: www.careconfidential.com/London-Enfield/Default.aspx
 Alternatives Stamford in Stamford and Rutland hospital: www.cpft.nhs.uk/services/Alternatives-Stamford.htm
 Alternatives Brighton in Royal Sussex County Hospital: www.alternatives-brighton.org/royalsussexhospital.html (all accessed 07/02/14)

Care Confidential is listed as a provider of post-abortion counselling on the NHS Choices site on abortion⁵⁷ and on NHS Direct Wales.⁵⁸ **Approximately 30 individual CPCs were signposted to on the NHS Choices website** (as of January 2014). Others were linked to on local NHS sites, often those specifically targeting young people, for example, the Cambridge and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust site on sexual health and pregnancy aimed at young people.⁵⁹

The Lighthouse Family Trust, which runs a Care Confidential affiliated CPC in Essex is listed on NHS Choices under 'pregnancy testing'.⁶⁰ The website of this centre gives medical misinformation (linking abortion to breast cancer and 'post-abortion stress'). During a mystery shopping visit to this centre in 2014, the counsellor reiterated misinformation about abortion and mental health, suggesting that it leads to trauma, anger, and even crime.

The counsellor also gave personal information about a family bereavement to make a point about grief 'triggers'. It is highly concerning that this centre has been linked to by the NHS Choices site without an assessment of the accuracy of the information given, nor the affiliations of the centre (which shares a trustee with the Christian Medical Fellowship,⁶¹ an organisation which consistently presents an anti-abortion agenda).

CPCs in prisons

Both Care Confidential and Image report counselling pregnant women in prison. Care Confidential lists involvement in five women's prisons: HMP Styal, HMP Send, HMP Peterborough, HMP Eastwood Park and HMP Holloway⁶² whilst Image report only working in HMP Styal.⁶³ It is currently unclear how both charities have come to occupy this role however it is clear that, at least in the case of HMP Holloway, Care Confidential is operating with the full knowledge of the NHS:

"Pregnant women are, on the whole, well supported and the quarterly maternal and paediatric care provider meetings which bring together senior managers and medical staff from Holloway, the Whittington and voluntary agencies."⁶⁴

Care Confidential claim to reach 500 service users annually.⁶⁵ Their service is provided by the Islington Choices branch and aims to provide "an unplanned-pregnancy advisory service and counselling support for pregnancy and child loss including post-abortion and post-adoption support".⁶⁶

57 NHS Choices, *Abortion* www.nhs.uk/conditions/Abortion/Pages/Introduction.aspx (accessed 07/02/14)

58 NHS Direct Wales, *Local Services* www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/localservices/viewlocalservice.aspx?id=1658 (accessed 07/02/14)

59 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust, *A Guide to Rough Times: Sexual Health, Pregnancy* www.cpft.nhs.uk/GTRT/Sexual-health-pregnancy.htm (accessed 07/02/14)

60 NHS Choices, *Pregnancy Testing: Lighthouse Family Trust* www.nhs.uk/ServiceDirectories/Pages/GenericServiceDetails.aspx?id=1551965 (accessed 07/02/14)

61 Charity Commission, *803069 Lighthouse Family Trust* <http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Showcharity/RegisterOfCharities/ContactAndTrustees.aspx?RegisteredCharityNumber=803069&SubsidiaryNumber=0> (accessed 07/02/14)

62 www.clinks.org/partnership-finder/43818 (Accessed 10/02/2014)

63 http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends32/0001141832_AC_20120405_E_C.PDF (Accessed 10/02/2014)

64 www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/publications/corporate-reports/imb/annual-reports-2012/holloway-2012.pdf (Accessed 10/02/2014)

65 www.clinks.org/partnership-finder/43818 (Accessed 10/02/2014)

66 www.clinks.org/partnership-finder/43818 (Accessed 10/02/2014)

Image spoke to 44 women in 2011.⁶⁷ It claims to have set up a “new women’s prison ministry”⁶⁸ in 2010 and publically asks supporters to “pray for the work in Styal prison.”⁶⁹

Women in prison have been shown to be at risk of delays, staffing shortages and a lack of information about their reproductive rights meaning that there is an increased likelihood that their access to services will be delayed.⁷⁰ It is therefore particularly vital that women in prison receive unbiased, timely and non-judgemental support when pregnant.

