

Men and Abortion Trauma



Forgotten Fathers
Forgotten Fathers

**Abortion can have a profound impact on men's lives,
both through their own exposure and/or through their
partner's trauma.**



**Parenthood is a Process...
...which Begins on First Learning of the Pregnancy.**

This initial discovery can produce a mixture of unexpected and even conflicting emotional responses. Feelings of fear and uncertainty frequently surface, many of which, only time will resolve. Even planned pregnancies can be daunting.

The Sensitivity to this Process is Often Impacted by the:

- Relationship with the partner.
- Lack of time to work through deeper underlying issues.
- External pressures from family, peers, health professionals, society...
- Internal issues such as unresolved childhood issues, inability to connect to deeper self.
- Perceived expected male and female roles:
 - A male may be focused on his role of supporting the woman at the expense of his own values and desires.
 - A female may internalize the perceived needs of the male and/or significant others.
- Introducing the idea of abortion complicates the parenting process.

Pregnant women can feel vulnerable and any hesitation or failure on the part of the male may be interpreted as negativism and imply a preference for abortion.



Couples typically...

do not work through their parenting process within the same time frame, adding to confusion and conflict.

Both men and women can experience symptoms of abortion trauma in anticipation of the event. Feelings of numbness, anger and shame in the lead up to the abortion, can incapacitate their ability to work through issues.

Further, the medical profession has yet to recognize that parents are often bonded to their unborn, regardless of the 'wantedness' of the pregnancy, or gestational size.

It is during this vulnerable time that most abortions are carried out.

'Abortion abruptly arrests the parenthood process and can create a role vacuum in which confusion, ambivalence, guilt and hostility abound.'

*- Forgotten Fathers: Men & Abortion,
Vincent Rue Ph.d.*



A Fifth of Callers to Abortion Grief Australia's Help Line are Men.

...their personal stories and reported case studies illustrate that men can suffer trauma/grief reactions similar to women. See AGA Post Abortion Syndrome brochure or website.

The extent to which men suffer because of abortion is unknown. However, whether the abortion was wanted or unwanted, underlying conflicts are not uncommon.

The male's initial reaction may be 'denial and distancing'. They may feel deeply rejected and experience profound depression. Some men will identify with the unborn's death to such an extent that it amounts to 'loss of self', almost his own death. For others, abortion violates the very essence of masculinity.

Others will 'bury' or put their feelings on hold while trying to cope with their partner's grief/trauma or out of control domestic situations.

Most men find themselves totally unprepared for the suffering abortion can cause in the lives of their present and/or future partners and children.

Anger, Despair & Self Destructive Behaviours

That neither the medical profession nor society in general recognises abortion trauma in men exacerbates the isolation and hopelessness men feel.

**‘Within 60 days I was in what I now call the 3D’s
- Drugs, Daring and Death -
and that is where I remained for three years.
I was doing drugs constantly -24 hours a day.
I never went straight. I went to church stoned.
I went to my job stoned.
I also ruined my career.**

**I was living on the edge of a daring life.
I was the guy you saw on the ski slopes coming
down missing trees, doing flips and hitting those
[ski-jumps] at 90 miles per hour.**

**I was driving fast and drinking and driving
because I had lost my self-worth.
I had everything bottled up within me.
I was waiting for life to be snatched from me
because it had lost its meaning and I wanted to die
to atone for the one I had allowed to be taken.’**

*Peter Palmer,
Healing conference, Milwaukee 1993.*

‘In a study on 35 adolescent males whose partners were undergoing abortion, of the cases examined in detail, rage, fear of abandonment and total despair were observed.’*

Rothstein A.A. Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 7 (2): 203-204 (1978).

Without the opportunity to work through inner conflicts, unexpressed feelings can become ‘toxic’. Anger is the most consistent and evident symptom of abortion trauma, usually acted in aggression or self destructive behaviours. Typical coping mechanisms can include:

- **self-medicating** with alcohol and/or drugs
- **self destructive behaviours**
- **distractions** that absorb emotional and mental energy
- **sexual dysfunction**
- **sabotage of self** in relationships, career and/or health

Abortion Destroys Relationships

Relationships give life meaning...

...One of the biggest predictor of male suicide is failed relationships.

The overwhelming evidence is:

- Most unmarried relationships fail shortly after abortion.
- Abortions done to save relationships almost never work.
- Married relationships often struggle to survive after an abortion.

