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Column: Effects of Abortion Can Be Long Lasting

By: Mark Peske

As a counselor, I get quite an education. Most of my professional counseling is done at an alcohol and drug treatment center. There I sit with individuals as they go through the "5th Step" - admitting to God, to themselves and to another human being the exact nature of their wrongs.

I listen as people tell me their life's story, as it really was, realizing that if they don't follow the steps to recovery, they are going to die of the absolutely fatal disease of alcoholism. Many people are getting honest with themselves for the first time in their lives. I routinely hear the phrase, "I've never told anyone this, but ..."

So I get firsthand accounts of child abuse, rape, burglary, murder and family tragedies. But one experience I hear about stands out for the intensity of emotion it generates in human lives. It's the experience of abortion.

It's a subject we don't talk about much. Except when it's couched in political rhetoric of phrases like "pro-life" or "pro-choice." But I'd like to step back from the political fray for just a moment to offer you a glimpse of what I've seen from the insider's view - from those who've gone through the experience and lived to tell about it.

There are any number of things that are difficult for people to talk about. And men's "most difficult subjects" are different from women's. But when their recovery depends on getting honest, I have heard women tell about being sexually abused as children, being beaten or raped by men, stealing money from their own children and working in prostitution. Many of these stories are told through tears.

But I have never seen such anguish on the face of a woman as I have witnessed on the faces of those who've told me about their abortions. Grief at the loss of their children, plus guilt at their own part in it, combine like the two

arms of a giant emotional pliers to grip the souls of these women, contorting their faces in pain and squeezing tears from their eyes.

One woman told me about her recurring nightmare. "It's not a visual dream. It's what I hear - a baby crying desperately, like it's in pain. I always wake up sweating and screaming."

Another woman told me about her efforts to kill herself after her abortion. Many such women doubt they can ever be forgiven, or forgive themselves, for what has happened. Honestly, I don't think I could continue sitting with women in this type of setting if I did not have recourse to the healing power of One who carried the pain of every woman's abortion to a Roman cross, and there cried, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."

I was also somewhat surprised to see how strongly an abortion can affect another group of people - the fathers. One 46-year-old man told me how he had gotten his girlfriend (eventually to become his wife) pregnant when they were in college. They went to three of their professors for advice.

"We really looked up to them. They were so intelligent and attractive. They told us the only sensible thing to do was get an abortion. No one ever said it was wrong. It was illegal in North Dakota at that time so we drove to South Dakota where it was permitted by law.

"We got back to our apartment and just laid around, feeling like zombies for a couple of days. Then we got back into our classes. After that we never talked about it with anyone again. But after a couple of years passed and we got married, I started to think about what we'd done and became increasingly uncomfortable about it. But I've never talked about it with anyone till today."

And an 18-year-old young man who'd gotten his girlfriend pregnant when she was 16 described it like this:

"After the abortion, I felt like my heart had been ripped out. I've thought about it every day for the past two years. I've always felt like I could never forgive myself."

Perhaps part of the problem is that women who end up going for an abortion are always (like the situations described here) in a "crisis pregnancy." They are not "settled down" with a loving husband to take care of them and their child.

But one thing I am becoming increasingly convinced of is this: Whatever troubles a pregnant couple may find themselves in, an abortion never solves the problem. It only creates a much larger one!

If you are suffering from the effects of an abortion, call your pastor or a trusted friend and ask if you can talk with them. The road to healing always begins with finding someone to whom we can tell our story. If you have no one you feel you can turn to, give me a call at 755-9132.

Don't suffer alone any longer.

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Article #19 (Abortion Trauma (AT) General Info)