

# Understanding Abortion's Aftermath

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*Everything I read on  
abortion before I  
experienced it told me  
that women do not  
suffer from depression  
or regret afterwards. . .*

*I could expect to feel  
relieved.*

*Where did they get  
that from?*

*I will never be the  
same.*

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**A**bstions are performed 4,000 times a day in the United States, every day of the year. Since 1973, more than 36 million children have been destroyed by abortion. While some of their mothers report relatively little trauma following abortion, few come away truly unscathed. For many, the experience is devastating, causing severe and long-lasting emotional, psychological and spiritual trauma.

Evidence of post-abortion trauma is increasingly attested to by psychologists, counselors and those involved in post-abortion ministry. We now know, for example, that women hurt by abortion manifest this trauma in many ways, suffering some or many of the following symptoms:

- ◆ Guilt and shame
- ◆ Grief that she cannot share
- ◆ Depression and low self-esteem, sometimes to the point of becoming suicidal
- ◆ Alienation from family and friends
- ◆ Fear that God will punish her, or is punishing her, for committing the "unforgivable sin"
- ◆ Sexual dysfunction, promiscuity, or problems with intimacy
- ◆ Problems bonding with her other children (being over-protective but emotionally distant)
- ◆ Deep anger
- ◆ Abortion-related nightmares, flashbacks or even sounds of a baby crying
- ◆ Alcohol and drug problems
- ◆ Desire for a "replacement" baby
- ◆ Anniversary reactions of grief or depression on the date of the abortion or the baby's expected due date
- ◆ Anger or avoidance when conversations turn to babies or abortion

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*I have had so much pain: the shame and guilt  
and the fear that God hates me.*

*I still cry every day and think of my baby.*

*... How can God ever forgive me? I have  
destroyed a creation made by him.*

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Some, especially young girls, experience symptoms soon after the abortion. More commonly, the symptoms may appear over the course of five to ten years. This is not information you will likely read in the newspaper or even in women's magazines. Abortion's aftermath is largely ignored. Groups organized to protect the availability of abortion claim that it's "no big deal." Consequently, many women suffering after abortion cannot even identify the root cause of their suffering.

**T**he woman who approaches a priest after an abortion has walked a path of grief and hopelessness, usually alone. But she is beginning to understand that she has a deep spiritual wound that only God's mercy and love can heal. Simultaneously, she likely believes that she has committed the unforgivable sin and fears God's anger.

She is a person whose lifestyle may have taken her down a path that was harmful to her. In fact, she may never have known true spiritual or emotional health. In the words of one woman: *The abortion was almost inevitable the way my life was going. I made no commitments, not serious ones, saw nothing wrong in having sex just because I wasn't married, and when I found out I was pregnant, I guess I didn't see anything wrong with having an abortion.* She may be a person who has experienced abuse, whether sexual, emotional or physical.

The woman who has had an abortion comes to you with questions, the answers to which are indispensable to beginning her healing journey. *Can God ever forgive me? Can my child? Can I ever forgive myself? Will the Church kick me out when I confess this sin? Where is my child? Will this horrible pain ever go away? Is healing possible?*

Truly, she is one of God's lost sheep, in desperate need of your help. You may touch her life once or work with her over time. However it proceeds, trust that God has chosen you to be his representative in helping her. ■