Further:

- Abortion trauma can shatter future relationships unless work is done towards resolution.
- Men's inability to protect their children from the mother's post abortion dysfunction can be traumatic and ongoing.
- A daughter's abortion trauma can be a shattering experience and tear families apart.
- Abortion can impact the males' ability to;
 - relate to a pregnant spouse
 - bond with subsequent children or change the relationship with existing children.

Seldom do couples work through their abortion grief in the same manner or time frame. For most the topic is subsequently taboo.

Sexual dysfunction, avoidance of intimacy, male insecurity and feelings of powerlessness, anger and isolation all contribute to relationship instability after an abortion.

The sense of hopelessness many women and men feel after abortion can negate any former need to persevere with relationships.

For men, resentment and distrust of women are not uncommon. Fears of relationships and their vulnerability can lead to problematic or even extreme responses. Sterilization and changing of sexual orientation have been reported.



Insights from Therapists & Researchers.

**'...the place of the wound is typically where symptoms emerge
...those symptoms then are more likely to occur in future relational difficulties or obsessions and compulsions surrounding sexuality.'**

Kevin Burke - Social Worker,

'Abortion rewrites the rules of masculinity... reinforcing defective problem solving on the part of the male by encouraging detachment, desertion and irresponsibility...'

Dr Vincent Rue - PhD

'... We find that guys that have not ventilated, have not processed the experience, have at a level of their psyche a feeling of second class citizenship. They were not a full partner in the matter. So there is a lack of resolution, a seething discontent.... they become reluctant to trust and reluctant to commit.'

Dr. Arthur Shostak - Sociologist and Author

'...Abortion breeds anger, resentment, and bitterness towards the partner who was not supportive or who ignored their partner's desire to keep the baby.'

At the same time, there is often tremendous pressure in the relationship to conceal one's true feelings of grief or guilt. This can especially be a problem for men, who are often taught to hide their emotions. Men may also feel obliged to appear 'strong' so as not to upset the woman any further.'

'Can Relationships Survive After Abortion?'

Dr Theresa Burke - Psychotherapist and Author

'Typical male grief responses to abortion include remaining silent and grieving alone. In the silence, a male can harbour guilt and doubts about his ability to protect himself and those he loves. These 'silent sufferers' who feel they must not talk or cry may appear tough, but inside they crumble under the crushing weight of their own conscience and shame.'

'Some [men] become depressed and/or anxious, others compulsive, controlling, demanding and directing. Still others become enraged, and failure in any relationship can trigger repressed hostility.... To mask or substitute the need to grieve 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. His preoccupation with his partner, his denial of himself and his relentless feelings of post-abortion emptiness can nullify even the best of intentions. His guilt may prevent him from seeking compassion, support or affection. In turn, he 'forgets' how to reciprocate these feelings.'

Dr Vincent Rue - PhD

'...some of male's notorious reluctance to commit may have as a component guys who have failed to work through a prior abortion experience.'

Dr Arthur Shostak

Men Impacted Through their Spouse/Girlfriend's Trauma

'I married a post-abortive woman with the naïve notion that if I loved her enough and accepted her unconditionally, the effect her two abortions had on her would somehow work itself out.

