

# Impact of Abortion on Others

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## FATHERS OF ABORTED CHILDREN

The impact of fathers is mitigated by the role they play in the abortion. They fall into separate categories.

- ***Fathers who are violently opposed to the procedure.*** They may have attempted to stop the abortion with a court order. These fathers respond quickly with rage and a sense of impotence. They are immediately impacted. If you are dealing with one of these men immediately after the abortion, help him process his rage. These men are potentially dangerous and may strike out at someone, usually not the mother of his baby. If he expresses rage, you must take it very seriously. He will also be deeply grieving for his child. He often will have a severed relationship with his partner and this is another grief issue. He may be involved in pursuing a divorce. It is important to name these men "fathers," and to give them permission to grieve. They suffer from a sense of impotence because they couldn't protect their children or their partners. These fathers may struggle with some identity questions concerning how they became involved with someone, whom they loved, who had values so different from theirs.
- ***Fathers who are opposed but have not gone to extremes to prevent it.*** These fathers express great sadness and perhaps anger. This experience will haunt these two groups of fathers the rest of their lives. They often unconsciously become fixated on impregnating a woman again, sometimes the one who had the abortion (if they remain together).
- ***Fathers who first support the abortion decision and then change their minds, but their partners proceed with the abortion.*** They are very angry with themselves and carry a great burden of guilt and culpability. If this relationship survives the couple will have serious issues to work out concerning blame and anger.
- ***Fathers who appear to be neutral on the issue.*** Whatever the woman chooses they will support. There are two sub-groups here:
  - The *first* are men who really do care but never share that with their partners. They say what they assume is the "Politically Correct" thing . . . "Whatever you want to do, I will support." These fathers will exhibit characteristics more like the fathers who don't support but are upset that they didn't speak the truth of their desire to have the child. The strength of emotion takes them by surprise.
  - The *second* group is men for whom the abortion solves the problem and they are truly ok with the decision. These fathers may not demonstrate obvious aftermath until some time later when they are ready to be a father. Sometimes a partner's subsequent pregnancy loss, like a miscarriage, can unleash the loss issue. The strength of the emotional reaction may catch them by surprise.
- ***Fathers who force the abortion decision or threaten to withdraw support if abortion is not chosen.*** These men may not revisit the abortion loss unless a significant conversion experience happens in their lives and they become responsible. Often these men are narcissistic and continue in relationships that serve only their needs. In speaking to them you may discover that they have a history of abortions with different partners.
- ***Fathers who are not told about the abortion until after it occurred.*** These men may grieve immediately and also struggle with many other feelings because of having been left out of the decision. They are often confused by their feelings. Even if they would have responded to the news

of the pregnancy with an abortion suggestion, the fact that he was not consulted changes everything. It also calls the strength of the relationship into question. It may create some serious trust issues.

- ***Fathers who are never certain an abortion has occurred, but who, upon hearing the aftermath of abortion in women described, recognize the symptoms in a former partner.*** These men live with a perpetual “What if? I wonder if?” There usually is no way to find out if an abortion has occurred as the partner is long removed from the relationship. This may become a very significant issue if the man subsequently loses his ability to be a biological father because of something like testicular cancer.

## **SECONDARY MEN**

These are men who are involved with a woman who has had an abortion, which he may or may not know about. He is caught in the emotional vortex of her reaction. If he knows about the abortion, he can be a wonderful source of support for her.

