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The Key to Increasing the Russian Birth Rate? Healing the Traumatic Aftershock of Abortion.

By Kevin & Theresa Burke

The Russian government declared 2008 to be the "Year of the Family" to fight the decline in population resulting from the highest abortion rate in the world with nearly 70 percent of pregnancies ending in an abortion. Authorities in the southern Russian City of Novorossiysk scheduled a "week without abortion" in an effort to combat the country's high abortion rate.

Government policies to encourage child bearing have had little effect to reduce the high number of abortions. Despite all the pregnancy perks and childbearing incentives now being offered, women in Russia are not biting the bait to breed.

Dr Theresa Burke is the founder of Rachel's Vineyard Ministries and the author of *Forbidden Grief - The Unspoken Pain of Abortion*. In her groundbreaking book, Dr Burke explores the dynamics of "Traumatic Re enactment," the repetition of traumatic themes, feelings and actions as a hallmark indicator of trauma.

Dr Burke shares:

"In order to understand the Russian population problem, it is essential to understand the psychological dynamic of traumatic repetition. This is directly connected to the phenomenon of multiple abortions. In the United States nearly half of all abortions are repeat procedures...in Russia the conservative estimate is that Russian women average between 3-8 abortions. While it is true that many Russians view abortion as a form of birth control, there is a deeper dynamic at work here.

During trauma the feelings and knowledge of what is happening are so unacceptable that the mind refuses to acknowledge them. The trauma becomes fixed at a certain moment in a person's life - dissociated from consciousness - and provides the material for subsequent post-traumatic reenactment.

Without healing and grief work following the initial abortion loss and the degrading and painful procedure, women are susceptible to cope with their painful feelings through the use of drugs, eating disorders, alcohol, drug abuse and promiscuity. These behaviors frequently lead to another crisis pregnancy, and abortion is once again seen as the best solution. Repetition is the greatest indicator of trauma.

With each abortion the individual becomes increasingly numb, more detached from their hearts, more disconnected from hopes and dreams for the future and susceptible to patterns of relational abandonment, ambivalence over motherhood, depression and

anxiety. With each abortion there can be a distorted sense of mastery over the traumatic feelings...they may not be aware of feelings of loss or grief and not even be aware a deeply entrenched self-destructive pattern of aborting new opportunities for love and life.

In many ways, women really do experience their pregnancies and their unborn children as part of themselves. When the woman destroys her pregnancy and developing child, she is also destroying an extension of herself.

If those in power want to lower the abortion rate and allow Mother Russia to recover from the ravages of abortion's toll, there is a need to drastically increase the number of healing programs like Rachel's Vineyard so that women and men can begin to heal from this complicated grief caused by the loss of so many children. Incentives wont make women want to reproduce. Only healing can do that – and bring resolution to the trauma.

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