Summary of findings and the impact of CPCs

Advocacy campaigns led by organisations such as NARAL have documented CPC activity in the U.S.,⁷¹ our research demonstrates that many of these tactics are now being used in the UK. Here, practice varies widely between centres. At worst CPCs are operating in ways which are unethical, and go against all good practice principles that guide public health – for example providing evidence-based information and impartial, client-centred support. At best what they offer is acceptable, if not necessarily valuable since they do not provide ante-natal healthcare or abortion referral.

Summary of findings

- The quality of services provided by centres within the same networks is extremely variable.
- Significant numbers of CPCs are spreading myths about abortion via their websites, leaflets and/or counselling sessions.
- ‘Counsellors’ belonging to organisations registered with professional bodies such as the BACP and the Association of Christian Counsellors (ACC) are offering poor-quality counselling which flies in the face of best practice guidance and counselling ethics.
- CPCs are targeting young and vulnerable women who may have little knowledge of where to go to get good quality information and support.
- Life and CPCs belonging to the Care Confidential network provide education sessions in schools. Anti-abortion groups have been found to provide misinformation in educational settings and there is a need to be vigilant about the veracity of information provided on abortion.⁷²

67 http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends32/0001141832_AC_20120405_E_C.PDF (Accessed 10/02/2014)

68 www.imagenet.org.uk/20yearsimagenews.pdf (Accessed 10/02/2014)

69 www.imagenet.org.uk/plm.html (Accessed 10/02/2014)

70 www.maternityaction.org.uk/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/prisonsreport.pdf (Accessed 10/02/2014)

71 NARAL Pro-Choice America Foundation, *The Truth about Crisis Pregnancy Centers* www.prochoiceamerica.org/media/fact-sheets/abortion-cpcs.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

72 As shown in Education For Choice/Brook (2013) *Abortion Education in the UK: Failing our Young People?* www.brook.org.uk/images/brook/professionals/documents/page_content/EFC/abortioneducationreport.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

- At least two CPCs in the UK offer ultrasound scans with the express intention of persuading women out of having abortions. At the time of writing the report, only one of these centres was registered with the Care Quality Commission and in providing non-diagnostic scans are in contravention of guidance endorsed by the British Medical Ultrasound Society.⁷³
- NHS and some local authority websites are signposting to CPCs, adding legitimacy to these services – some CPCs are even located in NHS premises.

The potential impact of poor quality CPCs

- Young women may be diverted to CPCs and away from professionally-run and well-regulated clinical and counselling services.
- Medical misinformation may reduce someone's ability to make a truly informed choice about pregnancy, which is essential to future emotional health.
- Misinformation which overstates the risks of abortion may delay women from accessing abortion or deter them altogether (abortion is safer the earlier in pregnancy it is provided).
- Misinformation which raises the expectation of poor outcomes after abortion may cause unnecessary anxiety and distress.
- Counsellors who promote their own values and negative beliefs about abortion reinforce the stigma of abortion and may leave those who choose to have an abortion with feelings of shame and guilt.
- Those who have experienced unintended pregnancy are at risk of STIs and of future unintended conceptions yet no counsellor offered information about contraception or safer sex.

Recommendations

What this report makes clear is that there is currently no well-regulated network of independent pregnancy advice centres offering good quality, consistent support outside of conventional NHS, sexual health and abortion service-provider settings.

Health commissioners and those signposting to pregnancy services should fully investigate their local service before recommending, promoting or funding them in any way. In doing so they should be aware of any inconsistencies between the 'counselling' practice, the literature they provide, the information on their websites, and the ethos and information provided by their parent or umbrella organisations.