### ***Men describe their aftermath as follows:***

- Rage
- Impotence
- Grave concern for their partner and her well being
- Inability to communicate with their partner about her experience and theirs
- Chemical use and abuse (excessive alcohol or drug use)
- Risk taking behaviors, such as driving fast cars or motorcycles, breaking horses, jumping out of airplanes, or other death defying activities. (Fathers who opposed the abortion may verge on being suicidal themselves.)
- Grieving and sadness
- Obsessive thoughts of the lost child
- Nightmares of someone/something vulnerable being threatened and being unable to protect it.
- Desire for another child and subsequent behavior to try to achieve that goal. (Sometimes becoming almost obsessive in wanting to re-impregnate the woman who had the abortion. This may also generalize to another partner.)
- Suicidal ideation - this does not appear common, but it does occur especially in the fathers who wanted the child.
- Inability to sort out the feelings they are experiencing. If involved in more than one abortion, they will resolve one, but deny the need to process the rest. (When helping men it is often necessary to help them take apart the various emotions involved and deal with them separately.)
- Spousal battering – may be man to woman or woman to man. There appears to be a predisposition for individuals with abortion histories to find partners with the same history. The dynamic that develops is as follows. She reminds him of the woman who aborted his child against his will, and he reminds her of the guy who insisted that she have an abortion. On a subconscious level, this is the scenario of anger and striking out. If the partners have stayed together after an abortion and treated the abortion as a non-event, they too may strike out at each other.
- Some men seem to become overly nurturing fathers, assuming the role the mother normally plays with a child and being very overly protective.
- Occasionally a man may act out in socially destructive ways: church fires, bombing, etc.
- Confusion and grief over the end of the relationship that resulted in the pregnancy. They may occasionally obsess about the lost partner. Make sure there is no stalking behavior or harassment going on. You may need to suggest that he back off for a while.

**When men identify the issue that is troubling them it is the loss of fatherhood.**

The book, Fatherhood Aborted: The Profound Effects of Abortion on Men by Guy Condon and David Hazard, includes the following:

*Aftershocks of Male Post-abortion Trauma:*

- Has difficulty with commitment.
- Dodges authority.
- Has no solid sense of identity.
- Works to impress moral leaders.
- Keeps women at bay.
- Has trouble bonding.
- Fears impending tragedy.
- Doesn't own his mistakes.
- Feels inadequate as a leader.

*They also lay out the following symptoms:*

- Relationship struggles
- Inability to trust friends
- Rage
- Addictions and sexual compulsions

*Other additional behavioral clues:*

- Sleeplessness
- Bad dreams
- Nightmares
- Sexual dysfunction
- Depression
- Fear of failure
- Fear of rejection
- Loneliness or numbness

Vincent Rue, Ph.D. writes in an article, *The Effects of Abortion on Men*, that “men do grieve following abortion, but they are more likely to deny their grief or internalize their feelings of loss rather than openly express them . . . When men do express their grief, they try to do so in culturally prescribed “masculine” ways, i.e. anger, aggressiveness, control. Men typically grieve in a private way following an abortion. Because of this, men’s requests for help may often go unrecognized and unheeded by those around them.”

He continues, “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.”

**Resources for men:**

Men and Abortion: A Path to Healing by C.T. Coyle, Ph.D., published by Life Cycle Books. (This book uses a forgiveness model. It is a gently Christian book that deals with different scenarios of involvement, and would be appropriate for most fathers. Counselors and clergy use it as a text, reading it with the father a few chapters at a time, and working through those issues.)

Fatherhood Aborted: The Profound Effects of Abortion on Men by Guy Condon and David Hazard, published by Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL. (Can be obtained through Amazon.com.)

Grief Therapy for Men by Linus Mundy, published by Abbey Press (#20141). (This is NOT abortion specific, but valuable in helping the deeply grieving fathers to understand the manifestations of grief they are experiencing and how to cope.)

(In dealing with fathers, it is crucial to determine the father's perception of his involvement. You will need to listen carefully to what he brings to help him sort out the issues that need resolving. Use a similar process to that for women in naming the child, writing a letter to say what his father's heart needs to say. Help him choose a way to memorialize his child. If he is close to the loss, he will need support during holidays and other significant events. Beyond that, the spiritual issues of culpability or vulnerability will need to be addressed. If he feels responsible, that will have to be addressed in a spiritual setting, if he is in that place. If he could not protect his child and, if he is Christian, help him form an alliance with God the Father who understands his pain. Whatever faith tradition, it is imperative that the clergy person listen to the father's issues and respond appropriately to what he is hearing. Whatever opinion the clergy person holds about the suitability of abortion, he must withhold his opinion and be present to this man where he is. It may be necessary to refer him to alcohol or drug counseling, or something else if appropriate. Listen for suicidal ideation or ask about it, especially in the men who did not support the abortion. You will need to take this ideation very seriously and address it with the father.)

