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RESEARCH CENTER

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Leaves a Fingerprint on the Universe*

FACTS IN FOCUS

ABORTION AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS: A POOR PROGNOSIS

Many couples choose abortion believing that the decision will preserve the quality of their relationship if one or both partners feel psychologically or materially unprepared to have a child (1,2). Although the research on this topic is somewhat limited, the available data reviewed below suggests just the opposite with abortion introducing significant challenges and stress into the partnership.

Partner communication problems following abortion have been identified (3), and an increased risk for separation or divorce following an abortion has been reported in several studies (3, 4, 5, 6, 7). In one study by Lauzon and colleagues (6), 12% of the women and 18% of the men indicated that an abortion performed up to 3 weeks earlier had adversely affected their relationship. Rue and colleagues (7) reported that 6.8% of Russian women and 26.7% of American women indicated relationship problems caused by an abortion experience; whereas relationship benefit was reported by very few Russian women (2.2%) and American women (.9%).

Research has demonstrated that women with an abortion history are at an increased risk for sexual dysfunction (7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12). Sexual desire, frequency of sexual intercourse, orgasm ability, and sexual satisfaction are among the female sexuality variables explored in the literature. In a recent review, Bradshaw and Slade (13) concluded that 10-20% of women experience abortion-related sexual problems in the early weeks and months after an abortion, while 5-20% of women report sexual difficulties a year later. Male responses to a partner's abortion have not been extensively studied; however, post-abortion sexual problems in the first three weeks post-abortion were indicated by 18% of men, who were significantly affected by a partner's abortion (7).

Studies designed to examine the issues behind post-abortion declines in the quality of intimate relationships are generally missing from the literature. Variables that researchers might logically explore in future studies include any of the following: 1) perceptions of a partner as insensitive or insufficiently supportive, 2) negative abortion related emotions on the part of one or both individuals, 3) altered self-perceptions which may result in feelings of estrangement from one's partner, 4) anger due to relationship-based information (e.g., commitment, long-term plans, etc.) derived through the abortion decision-making process, and/or 5) history of unresolved grief and trauma in one or both partners.

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