Commissioners should ensure that CPCs meet good standards of practice, and are transparent in what they believe and what they provide. Finally, with substantial cuts to public funds and an encouragement to turn to non-professionalised community organisations, commissioners should be mindful that free or cheap is not always good value or good quality.

⁷³ The British Medical Ultrasound Society, *Ultrasound Safety* www.bmus.org/about-ultrasound/au-safetystatement.asp (accessed 07/02/14)

Commissioners, educators and health providers should:

- Assess local services and mystery shop any that offer pregnancy counselling to ensure that they are evidence-based and impartial. For more information on delivering and evaluating pregnancy advice services see EFC's Pregnancy Decision Making Toolkit.⁷⁴
- Refuse to fund, promote, signpost to or host services that are not compliant with best practice.
- Promote reliable, reputable services and inform education, health and youth work professionals about any services which are not providing high quality services.
- Improve local SRE and ensure that groups delivering school workshops provide evidence-based information about contraception and abortion and signpost young people to reputable local services.
- Report and highlight bad practice where it exists, by making an official complaint (for misleading advertising, to the ASA) or contacting local health professionals and press contacts to spread awareness.
- Provide workforce training for all local professionals who might be providing pregnancy decision-making support.

Further we recommend that:

- Those providing kite-marking or accreditation of pregnancy counselling services or the information they disseminate should monitor them regularly and ensure they are compliant with best practice.
- Organisations running networks of CPCs should be transparent about their ethos, aims and motivation so that they do not mislead members of the public, funders, commissioners, schools or health providers as to the service they provide.
- Organisations that claim to be providing an impartial, evidence-based and professional service must demonstrate their commitment to monitoring their centres and ensuring that they all comply with good practice, and must take urgent action to close any centres which are not compliant.
- Those centres which are providing ethical, evidence-based pregnancy counselling services should disassociate themselves from their umbrella organisations if they do not offer consistent good quality services across their whole networks.

This report will be sent to representatives at the NHS, BACP and those coordinating the Information Standard scheme to ensure that they are aware of the poor practice which has been uncovered and encouraged to support compliance with best practice.

⁷⁴ Education For Choice, *Best Practice Toolkit: Pregnancy Decision Making Support for Teenagers* www.efc.org.uk/PDFs/Pregnancy-decision-making-toolkit.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

Appendix 1:

Key to CPCs which were mystery shopped

Between 2012 and 2014 33 CPCs were mystery shopped. These centres are listed below along with affiliation and the evidence which was collected.

Name of CPC	Location	Date of visit	Evidence collected	CPC website address and affiliation
Basingstoke Pregnancy Choices Counselling	Basingstoke	Jan 2014	Audio and transcript	Care Confidential www.careconfidential.com/Basingstoke/Default.aspx
The Grove Pregnancy Crisis and Post Abortion Centre	Bedford	Mar 2012	Audio, transcript and notes	Care Confidential http://thegrovepcc.org.uk
Stillwaters Pregnancy Crisis Centre	Birmingham	Jan 2014	Audio and transcript	Care Confidential www.careconfidential.com/Birmingham-KingsHeath/Default.aspx
Alternatives Pregnancy Counselling Centre	Brighton	Feb 2012	Transcript	Care Confidential www.alternatives-brighton.org
The Junction	Cardiff	Jan 2014	Audio and transcript	Care Confidential www.thejunctioncardiff.co.uk
Chelmsford Lighthouse Centre	Chelmsford	Jan 2014	Audio and transcript	Care Confidential www.lighthouseft.org.uk
The Haven	Cambridge	Dec 2012	Audio, transcript and leaflets	Care Confidential www.havencam.org
Amica Pregnancy Crisis Centre	Edinburgh	Dec 2013	Audio and notes	Care Confidential www.amicapcc.org

(continued)

