Abortion's PSYCHO-SOCIAL Consequences citations for Fact Sheet

1/07

National Right to Life Educational Trust Fund

Abortion's Effect on RELATIONSHIPS

A Woman's Partner

Nearly half of women in one study said abortion had "significantly altered" their relationship with their partner. Breakups are common, even among couples with previously stable relationships.

Her Parents

If a woman's parents coerce her to abort, the parent-child relationship is likely to be damaged.⁴ If kept a secret, abortion can put distance between parent and child.⁵

Her Other Children

Women who have abortions are more likely to abuse their other children.⁶ Not surprisingly, children of aborting women have higher rates of behavior problems.⁷

Future Partners

Past abortions may be kept secret from husbands out of fear of judgement or rejection, though hesitancy to discuss the event creates distance. Women may become anxious or uncomfortable with sexual activity. Others may become promiscuous.

David H. Sherman, et al, "The Abortion Experience in Private Practice," in W. Finn, et al, eds, Women and Loss: Psychobiological Perspectives (New York: Praeger, 1985), p. 102. An illustration of how this plays out in a marriage relaionship is offered in the case of Ariel Balkind, detailed in Linda Bird Franck's The Ambivalence of Abortion (New York: Dell, 1978), pp. 149-152.

² Arthur B. Shostak and Gary McLouth, Men and Abortion: Lessons, Losses, and Love (New York: Praeger, 1984), p. 105 notes that 25% of 75 men interviewed at some interval (varied) after their partner's abortion said that abortion contributed to a breakup of the relationship.

Winfried Barnett, et al, "Partnership After Induced Abortion: A Prospective Controlled Study," Archives of Sexual Behavior, Vol. 21, No. 5 (October 1992), pp. 443-455. Barnett and colleagues found that 20 out of the 92 aborting couples, or 22%, in their study group had separated after one year. Among the 2,000 plus cases of post abortion trauma that Theresa Burke worked with, she encountered several women whose marriage dissolved as a consequence of their abortions. See Theresa Burke, Forbidden Grief (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2002), pp. 208, 212, 217.

⁴ Vincent Rue, Postabortion Trauma (Lewisville, TX: Life Dynamics, 1994). D. Crawford, M. Mannion, Psycho-Spiritual Healing After Abortion (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1989), p. 12. Individual anecdotes in P. Ervin, Women Exploited: the other victims of abortion (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1985), pp. 31, 33, 145, 147. A classic example in Burke's Forbidden Grief, pp. 23ffi. Another example is found in Burke, pp. 86-87.

⁵ Rue, p. 66. Burke offers an excellent example from a case history in *Forbidden Grief*, pp. 55-56.

⁶ Paula Kienberger Jaudes and Edem Ekwo, "Association of Drug Abuse and Child Abuse," Child Abuse & Neglect, Vol. 19, No. 9 (1995), p. 1070 showed an 89% increased risk of child abuse among aborting women. M.I. Benedict, R.B. White, D.A. Conley, "Maternal Perinatal Risk Factors and Child Abuse," Child Abuse and Neglect, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1985), pp. 217-224.

Priscilla Coleman, David C. Reardon, Jesse Cougle, "The Quality of the Caregiving Environment and Child Developmental Outcomes Associated with Maternal History of Abortion Using the NLSY Data," Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, Vol. 43, No. 6 (2002), pp. 743-757...

⁸ See Burke's example in Forbidden Grief, p. 100.

⁹ There sa Burke, Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2002), p. 203.

