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### **Confronting the Controversy of Rape and Pregnancy**

By Bradley Mattes

According to statistics from the CDC, approximately 1 out of every 6 American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime<sup>1</sup>. It is appalling to consider the millions of women who have been victimized. And if a woman becomes pregnant, her trauma will be multiplied as she is confronted with overwhelming pressure to abort her unborn child. This is an added assault on her humanity.

There has been a history of sharp controversy when it comes to the subject of rape and pregnancy. The 2012 election cycle erupted over the issue and resulted in an aggressive attack by the media and political operatives and pundits against pro-life candidates. Dr. Willke was drawn into the center of this firestorm when an article he wrote in 1999 became the focus of media scrutiny and was used to discredit the candidates and Dr. Willke himself. In it he discussed the occurrence of pregnancy following an assault rape. Dr. Willke explained multiple reasons why rape pregnancies are rare. He cites that one of the most important reasons a rape victim rarely gets pregnant is physical trauma. The stress and emotional factors can upset a woman's hormonal balance which can potentially impact ovulation, fertilization, implantation and nurturing of a pregnancy.

The media was quick to attack and manipulate the context of his writing by claiming he was saying that women could not get pregnant during rape. The *New York Times* stated, "to suggest that there's some biological reason why women couldn't get pregnant during a rape is absurd."<sup>2</sup> The *L.A. Times* called it a "bogus rape theory."<sup>3</sup> An article from *The Daily Beast* referred to Dr. Willke's claims as "junk science."<sup>4</sup> And the egregious *Jezebel* website stated, "Dr. Willke legitimately believes that ladies have magical parts that can be controlled by their witch minds. The man's a quack."<sup>5</sup> The media readily sought to discredit Dr. Willke, targeted only because of his pro-life ideology. However, their hyperbolae were not supported by facts. **There is a documented link between stress and the likelihood to conceive.**

It was not possible to have a reasoned discussion on the scientific facts related to this controversy while the media was in a frenzied attack. Now, outside the context of an election cycle, I'd like to present the prevailing consensus from the scientific community on this controversial topic.

Although no study specifically addresses rape and fertility, **there are several that confirm there is a relationship between stress and infertility**. Ironically, two of these studies were published in the *New York Times*. One measured the levels of the enzyme alpha-amylase, a biological indicator of stress, and found that women with higher levels took longer to become pregnant. Dr. Sarah Berga, head of obstetrics and gynecology at Emory University, stated, "The surprising finding was that even low levels of stress can have an impact on conception."<sup>6</sup> Dr. Alice D. Domar is the director of mind-body services at a Boston fertility center. She affirms the link between stress and infertility, "If you're really stressed out and depressed, the body seems to sense that's not a good time to get pregnant."<sup>7</sup> A study from Emory University School of Medicine researched the impact of stress on ovulation and concluded, "Stress is one of the most common and most commonly underappreciated causes of infertility and reproductive compromise in men and women."<sup>8</sup> [We've compiled a list of multiple studies](#) at our website that confirm Dr. Willke's assertion that stress can influence the likelihood of conception.

Why is the occurrence of pregnancy following rape such a subject of dissent? Pro-abortion advocates use rape as one of their primary justifications for abortion. Many laws are written to include rape as an exception. It's unthinkable to them that any woman would choose to carry a child conceived in rape.

It must be acknowledged that rape is a horrific trauma, but abortion is not the solution. A woman's pain is compounded first by being a victim of a violent act, then by enduring another violent act to cause the death of her unborn baby. Our response should be one of loving, compassionate support and affirmation of the value of both the mother and her baby.

- We reach out to every woman faced with a pregnancy after rape and say, "Your life and the life of your baby are both important. We want to love you both."
- It's a basic failure of human justice to force capital punishment on the innocent child for the crime of his or her father.
- Women don't need the violence of rape to be followed by the violence of abortion. We must instead provide for her needs, love her and nurture her.

It is an understatement to say the issue of rape and pregnancy is volatile, but what's indisputable is the knowledge of those who've experienced it firsthand. We've produced two TV programs and a radio special on the topic that can be valuable resources.

- In [Abortion: The Rape I Consented To](#), Nicole Cooley explains the pain that followed her decision to have an abortion. She said, "The abortion felt like I was being raped again, but I consented to it."
- Jason Lovins puts a face on the issue of pregnancy and rape. He was conceived when his mother was raped at the young age of 15. He shares his story in an episode entitled, [Conceived in Rape](#).

- Finally, Liz Carl chose to carry her baby and make an adoption plan. In *A Choice to Love*, she recalls, “People tell me all the time you are so strong for doing that. I say thank you, but all women are strong enough to love their child enough to give them life.”

As pro-lifers, rape and pregnancy can sometimes feel like an overwhelming subject to effectively address. However, we cannot afford to stay silent when these innocent lives are being viciously targeted. **We must be a voice of life for the child and the mother—we must love them both.**

*Life Issues Institute is dedicated to changing hearts and minds of millions of people through education. For over 22 years, organizations and individuals around the world have depended upon Life Issues Institute to provide the latest information and effective tools to protect innocent human life from womb to tomb.*

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<sup>1</sup> Black, M.C., Basile, K.C., Breiding, M.J., Smith, S.G., Walter, M.L., Merrick, M.T., Chen, J., Stevens, M.R. The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Belluck, P. (2012, August 20). Health experts dismiss assertions on rape. *New York Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/21/us/politics/rape-assertions-are-dismissed-by-health-experts.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/21/us/politics/rape-assertions-are-dismissed-by-health-experts.html?_r=0)

<sup>3</sup> Geiger, K. (2012, August 20). Todd Akin not alone in adhering to bogus rape theory. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/aug/20/news/la-pn-todd-akin-rape-theory-origins-20120820>

<sup>4</sup> Pesta, A. (2012, August 21). Todd Akin finds a friend in Dr. John Willke, a pro-life ‘Founding Father’. *The Daily Beast*. Retrieved from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/08/21/todd-akin-finds-a-friend-in-john-willke-a-pro-life-founding-father.html>

<sup>5</sup> Ryan, E.G. (2012, August 21). The doctor who taught Todd Akin all about legitimate rape is a real guy. And he’s crazy. *Jezebel*. Retrieved from <http://jezebel.com/5936611/the-doctor-who-taught-todd-akin-all-about-legitimate-rape-is-a-real-guy-and-hes-crazy>

<sup>6</sup> Rabin, R.C. (2010, August 16). Old maxim of fertility and stress is reversed. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/17/health/research/17stress.html>

<sup>7</sup> Parker-Pope, T. (2011, May 10). Lowering stress improves fertility treatment. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/10/lowering-stress-improves-fertility-treatment/>

<sup>8</sup> Berga, S.L. and Loucks, T.L. (2007). *Stress induced anovulation* [Brochure]. Atlanta, GA: Elsevier. Retrieved from <http://booksite.elsevier.com/brochures/stress/PDFs/berga.pdf>