

CLEARING THE AIR ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF ABORTION

Martha Shuping, M.D.

Why do women have abortions?

At least 70 percent of women having abortions say they believe it is immoral. But they choose against their conscience because of pressure from others and their circumstances.

Most women choose abortion out of fear—fear of not being able to raise a child, fear of losing their partner if they do not have an abortion, fear of losing control over their lives, etc. Some polls show that more than 80 percent say they would have completed their pregnancies under better circumstances or with more support from the people they love.

It is precisely because so many women who abort are acting against their consciences and maternal instincts that the psychological impact of abortion can be so profound.

Didn't former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop conclude that there are no psychological consequences from abortion?

Actually, no.

What Dr. Koop reported to President Reagan was that all the studies on abortion complications were seriously flawed. As a result, the data was simply *inadequate* to determine the *extent* and *degree* of the psychological impact of abortion. He made a recommendation for a government-funded study to answer this question. Unfortunately, this study was never done.

Some extremists have twisted Dr. Koop's letter to the President to mean, "Koop didn't find anything, so nothing exists." Dr. Koop has publicly refuted this misrepresentation of his views.

He has stated that he is personally convinced, even by the existing evidence, that many women *do* suffer serious post-abortion psychological problems. It is the degree of this problem that has not been measured.

Still, don't most experts agree that there is no significant psychological impact from abortion?

While many abortion proponents will discount the psychological costs of abortion, others are more candid. For example, Dr. Julius Fogel has personally performed more than 20,000 abortions. He is unique in that he is *both* a psychiatrist and an obstetrician, and he insists that "every woman, whatever her background or sexuality, has a trauma at destroying a pregnancy....[I]t is not as harmless and casual an event as many in the pro-abortion crowd insist."

In fact, there are more than 375 studies dealing with the psychological impact of abortion on women. All show that at least a minority of women, typically between 10 and 20 percent, have one or more negative reactions shortly after an abortion. Studies looking at long-term reactions indicate that the longer after an abortion one looks, the more negative reactions will be reported.

So what are the psychological aftereffects of abortion?

Every woman is different. They each have different responses in different time frames. Some women repress or are unaware of any aftereffects for many years.

Commonly reported reactions include: feelings of guilt, shame, anxiety, helplessness, grief and/or remorse; uncontrollable crying; feelings of anger, bitterness, and

resentment; feelings of distrust and betrayal; lowered self-esteem; avoidance of babies, small children, or anything to do with pregnancy; fear of future pregnancies or, alternatively, a desire to have a "replacement" baby; flashbacks to the abortion experience; nightmares or sleeping disorders; depression; sexual dysfunction; eating disorders; substance abuse; self-destructive behavior; broken or abusive relationships; problems bonding with other children; suicidal thoughts or tendencies; and other problems.

A trained post-abortion counselor can be of tremendous help in resolving these problems.

You said that some of these reactions might be delayed or repressed. Are there times or circumstances when negative reactions are more likely to occur?

Delayed reactions are often triggered by subsequent life events such as the birth of a child, the death of a loved one, the end of a relationship, a religious conversion, or even physical changes like menopause.

Many women have "anniversary reactions," such as anxiety attacks, depression, suicidal impulses, or abdominal cramping around the anniversary date or month of the abortion or around the time when their babies would have been due.

Dr. Martha Shuping, M.D., is a psychiatrist with more than ten years of experience in helping women with post-abortion issues. Supporting citations are posted at www.afterabortion.org

MY NAME IS AMANDA

My name is Amanda and I am 18 years old. When I told my boyfriend [I was pregnant] he blamed me for getting pregnant and insisted that I have the abortion.

My mom told me that I either had to have an abortion or get out of her house.

No one would support me, not my boyfriend and not my family. I felt alone and trapped. I went through with the abortion but I never wanted to do it.

The amount of guilt I feel is tremendous. Everything reminds me of what I did. I am trying very hard to get through this.

The only advice that was ever offered by my boyfriend and my mom was to just not think about it. They said that it was the right thing and that I did what I had to do. I think that is a joke.

I just can't get over it.



www.afterabortion.org