

The less affected person may also become confused and frustrated if his or her partner begins to experience sexual dysfunction, substance abuse, uncharacteristic workaholic tendencies, disengagement from previously enjoyed activities, or other post-abortion reactions.

Such dynamics may underlie more frequent and bitter fighting, over unrelated issues, which may even culminate in physical violence.⁷ In one of the first studies to examine the impact of abortion on men's relationships, men who were involved in an abortion with a current partner were more likely to report domestic violence; to feel that their lives would be better if the relationship ended; to have difficulty with jealousy or drug use; and to report arguing about children, jealousy and drugs.⁸

If a past abortion is kept secret in subsequent relationships, this secret may have a destructive effect on the new couple's relationship and their family unit. Secrets signify a lack of trust, which acted upon, becomes distrust. Unable to share a secret pain, the secret keeper is unable to experience the full acceptance and love of family members who are being kept "in the dark." The secret thus exerts a constant hold over the couple and the family; it is an obstacle to more complete intimacy.

The work of some family therapists suggests that abortion may also create an unsettling ambiguity about one's "family boundary." After an abortion, members of the family who are aware of the abortion may develop a cognitive or emotional difficulty knowing who is in and who is out of the family system.⁽⁸⁾ For example, every time post-abortive men and women are asked how many children they have, they may flinch. Should the aborted child be acknowledged and numbered among their offspring? Similarly, siblings of an aborted child may experience similar unsettling feelings about the proper dimensions of their family.

Usually, when a family member dies the rest of the family engages in public and familial grief process, which if successful, "closes the wound." But proper closure following the loss of a miscarried or aborted child is much more difficult because our culture resists, and is even hostile to, acknowledging

the reality that abortion involves the loss of a child--a member of a family.

Learn more: Read about the latest study on abortion's impact on men's relationships.

<http://www.theunchoice.com/news/RelationshipsWomenMen.htm>

Citations

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Pamphlet 621

Forgotten Father's Day: Abortion Has Negative Impact for Men, Relationships

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In the early 1970s, Arthur Shostak accompanied his partner to a well-groomed suburban abortion clinic. They had both agreed abortion was best. But sitting in the waiting room proved to be a "bruising experience." By the time he left the clinic, he was shocked by about how deeply disturbed he had become.

A professor of sociology at Drexel University in Philadelphia, Shostak spent the subsequent ten years studying the abortion experience of men. His study included a survey of 1,000 men who accompanied their wives or girlfriends to abortion clinics.

Shostak's study was published in *Men and Abortion: Lessons, Losses and Love*, in 1984. The value of this study is limited to reporting mostly the short term reactions of men to the pregnancy and the decision to abort. In addition, because of the selection process, this study did not reflect the attitudes or experiences of men who did not accompany their partners to the abortion clinic--which could be because they were unaware of the pregnancy and abortion, because they were casual or unsupportive partners, or because they were opposed to the abortion. Despite these significant limitations, Shostak's study, using the largest group of men ever surveyed about their abortions, is still the benchmark study in this understudied field.

Shostak reported that the majority of the men surveyed in clinic waiting rooms felt isolated, angry at their partners or themselves, and were concerned about the physical and emotional damage abortion might cause their partner. Only about one-fourth of the men stated that they had offered to pay the costs of raising the child if the woman didn't abort. Half of the single men said they offered to marry their female partner if continued the pregnancy.

Shostak's study found that abortion is far more stressful for men than the public would generally suppose. More than one in four equated abortion to murder. Slightly over 80 percent said they had already begun to think about the child that might have been born (with 29 percent saying they had been fantasizing about the child "frequently"), 68 percent believed men involved in abortions "did not have an easy time of it," and 47 percent worried about having disturbing thoughts afterwards. Shostak reported that many men began to cry during the interview.

The overwhelming majority, 83 percent, opposed any legal restrictions on abortion, and 45 percent stated that they had urged an abortion (48 percent of unmarried men and 37 percent of the married men). When asked if the man and woman should have an equal say in the decision, 80 percent of married men agreed compared to 58 percent of single men. Many expressed frustration and anger about the failure of women to consider their wishes and feelings. They felt isolated from the decision and--especially if they opposed the abortion--emasculated and powerless.