Name of CPC	Location	Date of visit	Evidence collected	CPC website address and affiliation
Ely Pregnancy Crisis Centre	Ely	Dec 2012	Audio and transcript	Care Confidential www.lighthouse-ely.org/home/4576561624
Jakin Pregnancy Care and Counselling	Leicester	Aug 2012	Report compiled by Leicestershire Youth Service	Care Confidential http://thekingscentre.co.uk/jakin.php
Ashford Options Pregnancy Crisis Centre	Ashford, London	Jan 201	Audio and transcript	Care Confidential www.options-ashford.org.uk
Choices	Ealing, London	Dec 2012	Audio and transcript	Care Confidential www.careconfidential.com/London-Ealing/Default.aspx
Crossroads Crisis Pregnancy Centre	Harrow, London	Jul 2012	Leaflets	Care Confidential www.rlbc.org.uk/crossroadspregnancy
Crossway Pregnancy Crisis Centre	Twickenham, London	Jan 2014	Audio and transcript	Care Confidential www.crosswaypregnancy.org.uk
Choices Crisis Pregnancy Counselling	Walthamstow, London	Dec 2013	Audio and transcript	Care Confidential www.choicescounselling.org
The Gate	Westminster, London	Jul 2013	Audio, transcript and notes	Care Confidential www.thegatewestminster.org
Options Wimbledon Resource Centre	Wimbledon, London	Sep 2012	Transcript and leaflets	Care Confidential www.optionswimbledon.org
Pregnancy Helpline	Manchester	Sep 2012	Leaflets	Care Confidential/Image www.pregnancyhelpline.co.uk/aboutus.html

(continued)

Name of CPC	Location	Date of visit	Evidence collected	CPC website address and affiliation
Acorn Pregnancy Advisory Centre	South Manchester	Oct 2013	Audio and transcript	Care Confidential/Image www.acornpregnancycentre.org.uk
Newmarket Pregnancy Support Centre	Newmarket	Dec 2012	Audio and transcript	Care Confidential www.newmarketpregnancysupport.org.uk
Pregnancy Choices Norfolk	Norwich	Oct 2013	Audio, transcript and leaflets	Care Confidential www.pregnancy-choices.org.uk
sPACe	Oxford	Jul 2012	Audio, transcript and leaflets	Care Confidential www.spaceoxford.co.uk
Reading Lifeline	Reading	Dec 2013	Audio and transcript	Care Confidential www.readinglifeline.co.uk
Achor Pregnancy Counselling Centre	Woking	Jun 2012	Audio, transcript and leaflets	Care Confidential www.achor.org.uk
Yeovil Pregnancy Crisis Centre	Yeovil	Dec 2013	Audio and transcript	Care Confidential www.ypcc.co.uk
Life	Gloucester	Feb 2012	Transcript	Life www.lifecharity.org.uk
Life	Oxford	Dec 2013	Audio and transcript	Life www.lifecharity.org.uk
Life	Reading	Jan 2013	Audio and transcript	Life www.lifecharity.org.uk
Bolton Philippi	Bolton	Dec 2013	Audio and transcript	The Philippi Trust www.philippi.co.uk/index.php/bolton

(continued)

Name of CPC	Location	Date of visit	Evidence collected	CPC website address and affiliation
City Pregnancy	London	Dec 2013	Audio, transcript and notes	City Pregnancy Counselling and Psychotherapy www.citypregnancy.org.uk
Alma Pregnancy	Luton	Jan 2012	Audio and transcript	Unknown http://almapregnancy.org.uk
Central London Women's Centre	London	Oct 2013	Audio, transcript and leaflets	Good Counsel Network http://wcn.vpweb.co.uk/default.html
Pregnancy Advice Centre	Tyneside	Oct 2013	Audio, transcript and leaflets	Foundation For Life www.tyneside-pregnancy.org.uk

Appendix 2:

Case studies of organisations which run CPCs

The Good Counsel Network

www.goodcounselnet.co.uk

Charity Number 1096617 – ‘The Guild of Our Lady of Good Counsel’

The Good Counsel Network (GCN) is a ‘Catholic, pro-life group based in London’⁷⁵ (with a ‘sister site’ in Ireland).⁷⁶ They provide ‘counselling’ to pregnant women **“founded on prayer and the teachings of the Catholic Church”** as well as hosting ‘abortuary vigils’⁷⁷ outside abortion clinics in London.