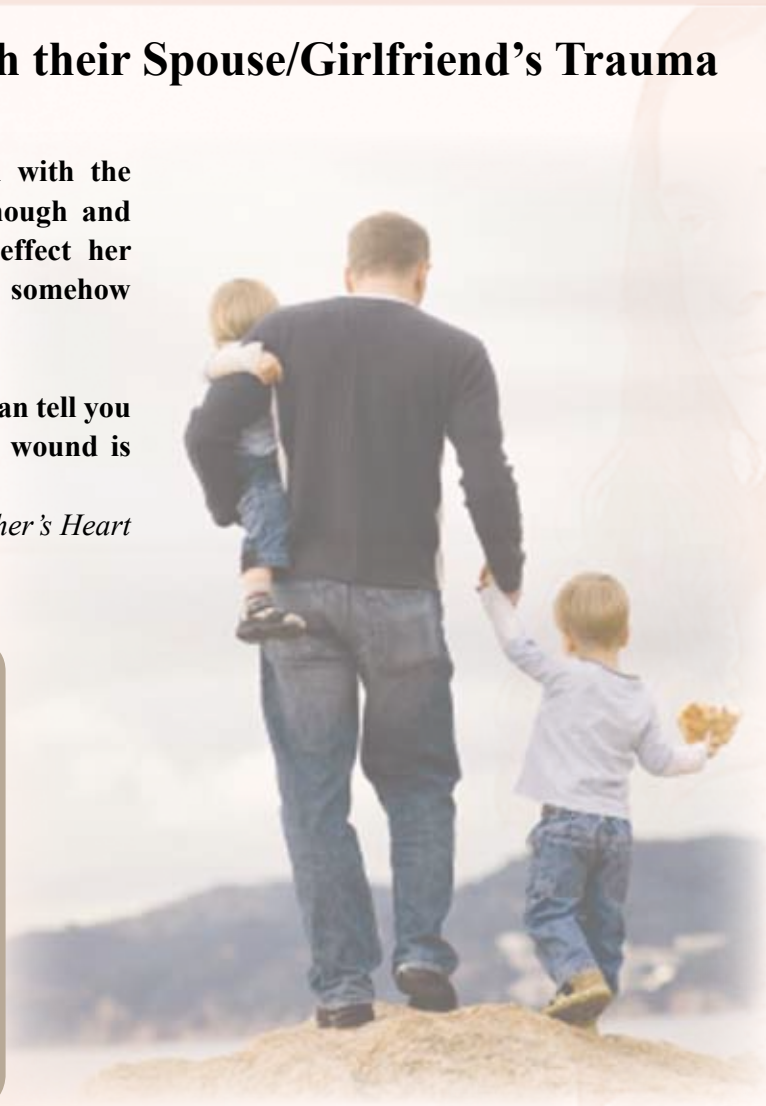
Time may heal some wounds, but I can tell you now from experience, an abortion wound is not one of them.'

James McNeil, Redeeming a Father's Heart

Flirting with death

Large scale record based research consistently links abortion in women to deaths by suicide, accident, homicide and natural causes.

See Research on AGA's Website



Abortion can be extraordinarily painful for women.

Feelings of intense pain, grief and confusion can undermine or incapacitate a women's ability to function as a wife and/or mother.

Some may become withdrawn, depressed, fatigued and struggle to cope with routine daily tasks. In its more serious presentations, sexual dysfunction, personality disorders and/or mental health problems requiring intermittent hospitalization can become the family reality.

Domestic Violence

With powerful feelings of self hatred and anger, many women provoke conflicts in their interaction with others, particularly personal relationships. They may create or fuel emotional dramas that both serve as a distraction and as an opportunity to release pent up emotions.

That the end result will ultimately be destroyed relationships and isolation, fulfils a driving need for self punishment.

Irrespective of the abortion role the male plays, women often feel abandoned and on an emotional level, blame the male for the abortion outcome. Thus the male, and men in general can become the object of their pent up unexpressed self hatred, anger and rage.

Abortion Trauma has historic parallels to child sexual abuse and post traumatic stress disorder. It took a social movement in conjunction with professionals willing to explore and investigate before these traumas were accepted.

At present understood to be a type of post traumatic stress disorder, abortion trauma typically has a delayed presentation (usually years) often accompanied by a 'triggering event'. See AGA Post Abortion Syndrome brochure or visit website below. Most women and men do not consciously connect their problems with their abortion experience.

*'I wasn't in the room: I wasn't even in the clinic that day.
But in my mind, I've been there a million times since.
I've been there watching, breaking, wanting to rescue you.
In my mind I need to be a hero
not a killer,
The man who didn't flee.
But I am not. I am a man I fear to see.'*

Extract from 'Men and Abortion' by Vincent Rue



Men are less culturally conditioned to express their feelings than women and are usually unaware of the value of doing so.

However, given the opportunity AND permission to share and examine their own role in abortion and the impact it had on their lives, men are often exceedingly honest and direct, and great progress can be made working through their grief.

Men & Abortion Trauma

Help Line 1300 887 066



Abortion Grief Australia Inc. PO Box 904 Canning Bridge WA 6153

Admin: Ph/Fax 08 9313 1784

Abortion Grief & Pregnancy Crisis Line **1300 363 550**

Men & Abortion Trauma Line **1300 887 066**

Website: www.abortiongrief.asn.au

AGA is a tax deductible charity