In a subsequent interview Shostak said:

Most of the men I talk to think about the abortion years after it is over. They feel sad, they feel curious, they feel a lot of things; but usually they have talked to no one about it. It's a taboo.... With a man, if he wants to shed a tear, he had better do it privately. If he feels that the abortion had denied him his child, he had better work through it himself. He does not share his pain with a clergyman, a minister; he does not share it with a close male friend.... It just stays with him. And it stays for a long time.¹

Research Shows A Range of Negative Reactions

Other studies contribute to this grim picture. In a random telephone survey conducted in 1989 by the Los Angeles Times, only 7 percent of males and 8 percent of females admitted having a prior history of abortion. (This is well under one-third of the expected rate, indicating that most people feel a need to conceal their involvement in a past abortion, even in an anonymous survey.) Of those admitting to an abortion, men were significantly more likely to admit to negative feelings. Two of every three men reported feelings of guilt compared to 56 percent of the women. Over one-third of the men who admitted

involvement in a past abortion said they regretted the abortion compared to one-quarter of the women.²

An interview-based study of inmates at a medium security prison found that male prisoners with a history of involvement in abortion had a generally negative view of abortion. Most reported that it had been, and continued to be, a negative psychological experience for themselves and their partners.³

Men have reported a large number of problems that they claim were a direct result of their abortion experience. These include broken relationships, sexual dysfunction, substance abuse, self-hate, risk taking and suicidal behavior, increasing feelings of grief over time, feelings of helplessness, guilt, depression, greater tendencies toward becoming angry and violent, and feelings connected to a sense of lost manhood.⁴

According to Dr. Vincent Rue, one of the nation's most experienced psychologists in the field of post-abortion issues:

Induced abortion reinforces defective problem solving on the part of the male by encouraging detachment, desertion, and irresponsibility.... Abortion rewrites the rules of masculinity. While a male is expected to be strong, abortion makes him feel weak. A male is expected to be responsible, yet abortion encourages him to act without concern for the innocent and to destroy any identifiable and undesirable outcomes of his sexual decision making and/or attachments.... Whether or not the male was involved in the abortion decision, his inability to function in a socially prescribed manner (i.e., to protect and provide) leaves him wounded and confused.

Typical male grief responses include remaining silent and grieving alone. In the silence, a male can harbor guilt and doubts about his ability to protect himself and those he loves.... Some become depressed and/or anxious, others compulsive, controlling, demanding and directing. Still others become enraged, and failure in any relationship can trigger repressed hostility from their disenfranchised grief.... [The act of running from the grief process] fosters denial and forces a male to become a "fugitive" from life, loving, and healing. A guilt-

ridden, tormented male does not easily love or accept love.⁵

Abortion Impacts Men's Relationships

Because abortion affects both women and men, it must necessarily have an impact on couple and family relationships. Most research supports the conclusion that the vast majority of unmarried couples who participate in an abortion end their relationships within a year, often within weeks. While the outcome for married couples is more mixed, many report that their abortion led them to divorce. One study has found that unsatisfactory or mediocre marital adjustments before an abortion are predictive of greater marital or sexual maladjustments after an abortion.⁶

Abortion has never been known to solve any relationship problems. The only time couples report feeling closer after an abortion is when they have mutually shared feelings of grief and regret about having aborted their child. In short, the relief of being freed from an unplanned pregnancy never binds a couple closer together, but honestly shared remorse can.

While broken relationships after an abortion are often interpreted as the result of women rejecting the uncommitted male, other dynamics also contribute to this problem. In most cases, the abortion is relegated to "something we don't talk about." This non-communication zone stifles the relationship and establishes a pattern for hiding other feelings as well.

Males may feel especially bound by a code of silence. They are likely to believe it is their manly duty not to aggravate their lover's emotional recovery with any expression of their own doubts or grief. In general, there is a need, as individuals and as a couple, to hold to the party line: "We did the right thing."

At the same time, the man and the woman are each likely to be experiencing different levels of regret, guilt, resentment, and recrimination. If one is coping relatively well, this may not sit well with the partner who is saddened or depressed. Conversely, signs of depression may aggravate the guilt and resentment of the non-depressed party who feels unfairly blamed for the abortion.