The GCN website gives misinformation about abortion, such as claims of ‘post-abortion syndrome’ and **“many threats to a woman’s future ability to carry a pregnancy to term”**.⁷⁸ The website is clear that the counselling provided is intended to persuade women out of choosing abortion:

“This type of counselling is being successfully used around the world to save tens of thousands of lives. It is currently operating in Catholic Centres in the USA, Spain, Austria, Mexico, Ireland and the UK. Here in the UK we see hundreds of girls each year and about 70% will keep their baby after their visit. To date, through God’s grace and your support we have helped thousands of Mothers to change their mind and save their babies from abortion”.

To this end, GCN has purchased an ultrasound machine:

“We would love to be able to give women the chance to see their unborn babies, a moment that can change an abortion-minded woman’s views forever. One Pregnancy Centre in the USA reported that 90% of their clients kept their babies after seeing them on ultrasound”.⁷⁹

EFC has carried out mystery shopping visits to the GCN’s Central London Women’s Centre (aka Albany Women’s Centre) in 2008, 2011 and 2013 and each time the mystery shopper was given shocking misinformation about abortion. In 2013 the counsellor linked abortion to infertility, breast cancer, suicide, post-abortion emotional stress and ‘anniversary syndrome’. Two complaints about the Central London Women’s Centre have been upheld by the Advertising Standards Agency (put forward by EFC⁸⁰ and bpas⁸¹).

75 The Good Counsel Network, *Pregnant? Worried? Poster* www.goodcounselnet.co.uk/upload/Parish%20Poster%202010%20Maria%20Stops%20Abortion.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

76 The Good Counsel Network <http://goodcounselnetwork.org> (accessed 07/02/14)

77 The Good Counsel Network, *Abortuary Vigils* www.goodcounselnet.co.uk/Abortuary-Vigils.html (accessed 07/02/14)

78 The Good Counsel Network, *About Good Counsel* www.goodcounselnet.co.uk/About-Good-Counsel.html (accessed 07/02/14)

79 The Good Counsel Network, *Good Counsel News Issue 3 in 2010* www.goodcounselnet.co.uk/upload/GCN%20News%20Christmas%202010.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)

80 Advertising Standards Authority (2011) *ASA Adjudication on Albany Women’s Centre* www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2011/7/Albany-Womens-Centre/TF_ADJ_50995.aspx (accessed 07/02/14)

81 Advertising Standards Authority (2013) *ASA Adjudication on Central London Women’s Centre* www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2013/9/Central-London-Womens-Centre/SHP_ADJ_231985.aspx (accessed 07/02/14)

In the UK, 40 Days for Life campaigners give out leaflets which have the phone number for the CLWC on them⁸². GCN lists contact numbers in Manchester, Leeds, Leicester and Aberdeen as well as London.⁸³

Image

www.imagenet.org.uk

Charity Number 1141831 – ‘Image and Pregnancy Helpline’

LIFE BEFORE BIRTH

DAY ONE Each human life begins when one egg from the mother (ovum) is completely joined by one sperm from the father. This single cell that is formed at fertilisation has a new genetic blueprint (DNA), different from either parent, that will determine the sex, build, eyes, hair, skin tone, gifts and talents of the new person. It is a blueprint that will never be repeated, a unique individual. This is where you and I had our beginning.

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be

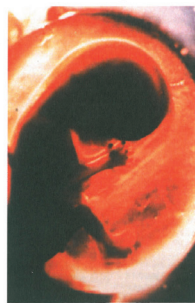
7 WEEKS The mother is about to miss her second period and may now know that she is pregnant. The heart is fully formed - in fact, it has been beating from day 21! The baby's liver is producing blood cells. Brain waves can be recorded and the brain is starting to control muscles and organs. The baby has begun to move and will respond to touch, moving away if tickled. There is development of the lungs, spinal cord, ears, nasal organs and teeth buds. Soon the eyelids will close to protect the eyes, which are becoming light sensitive, and reopen in the seventh month. Already the baby is more than 10,000 times bigger than the fertilised egg.