Edward O. Lauman, et al, "Sexual Dysfunction in the United States: Prevalence and Predictors," Journal of the American Medical Association, Vol. 281, No. 6 (February 10, 1999) p. 542 found women who had abortions were 34% more likely to report low sexual desire and 22% more likely to report arousal disorder. Janet Mattinson, "The Effects of Abortion on a Marriage," Abortion: Medical Progress and Social Implications, Ciba Foundation Symposium, 115 (1985), pp. 165-177 found an association between abortion and sexual and interpersonal conflict and extra-marital sexual affairs; David H. Sherman's, et al, "The Abortion Experience in Private Practice," Women and Loss: Psychobiological Perspectives, ed. "William F. Finn, et al, The Foundation of Thanatology Series, Vol. 3 (New York: Praeger Publications, 1985) study found 33% of women reporting that their sexual relations with their long term partners had been negatively affected; A June 1993 survey of patients at Akron Pregnancy Services, 105 E. Market Street, Akron, OH 44308 found 14% reporting frigidity after their abortions. Several studies summed up and cases presented in T. Reisser, "The effects of abortion on marriage and other committed relationships," Newsletter of the Association for Interdisciplinary Research in Values and Social Change, Vol. 6, No. 4 (May-June, 1994), p. 2. A. Torre-Bueno, Peace After Abortion (San Diego, CA: Pimpernel Press, 1997, p. 27.

Burke, Forbidden Grief, p. 147; examples, Margie, p. 89..

Other Relationships

Women may become negative or pessimistic about life in general 12 and avoid people and situations that remind them of the abortion. 13

REGRET & ABANDONMENT

Abortion advocates will tell you that the most immediate emotional reaction a woman has to her abortion is one of relief — relief that the crisis is over, relief that she can get on with her life.¹⁴ While this may reflect her state of mind when others are urging her on and she is struggling to justify her decision in the immediate aftermath, polls and studies indicate many women end up regretting that decision in the weeks, months, or years that follow.¹⁵

A 1989 Los Angeles Times survey found 56% of women who admitted having abortions felt guilty about them, and 26% mostly regretted the abortion. ¹⁶ Studies suggest that these numbers may be low, since negative reactions may be delayed, not surfacing for five or ten years. ¹⁷

Despite his promises, a woman's partner often leaves after the abortion. The clinic staff which offered its support is gone, and the woman has no desire to return to the place she associates with the event. Even friends who know hesitate to bring up the subject. This means, however, that a woman often deals with her pain, her doubts, her questions all alone.

As the male partner was often the only other one who knew of the abortion, ending the relationship left a large void in the subject's life, which contributed to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and alienation (p. 54).

¹² See Burke, Forbidden Grief, pp. 112, 115.

¹³ Douglas Crawford and Michael T. Mannion, Psycho-Spiritual Healing after an Abortion (Kansas City, MO: Sheed and Ward, 1985), p. 12.

Planned Parenthood says "Most women feel relief" on its "Risk and Effects" of abortion page at http://www.plannedparenthood.org/birth-control-pregnancy/being-a-parent.htm, accessed 9/15/06. Their Central Texas affiliate says that most experience relief and says abortion "can present an opportunity to reconsider attitudes and relationships. Many are happy to have a fresh start in life and be back to normal" (see "Successful Coping after an Abortion," accessed 9/15/06 at http://www.gynpages.com/ppct/coping.html).

Anne Nordal Broen, et al, have produced several studies comparing psychological outcomes of women having abortions and those having miscarriages at 10 days, six months, two years and five years, each finding significantly more anxiety and depression among abortion patients as time progressed. See Ann Nordal Broen, et al, "Psychological Impact on Women of Miscarriage Versus Induced Abortion: A 2-Year Follow-up Study," Psychosomatic Medicine, Vol. 66 (2004), pp. 265-271 and "The course of mental health after miscarriage and induced abortion: a longitudinal, five-year follow-up study," BMC Medicine 2005, 3:18.

¹⁶ George Skelton, "Abortion often causes guilt, poll finds," The Sacramento Bee, March 19, 1989, p. A7.

¹⁷ J. Trybulski warns about uncomfortable emotions and thoughts that surfaced months or years later following a woman's abortion in "Women and abortion: the past reaches into the present," Journal of Advanced Nursing, Vol. 54, No. 6 (June 2006), pp. 683-90.