## **GRANDPARENTS**

The parents of the girl or the boy may struggle with the knowledge of an abortion and the loss of a grandchild. Grandparents also have many “involvement scenarios.” They may force the abortion, know nothing about it until afterwards, or be opposed but supportive of the girl.

### ***Manifestations:***

- Sadness
- Anger with their child for getting pregnant or making the abortion decision; angry with the other partner or the other partner's parents.
- Worry about their child; want to fix their child.
- Grief over the loss of their child as they knew her/him and their lost grandchild.
- Loss of a dream for their child's life.
- Activism in terms of pro-life involvement (especially grandfathers).
- Blame: “Where did we go wrong?”
- Guilt, if they forced the decision or believe they missed cues to the pregnancy.
- Generational wound (abortion may run in the family systems with the mother, an aunt, grandmother or someone else having had an abortion).
- Grandmothers may carry burden of the abortion themselves, having encouraged the abortion to protect the husband from the knowledge of the pregnancy.
- Grandfathers who would have been supportive are especially sad and sometimes very angry.

Occasionally you will encounter truly tragic circumstances where the daughter has committed suicide or they have witnessed their child's life take a tragic turn that they are unable to prevent (chemical dependency, severe psychotic reactions, eating disorders). These individuals need a great deal of support and help in coping with their pain.

## **ABORTION SURVIVORS**

Individuals who have survived abortion attempts on their lives (failed abortions) will struggle with existential questions during their lives. A small study indicated that those who had abortion attempts made on their lives, may repeatedly attempt suicide at the same time of the year that the original abortion attempt was made.

- Some individuals may have lost twins in the failed abortion procedure. They will grieve deeply and bear deep psychological wounds from this loss of a twin and attempt on their lives.
- Those whose mothers made abortion plans, but did not go through with the plan may suffer with a sense of “not belonging in the world.” The early plan interfered with the normal progress of prenatal bonding.
- Some individuals will have lost several siblings to abortion. When given permission, they will grieve deeply for the lost siblings. This usually occurs in adult life.
- Those who lost siblings and had abortion plans made for them seem likely to choose abortion themselves.

### **OTHER SIBLINGS**

- Surviving children in a family may exhibit survivor syndrome like those who lose a sibling to cancer or to an accident of some kind.
- They may struggle with being “replacement children” or “chosen children.”
- Often they will have experienced a lack of proper bonding with their mother or had their relationship with their mother change after her abortion.
- Some children intuitively know that someone is missing in the family system. In therapy, the surviving child may draw the family system with the children lost to abortion or miscarriage included. When the parents are asked, they will admit either miscarriage or abortion.
- Some children will have come upon the information of an abortion either accidentally by overhearing or having been included in the discussion when an abortion decision is made. Young children are very black and white, and do not understand the nuances that adults perceive.

### **SECONDARY VICTIMS**

These are the spouses of those who have had abortions but have not been involved directly in an abortion. They struggle with understanding the pain their partner is in and trying to be supportive. Often they are very confused by what they are experiencing.

### **FRIENDS OF ABORTED PARENTS**

Often it is the friends of the pregnant couple who are consulted and drawn into the web of decision on abortion. They may support it or reject it, but they will be the first ones to observe changes in the behavior of their friends. They may seek help in understanding what has happened to their friends.

### **EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS**

- The siblings of the aborted parents may know about the abortion. They may be very concerned about the changes they observe in their loved one. They may have questions about how to facilitate the healing and their own need to grieve for the lost children.
- Cousins of the aborted child sometimes recognize a missing person in the family system. Once they confirm their suspicion, they need to grieve for the lost persons and reconcile with the aborted aunt or uncle, if they are important to the cousin. It seems that the grieving is most pronounced in those who are the closest in age to the lost child.

### **ABORTION PROVIDERS**

Abortion providers experience a great deal of stress in their jobs. At their annual meetings, seminars in stress management are offered. Abortion providers struggle with alcoholism, divorce, and accidents. Many who work in the field have their own abortion histories.