Your eyes saw my unformed body



10-12 WEEKS The baby is now fully formed and has his own unique fingerprints. It is possible to distinguish the sex of the child and, by using ultrasound technology, watch him sucking his thumb.



You knit me together in my mother's womb

He is pumping his own blood around his body, passing urine and bowel movements, swallowing and digesting. In fact, if you were to make the amniotic fluid sweet, he would swallow more; if sour, he would swallow less. He can smile, frown and respond to ultrasound signals. There are times when he sleeps but can be woken up by loud noises in the room or the mother doing something energetic. He is able to grasp an instrument in the palm of his hand.

All Bible quotations are from Psalm 139, NIV

image COUNSELLOR TRAINING MANUAL
SECTION 1 - BELIEFS AND VALUES

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Image is a Christian charity which is outwardly anti-abortion. Image organises a 'National Day of Prayer about Abortion', the prayer guide⁸⁴ for which encourages people to:

“Pray that those who advocate arguments which rationalize away the killing of unborn children would come to understand that the sanctity of human life is paramount”.

The online abortion 'factsheet' claims that **“over seven million babies have been killed by surgical abortion in Britain since 1967”**⁸⁵.

In its most recent accounts⁸⁶ Image states that its purpose is to **“educate young people to develop a sense of responsibility in regard to sexual behaviour”** and **“to promote the Christian faith and advance the education of the public in [...] recognising the sanctity of human life”**.

Image claims to have counselled just over 400 clients in 2011, including women in a local prison. Image acts as an administrator for the Challenge Team UK⁸⁷ education project which **“reached 1,500 pupils in the North-West with the option of saving sex for marriage”**.

Section of the Image Counsellor Training Manual – delivered in 2013

- 82 Education For Choice (2012) *40 Days for Lies?* <http://educationforchoice.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/40-days-for-lies.html> (accessed 07/02/14)
- 83 The Good Counsel Network, *Contact Us Page* <http://goodcounselnetwork.freemove.co.uk> (accessed 07/02/14)
- 84 Image, *Prayer Guide for the National Day of Prayer about Abortion* www.imagenet.org.uk/full%20prayer%20guide.pdf (accessed 07/02/14)
- 85 Image, *Abortion in Britain* www.imagenet.org.uk/factsheets_abortion.html (accessed 07/02/14)
- 86 Image, *Trustees' Annual Report for the Period 2011 to 2012* http://apps.charitycommission.gov.uk/Accounts/Ends32/0001141832_AC_20120405_E_C.PDF (accessed 07/02/14)
- 87 Challenge Team UK <http://challengeteamuk.com> (accessed 07/02/14)

Image has strong links with Care Confidential. According to the Care Confidential website, at least four of the Image counselling centres are affiliated to them. The individual centre websites also make this connection clear⁸⁸. Image is also a member of the Association of Christian Counsellors.⁸⁹

Two centres run by Image and affiliated to Care Confidential were mystery shopped as part of this research:

Acorn Pregnancy Centre, Stockport⁹⁰

(Situated in Hazel Grove Baptist Church)

Mystery shopped October 2013

The counsellor explains that she works as a nurse in gynaecology at the local hospital and that the centre receives referrals from there.

The counsellor goes on to give misinformation about abortion, and focuses heavily on mental health problems following abortion, including 'Post Abortion Syndrome' which is not a recognised medical condition:

“For a lot of girls it’s a lot like PTSD {post-traumatic stress disorder}, it’s called Post Abortion Syndrome and it can come in varying degrees. You can have the loss which is grief. At the moment you’ve got all your hormones going round getting you ready for this pregnancy to progress and that, all of a sudden does drop so you feel that loss OK.

... I think the whole thing about termination of pregnancy is, you are pregnant obviously there is another, there is a baby involved and for you as a mo ... as a woman it’s you with your hormones going round so there will be loss, its more emotional.”