¹⁸ See Sherman, Shostak, and Barnett above. Linda Bird Francke gives classic accounts on pp. 74 and 97. of *The Ambivalence of Abortion*. Burke offers examples from cases in *Forbidden Grief* on pp. 34, Ann Speckhard's study of thirty high stress aborters in *Psychosocial Stress following Abortion* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1987) found 46% of her subjects reporting a subsequent breakup with her impregnating parther, Speckhard observes:

Even forty years after her abortion, "Elsa" tells Linda Bird Francke that "even now I have trouble driving by the 72nd Street entrance to the West Side Highway in New York where his office was." Linda Bird Francke, *The Ambivalence of Abortion* (New York: Dell, 1978), p. 313. Burke quotes a woman in *Forbidden Grief* who says "I just can't go near that place. It freaks me out. I'd rather drive a hundred miles than have to pass that place. I just can't do it. It makes me sick" (p. 94; see also pp. 38-39). Also see Magyari, et al, 1987.

²⁰ Burke, Forbidden Grief, p. 55.

²¹ An example of such isolation is found in Burke's Forbidden Grief, p. 189.

POST-ABORTION SYNDROME

Professional counselors who have worked with women who have had abortions have recognized a cluster of reactions that fit the model of a post-traumatic stress disorder, a psychological dysfunction resulting from a traumatic experience which overwhelms a person's normal healthy defense mechanisms. ²² Some of the symptoms they have found to be typical are: ²³, ²⁴

FEELINGS EXPERIENCES

After abortion, experienced feelings of:	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Agreeing
Guilt	31.3%	61.3%	92.6%
Depression	35.7%	52.5%	88.2%
Anger	35.7%	45.1%	80.8%
Grief	40.8%	43.9%	84.7%
Regret	32.7%	52.1%	84.8%
Rage	21.2%	29.0%	50.2%
Loneliness	38.4%	45.2%	83.6%
Hopelessness	32.0%	41.3%	73.3%
Helplessness	31.5%	40.7%	72.2%
Anxiety	43.5%	37.9%	81.4%
Withdrawal	33.1%	31.8%	64.9%
Isolation	31.5%	30.3%	61.8%
Self-Hatred	33.2%	43.6%	76.8%
Alienation from others	31.9%	25.6%	57.5%
Having become degraded or debased	37.4%	30.0%	67.4%
Fear of harm to my other children	25.2%	23.4%	48.6%
Fear of another pregnancy	25.3%	23.7%	49.0%
Fear of making decisions	28.2%	20.0	48.2%

After abortion, experienced or felt:	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total Agreeing
Nightmares	28.6%	17.8%	46.4%
Insomnia	25.5%	19.3%	44.8%
Flashbacks	35.3%	28.1%	63.4%
Hysterical outbreaks	22.5%	28.3%	50.5%
Uncontrollable weeping	35.5%	34.3%	69.8%
Suicidal feelings	24.2%	31.6%	55.8%
A loss of self-confidence	38.2%	37.3%	75.5%
A loss of self-esteem	38.2%	44.1%	82.3%
Hallucinations related to abtn	6.9%	7.7%	14.6%
Eating disorders such as bulimia, anorexia, or binge eating	20.3%	18.3%	38.6%
An inability to keep jobs	15.9%	8.6%	24.5%
A loss of concentration	29.2%	18.2%	47.4%
Difficulty maintaining and developing personal relationships	30.1%	26.8%	56.9%
Need to block and stifle feelings	35.2%	44.0%	79.2%
started losing temper more easily	35.1%	24.1%	59.2%
became more violent when angered	26.8%	20.7%	47.5%
began to drink more heavily	19.3%	17.2%	36.5%
began to use, or increase use of drugs	21.4%	19.2%	40.6%

Different individuals experience different clusters of reactions. Examples of most of these can be found in case histories recorded in Theresa Burke's Forbidden Grief (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2002). For reference, these will be identified in following footnotes by Burke, FG (Forbidden Griefi) pseudonym case name and page number. Where there are studies dealing with particular symptoms, these will cited.

