

Chapter 1 Summary: Spiritual and psychological healing after abortion

Grief after pregnancy losses such as miscarriage or stillbirth is a widely accepted psychological phenomenon.¹ However, the grief experienced after induced abortion has been largely dismissed.² Women suffering grief after an abortion are often unable to publicly express their sadness and are therefore at greater risk of experiencing complicated grief, a state in which sorrow, numbness, guilt and anger following a loss are long-lasting and interfere with the life of the grieving person.³

Women may rely on a variety of forms of assistance throughout their healing journey. Healing can take place with the help of organizations, individuals, and online resources. One example is Abortion Recovery International (ARIN), a world-wide organization that links post-abortion sufferers with professional services, resources and programs that are "personal, confidential, non-judgmental and open to all."⁴ These programs range widely, as each woman has her own unique circumstances and personal beliefs. Other available resources include religious support groups, pregnancy resource centres, and online assistance, such as Abortion Changes You.

Forgiveness is considered an essential part of healing after abortion, regardless of one's attitude towards abortion.⁵ Many women have unresolved feelings of shame and guilt, which can be lessened through forgiveness of themselves and of the other people involved in the abortion.⁶ Different religions have distinct approaches to forgiveness after abortion. Project Rachel, a Catholic ministry, involves steps such as recounting one's story, assuring oneself of God's mercy, and forgiving oneself. The Buddhist practice of mizuko kuyo encourages parents to write letters of apology, accepting responsibility for ending

¹ Perinatal Bereavement Services Ontario. December 2012. http://pbso.ca/main/?page_id=6.

² Speckhard A, Rue V. Complicated mourning: dynamics of impacted post abortion. *Pre- and Peri-natal Psychology Journal* 1993; 8(1): pp. 5-32.

³ Complicated Grief. Mayo Clinic. December 2012. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/complicated-grief/DS01023>.

⁴ abortionrecovery.org.

⁵ Hess RF. Healing after abortion: a search for forgiveness. *Journal of Christian Nursing* 2009; 26(3): pp. 154-58.

⁶ Wilson K, Haynie L. Experiences of Women Who Seek Recovery Assistance Following an Elective Abortion: A Grounded Theory Approach. DNS dissertation, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center School of Nursing, 2004.

their child's life.⁷ In addition to forgiveness, memorializing the child, perhaps by naming him or her, is an important step in healing.

⁷ Wilson JT. Mourning the unborn dead: American usage of Japanese Buddhist post-abortion rituals. <http://udini.proquest.com/view/mourning-the-unborn-dead-american-goid:304844080/>.