Central Manchester Pregnancy Helpline, Manchester

Mystery shopped September 2012 (no audio or transcript available)

The mystery shopper who visited this centre was given two Image leaflets, three Care Confidential leaflets and a booklet of fetus images from U.S anti-abortion organisation 'Focus on the Family'⁹¹.

The Care Confidential leaflets bear the CARE logo, despite the fact that Care Confidential split from CARE in 2011. One leaflet suggests that 'relative infertility' is a risk of abortion and two of the leaflets give misleading information on mental health following abortion, listing **“depression, inability to be near babies and children (and) eating disorders, alcohol or drug abuse”**.

88 For example, Daylight www.lwcf.org.uk/daylight/preg.html (accessed 07/02/14)

89 Association of Christian Counsellors www.acc-uk.org (accessed 07/02/14)

90 Acorn Pregnancy Centre www.acornpregnancycentre.org.uk/index.html (accessed 07/02/14)

91 Focus on the Family www.focusonthefamily.com (accessed 07/02/14)

Foundation For Life

www.pregnancyadvicesalisbury.co.uk

Charity number 1154099 – Salisbury

www.tyneside-pregnancy.org.uk

Charity number 1119712 – Tyneside

The Tyneside Pregnancy Advice Centre (TPAC) opened in 2008 and was followed by a second centre in Salisbury in 2013. An American pastor named Dr Joel R Beeke spoke at the opening of the Salisbury centre⁹² – his publication 'Is abortion really so bad?' compares abortion to the Holocaust and the Second World War and claims that:

“Abortion is an attack upon a human person with the intent to kill. It is premeditated murder.”⁹³

Foundation For Life's stated charitable object is:

“To preserve and to protect the life and health of the most vulnerable people, especially (but not exclusively) unborn children from conception and their mothers.”

The Director of Foundation For Life, Chris Richards, is also the Director of education charity Lovewise – which has been shown to provide misinformation on abortion in its educational materials.⁹⁴

TPAC provides 'non-diagnostic ultrasound scans' and is clear in a promotional leaflet that this is done with the intention of influencing a decision about pregnancy:

“Focus on the Family estimate that up to 75% of women who see a scan of their baby will decide to proceed with the pregnancy... We have heard of about 20 women who have decided to keep their baby after their visit to the Centre – some have already given birth. How encouraging to think that these lives have been spared and mothers protected from the trauma of abortion.”

A mystery shopper who visited the centre in 2013 was given misinformation about physical and mental health risks of abortion:

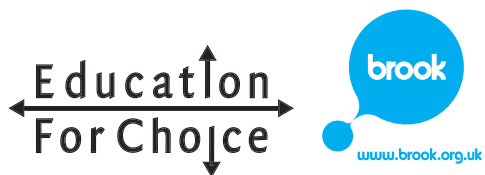
“On the physical side there's a risk of infection, it can affect future pregnancies – having an abortion adds an increased risk of miscarriage in future pregnancies, premature delivery and associated developmental problems with the baby. Risk of damage to the cervix.”

“Not necessarily of course but there's an increased risk of depression in women who've had an abortion compared to women who've had a baby or aren't pregnant at all.”

92 Foundation For Life Salisbury, *Invitation* https://scontent-a.xx.fbcdn.net/hphotos-ash3/t1/1005492_175603429294211_675254737_n.jpg (accessed 07/02/14)

93 The Apologetics Group, *Is Abortion Really So Bad?* <http://theapologeticsgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Beeke-Is-Abortion-Really-So-Bad.pdf> (accessed 07/02/14)

94 The Daily Mail (2012) *Christian Charity Tells Schoolchildren Abortion 'Doubles the Risk of Cancer'* www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2176020/Christian-charity-tells-schoolchildren-abortion-doubles-risk-breast-cancer.html (accessed 07/02/14)



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efc@brook.org.uk

www.brook.org.uk

020 7284 6040

50 Featherstone Street, London, EC1Y 8RT