²² In the American Psychiatric Association's DSM-III-R (The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Third Edition, Revised) (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1987), the section on "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder" (pp. 247 ff) outlines the cluster of symptoms listed in the following text. In Chapter 2, laying out "Use of This Manual," abortion is specifically identified as one of the "psycho-social stressors to be considered" (p. 20).

Due to an demonstrated tendency of aborting women to conceal or even deny abortions (E.F. Jones and J.D. Forrest, "Under reporting of Abortion in Surveys of U.S. Women: 1976-1988," Demography, Vol. 29, no. 1 (1992) pp. 113-126), broad studies of the overall incidence post-abortion syndrome are hard to obtain. A study by Catherine Barnard that looked at 80 women in Baltimore who had abortions three to five years earlier found 19% meeting the criteria for diagnosable post-traumatic stress disorder (The Long Term Psychosocial Effects of Abortion (Portsmouth, NH: Institute for Pregnancy Loss, 1990). Burke in Forbidden Grief (p. 118) says this establishes a baseline of about one in five, but says the actual rate may be much higher, owing to a high rate of refusal in Barnard's interview (half of those contacted refused to participate). A study of 260 women by the Elliott Institute (The Post-Abortion Review, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Fall 1994), pp. 4-8) who self-identified as those experiencing megative emotional reactions to their abortion, however, helps profile the sorts of experiences and reactions such women might face, found on the list in the text and on the chart below.

- intense fear, ²⁵ anxiety, ²⁶ sense of helplessness ²⁷ feeling of loss of control ²⁸

- emotional numbing, ²⁹ difficulty recalling event³⁰ guilt, ³¹ pain, ³² grief, ³³ depression ³⁴ irritability, ³⁵ angry outbursts, ³⁶ aggressive behavior ³⁷ sleep difficulties ³⁸ sexual dysfunction ³⁹ flashbacks, ⁴⁰ nightmares, ⁴¹ anniversary reactions ⁴² withdrawal from relationships, ⁴³ avoidance of children ⁴⁴ pessimism regarding future ⁴⁵
- pessimism regarding future 45
- drug, alcohol abuse, 46 suicidal thoughts 47

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25 Burke, FG, cases of Molly, p. 112, Lisa, p. 123.
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²⁶ Burke. FG. case of Barbara, p. 123.

²⁷ Burke, cases of Jennifer, 112, Julie Anne, p. 131, Barbara, p. 232.

²⁸ Burke, FG, cases of Beverly, p. 34, Hanna, p. 61, Lee, 235-6, Michelle, 245.

Burke, FG, cases of Kimberly, p. 53, Sonnie, p. 117, Tasha, 203. See also the case of "Mona" in Nancy Michael's Helping Women Recover from Abortion (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1988), p. 32.

³⁰ Burke, FG, cases of Diane, p. 86, Betty, Varan, Katie, Jennifer, pp. 128-130.

³¹ Burke, FG, cases of another client, p. 75, Elizabeth, p. 78, Molly, p.111, Lee, 235-6, Bianca, 257.

Burke, F.G. cases of Michelle, p. 36, Anna Mae, 143, Sandra, 191, Connie, 260,

Burke, FG, cases of unnamed, p. 76, Heather, p. 115, Rebecca, 258.

³⁴ Burke. FG, cases of Carla, p. 85, Cindy, 228.

³⁵ Burke. FG, cases of Lee Ann (anger/rage), p. 121.

In the Eliot Institute study, 81% said the abortions provoked anger, with 50% describing their anger as "rage." Fifty nine percent said they lost their tempers more easily after the abortion, 48% reporting they became more violent when angered. Burke, FG, cases of Grace, p. 212, Camille, p.177, Lexie, p.152, Candice, p. 187.

