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## **After Abortion, Women Hide Their 'Forbidden' Pain**

By: Jane Lichtenberg

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The 7<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals ruled last month that an Indiana law does not impose an undue burden by requiring women seeking abortions to wait 18 hours and receive in-person counseling. The three-judge panel overturned an injunction by a U.S. District judge.

The Indiana Civil Liberties Union will petition to have all 11 appeals court judges hear arguments against the law. The irony is that even if it is upheld, women are unlikely to get unbiased advice from abortion providers.

In a survey of women who experienced post-abortion problems, 66 percent said their counselors were very biased toward choosing abortion; 44 percent were actively hoping to find some other option during counseling sessions; and more than 90 percent said they were not given enough information to make an informed decision. The 252 respondents from 42 states were involved in chapters of Women Exploited by Abortion, a post-abortion peer support group.

"Ignoring all evidence to the contrary, most abortion counselors will tell women that psychological reactions to abortion are rare or even non-existent," explains Dr. Theresa Burke, a psychotherapist and founder of Rachel's vineyard, a post-abortion training and healing ministry funded by the American Life League. She directs the program from her King of Prussia, PA, home.

"It's all too easy to imagine that abortion is a 'quick fix' that will...allow a woman's life to go back and be the same as it was before," Burke points out in "Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion," co-authored by David. C. Reardon (Acorn Press). But once a woman is pregnant, the choice is not simply between having a baby or not having a baby. It's between having a baby and having the experience of abortion. "Both are life-changing experiences."

From 17 years of counseling women who have had abortions, Burke has observed that, "For many women, abortion is the most deeply traumatic and emotionally painful experience of their lives."

In a phone interview, she explains that she first got involved in post-abortion counseling "because of an awareness that the problem was not even being acknowledged by the mental health community."

From 1973 (the Roe vs. Wade decision) to 1997, more than 35 million legal abortions were performed in the United States. An estimated 43 percent of women will have at least one abortion by the time they are 45, reports the Alan Guttmacher Institute.

Studies show that 65 to 70 percent of women seeking abortions have a negative moral view of the procedure. "Many of the women I have treated knowingly violated their conscience or betrayed their maternal desires because of the pressures they faced," Burke says.

Some of these women face immediate regret and grief. Others have denied their feelings for years or even decades, "until finally they could no longer avoid the need to understand what they did," she explains. Often, a life trauma triggers this post-traumatic stress disorder.

Studies have shown, she points out, that women who have had abortions are much more likely afterward to abuse drugs and alcohol, suffer from depression and be more inclined to suicide. They often have problems with relationships, eating disorders, poor self-image, jobs, parenting.

The Rachel' Vineyard ministry provides weekend retreats for spiritual and emotional healing after abortion. Burke, who wrote the manual for the retreats, says there are 90 teams in 40 states and several other countries. The wife and mother of five spends her time providing training and leadership for the Christian-based retreats, which she calls "therapy for the soul." The teams use scriptural exercises and include a post-abortive woman and a clergy member.

"It's a process to detoxify repressed feelings of grief, anger, shame – any ambivalence regarding the baby that was lost," she explains. "Intellectually, they know God forgives them, but they can't forgive themselves." Burke says the women find enormous benefit from the unconditional love and acceptance of others who have shared their experiences.

In the interest of toeing the pro-choice line, many abortion providers skip over the realities of the procedure. When they do, they are failing the women who turn to them. As for the rest of us, the subject is awkward, uncomfortable.

Women considering abortion, or dealing with its effects, sense that we don't want to hear about it. Perhaps if we were more willing to talk with them, they would spend that 18 hour waiting period finding a different answer to unwanted pregnancies and avoiding years of "forbidden grief."

*For information about Rachel's Vineyard retreats in Indiana, contact Sue Brazo at 1-616-683-4958 or e-mail [ndsue33@hotmail.com](mailto:ndsue33@hotmail.com). Web site is [www.rachelsvineyard.org](http://www.rachelsvineyard.org).*



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