




## New Zealand Schools Assist Students in Secret Abortions

Parents in New Zealand have recently been  appalled to discover that the country's schools are assisting teenage girls in obtaining secret abortions. Fox News explains:

According to ... [New Zealand's] *Sunday Star-Times*, statistics show that 3,950 New Zealand teens ages 11 through 19 had induced abortions in 2009. Of those, 79 were between 11 and 14 years old. Under section 38 of the Care of Children Act 2004, a female of any age can consent to an abortion. In 2004, lawmaker Judith Collins put forward an amendment to prevent girls under 16 from having an abortion without their parents' knowledge. The amendment was voted down.

One mother whose 16-year-old daughter had a secret abortion arranged by a school counselor, told the *Sunday Star-Times*, "I was horrified. Horrified that she'd had to go through that on her own, and horrified her friends and counsellors had felt that she shouldn't talk to us." According to the mother, the school counselor took her daughter for a "scan" and then to the doctors to have the procedure performed.

The mother, dubbed Helen, said that she had suspected something was wrong with her daughter, though the girl insisted that her daily tears were merely over everyday teenage dramas. Eventually, Helen confronted her daughter's friends, who confessed that the school counselor had helped her daughter pursue an abortion. "I didn't know they could do that," she said.

Even worse than the secrecy, Helen emphasized, was the inadequacy of the service the school counselor provided her child. The mother reported that the counselor "wasn't very forthcoming" with advice, and that once the abortion was performed, failed to provide follow-up counseling.

Another mother bemoaned a system that would allow her daughter to obtain an abortion without her mother's permission. "I went through the horror of knowing that under the legislation, they did not need to say anything to me."

New Zealand attorney Kathryn Dalziel explained that the country's educators are obligated by the Health Privacy Code to maintain the secrecy of the students:

When it comes to contraception and abortion, they [counselors] would need the consent of the person before they could share information with a parent or the school. If that protection disappeared, you can pretty well guarantee the young person won't tell the counsellor a thing — particularly the thing you need them to talk about.

A New Zealand teacher admitted to the *Sunday Star-Times* that she knew of a 13-year-old student who had had two abortions — one with her parents' permission, the other without.

Helen Bissett, a New Zealand guidance counselor, insisted that if school counselors were to violate that code, it would create an "ethical nightmare." She indicated that the entire reason for the secrecy is because young females are fearful of their parents' reactions. "In the heat of the moment, parents can say some pretty rough stuff."

Bissett explained the procedure by which counselors assist female students in obtaining abortions, indicating she talks to students "long and hard" about getting a member of the family involved in the



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process. She then arranges for the students to meet first with a doctor for tests and scans, and then with two certifying consultants, who inform the students of the health risks involved in the abortions. Students are then asked to sign a form indicating both understanding and consent before they undergo the abortions.

Sixteen-year-old Rayelene Mou exemplifies that the alternative to abortion, and maintaining an open communicative relationship with one's parents, is the better route, however. When Mou discovered she was pregnant at the age of 14, abortion was never a consideration. She knew that she could speak to her parents about her dilemma, despite the discomfort of the subject. "I've always been close to my mum. I can talk to her about anything," she said.

"When I first let them [other students at school] know I was pregnant, they looked at me like I was lying, so that was kind of hard," Mou explained. "They looked at me like I was too young, I can't be pregnant." In the end, however, Mou and her parents came to the decision that placing the baby for adoption was not an option.

Mou is now enrolled in the Teen Parent Unit at her school and is working toward a career in law enforcement, and happily reports that she has no regrets about her decision to keep her child.



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