³⁷ Burke, FG, cases of Judy, Sally, Micki, Marge, pp. 210-212.

³⁸ Burke. FG, cases of Jeanette, p. 96, Cecilia, p. 126.

³⁹ Burke, FG, cases of Ginny, Tanya, Janet, Corrie, Bernice, Kyra, Valerie, pp. 216-218.

⁴⁰ Burke. FG. cases of Suzanne, Evelyn, Carol, pp. 122-3.

⁴¹ Burke. FG, cases of Julie, p. 101, Olivia, Rebecca, Helaine Vivian, Ellen, pp. 124-5.

⁴² Burke. FG. cases of Rosetta, Bonnie, Carol, Rachel, pp. 97-99

⁴³ Burke, FG, case of Janet, p. 79.

⁴⁴ Burke. FG, cases of Carol, Peggy, Maryelle, p. 71.

⁴⁵ Burke, FG, cases of Mel. p. 76, Kari, p. 115, Karissa, p. 195.

⁴⁶ Burke, FG, cases of Monica, Jennifer, Amanda, Mary, Heidi, others, pp. 167-170.

⁴⁷ Burke, FG, cases of Gretta, p. 58, Janet, p. 173, Paulette, 174-175, Eleanor, 175, Jill, 176.

REAL HUMAN COST: Studies examining the records of over 50,000 California Medicaid patients from 1989-1994 found women who aborted having 2.6 times more psychiatric admissions in the first 90 days following pregnancy than women giving birth and 17% higher mental health claims over the following four years.⁴⁸

Self Abuse & SUICIDE

Self Destructive Acts

For some, abortion appears to be associated with eating disorders such as binge eating, bulimia, and anorexia. 49 Others become reckless, or attempt to cut or injure themselves. 50

Smoking

Women who have abortions are twice as likely to be or become heavy *smokers*⁵¹ and are more likely to continue smoking during subsequent pregnancies, ⁵² increasing the risk of developmental malformations⁵³ or fetal death. ⁵⁴

Substance Abuse 55

Greater alcohol abuse has been found among women having abortions, ⁵⁶ bringing with it greater risk of violent behavior, divorce, auto accidents, and job loss ⁵⁷ After their abortions, women are also more likely to abuse drugs, ⁵⁸ exposing them to other health and safety risks. ⁵⁹

Priscilla Coleman, et al, "State-Funded Abortions vs. Deliveries: A Comparison of Outpatient Mental Health Claims Over 4 Years," American Journal of Orthospsychiatry Vol. 72, No. 1 (2002), pp. 141-152 compared claims for first time outpatient mental health treatment in California between 14,297 aborting women and 40,122 women who gave birth four years after the event and found the rate of care 17% higher among the aborting group. Another study by P. Coleman and colleagues, "Psychiatric admissions of low-income women following abortion and childbirth," Canadian Medical Association Journal, Vol. 168, No. 10 (May 13, 2003), available at www.cmaj.ca/cgi/content/full/168/10/1253, looked at the records of 56,741 women in the California Medi-Cal system and found aborting women having 2.6 times more pyschiatric admissions than than women giving birth in the 90 days following the event.

⁴⁹ M.A. Blais, et al, "Pregnancy: Outcome and Impact on Symptomatology in a Cohort of Eating Disordered Women," International Order of Eating Disorders, Vol. 27 (2000), pp. 140-149 found a higher incidence of eating disorders among women having therapeutic abortion not seen among women having miscarriages or live births. Speckards study of thirty women stressed by abotion in Psycho-Social Stress Following Abortion (1987) found seven, or 23% reporting weight gain of 20 pounds or more. Twenty-three percent also reported anorexia, giving evidence of a loss of 25% of body weight, cessation of menses, hospitalization and/or clinical diagnosis of anorexia nervosa (pp. 51-54). Burke's account of several post abortive women's eating disorders among her case histories is found in Chapter 15 of her book, Forbidden Grief, pp. 187-200.

