

Living with Abortion

An unwanted pregnancy while creating life, alters the life course of at least the pregnant woman. Knowing that the pregnancy will eventually let go the secret, some women opt for abortion to regain control of their lives and/or avoid personal and social implications. However, emotional, psychological and spiritual implications remain for some and as they remain, so too the effect on personal, social and spiritual well-being.

Regardless of one's position on the abortion debate, women contemplating abortion are thrust front and center into its throws. For those who choose to abort, the decision is not likely entered into casually or callously. However, by necessity and given the relative importance of the event the decision is achieved quickly. Thus the events of pregnancy and abortion come and go in fairly short order, yet memory, feelings and thoughts remain.

For some women an internal conflict develops as they try to reconcile their choice alongside beliefs, be they religious or simply about how they perceive themselves. Further, some women find themselves considering the life events that might have followed for their child, had it not been for the abortion. Hence some women follow the course of time and at about nine months consider what a delivery may have brought. As they see other children whose age would have paralleled their own child, they may think about how their child would have been at a similar age. When the child may have been about five years of age, a woman may think about how the child might have entered school, and so on.

In other circumstances and in order to survive intrusive thoughts regarding their decision or what would have been their child's development, some women actually make a psychological cut and avoid any such thought or contemplation as to do otherwise may prove too painful. Hence some women seem to split themselves psychologically and indeed even emotionally and spiritually from their decision and feelings in order to cope.

The outcome from an unresolved abortion decision can be daunting and haunting.

The distress can overwhelm and spill into other areas of life. Some women may have difficulty concentrating which in turn can affect school or work. Others may find that thoughts and feelings intrude upon intimate life and hence significant relationships may be strained. Still others whose decision may be in conflict with religious beliefs may find a spiritual distress and difficulty returning to or participating in religious or spiritual life.

In the event of an abortion, women are advised to seek counselling to determine the impact of their decision on their life – their whole life. If however they do not attend counselling at or near the time of the event, this doesn't mean they cannot enter into counselling later on. Further and in order to improve or return to religious or spiritual life, women may be encouraged to speak to their clergy and avail themselves of religious ritual directed towards facilitating forgiveness consistent with religious beliefs.

Throughout, the goal of counselling is not to judge or impose guilt, but rather to understand and provide self-forgiveness and spiritual forgiveness so that any harm perceived as a result of the abortion event can be repaired thus enabling the woman to live more peacefully with herself and others.

The abortion event is short lived. The effects of the decision can be long lasting. Counselling can help.

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Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.