Burke accounts one case of a post abortive woman regularly attempting to cut or burn herself (p. 131), another who regularly tried to cut herself with knives, paperclips, sharp edges, "anything I could find" (p. 143). Burke gives another example of a woman who began to regularly drive at reckless speeds, getting in a series of accidents (p. 140).

⁵¹ Nygren Meirik, "Outcome of First Delivery After 2nd Trimester Two-Stage Induced Abortion: A Controlled Historical Cohort Study," Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica, Vol. 63, No. 3 (1984), pp. 45-50.

Erik B. Obel, "Pregnancy Complications Following Legally Induced Abortion: An Analysis of the Population with Special Reference to Prematurity," Danish Medical Rulletin, Vol. 26 (1979), pp. 192-99

C.D. Drews, et al, "The Relationship Between Idiopathic Mental Retardation and Maternal Smoking During Pregnancy," Pediattrics, Vol. 97, No. 4 (April 1996), p. 547 suggest that maternal smoking may be a preventable cause of mental retardation in smoking. J.C. Martin, "An Overview: Maternal Nicotine and Caffeine Consumption and Offspring Outcome, "Neurobehavioral Toxicology and Teratology, Vol. 4, No.4 (July/Aug, 1982), pp. 421-7 found reductions in birth weight and an increased rate of neonatal death among those smoking at least a pack a day. Martin also found a possible increase in congenital anomalie and compromised cognitive function in early and middle childhood.

J.F. Fielding, "Smoking and Women: Tragedy of the Majority," New England Journal of Medicine, Vol. 317, No. 21 (November 19, 1987), pp. 1343-5.

^{55 /}a good review of the scientific literature may be found in Priscilla Coleman's "Induced Abortion and Increased Risk of Substance Abuse: A Review of the Evidence," in Current Women's Health, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2005), pp. 21-34.

A 1981 random survey of 917 women in the U.S. found significantly higher raters of moderate (13%) or heavy (13%) A study of inner city adolescent mothers by H. Amaro, et al, "Drug Use Among Adolescent Mothers: Profile of risk," Pediatrics, Vol. 8, 4, No. 1 (July 1989) found, those with a history of induced abottion twice as likely to be involved with alcohol, marijuana, and cocaines (pp. 144-150).

⁵⁷ For accidents, see P.L. Zador, "Alcohol-Related Relative Risk of Fatal Driver Injuries in Relation to Driver Age and Sex," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, Vo. 52, No. 4 (1991), p. 302. The World Health Organization's *Global Status Report on Alcohol 2004* details "Social problems associated with alcohol use," including effects on the workplace, the family, poverty, and domestic violence on pp. 59-64, available at www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/globalstatusreportalcoholchapters/en/index.html

A study of yound women in New York state by K. Yamaguchi and DB Kandel, "Drug Use and Other Determinants of Premarital Pregnancy and Its Outcome: A

Suicide

More than half of women reporting post abortion problems in a study said they had thought of suicide, with 28% actually attempting it.⁶⁰ Government researchers in Finland found the suicide rate for women having abortions was three times the national average and nearly six times what it was for women giving birth.⁶¹

Dynamic Analysis of of Competing Life Events, Journal of Marriange and the Family, Vol. 49 (1987) found a 6.1 greater use of illicit drugs (other than marijuana) when there was a history of prior abortion (p.257).

⁵⁹ See WHO study, Neuroscience of Psychoactive Substance Use and Dependence (2004), pp. 12-13, available at www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/psychoactives/en/print.html

⁶⁰ Eliott Institute Study, cited earlier, reprinted in Burke, FG, pp. 287-300.

⁶¹ Mika Gissler, et al, "Suicides after pregnancy in Finland: 1987-1994; register linkage study," British Medical Journal Vol. 313 (1996), pp. 1431-4.