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Psychological effects of an abortion

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PSYCH 303: Research Methods

Abortion. Where do I even start. Abortion is obviously a very double-sided topic. You are against it, or you aren't. It is a topic that touches peoples deep and personal morals, ethics, religions, society role, and emotions. Beyond the legal and social status of abortions, the psychological effects on someone who either chooses to or is forced to have abortions, are huge. Although for some, it may be a sense of relief and could make them feel more empowered. Some even say it had a positive effect of their mental state. While others had server post abortions depression and anxiety.

The most common emotions after enduring an abortion are anger, guilt, shame, loss of self-confidence, loneliness, eating disorders, sleeping disorders, anxiety, and depression (Obertinca, 2016). Another very common and extreme effect is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or known as PTSD. Individuals may experience flashbacks and nightmares related to their abortion. This can last for months at a time and may be similar to combat soldiers (Major, 2000). Panic attacks and breakdowns can happen from things like a certain date, sounds, smells, clinics/hospitals, anything related to babies, etc. PTSD due to an abortion even has its own term since it is so common, it is known as post abortion syndrome (Obertinca, 2016). Something to take into consideration is who is having an abortion and why. A study of Italian women was done in 1991, and 69% of the women scored above the cutoff point on the General health Questionnaire. However, another study similar to that on only found 15% of women above the cutoff point of the GHQ. (Bradshaw, 2003).

Th early on effects of an abortion are much more sever and traumatic than after a year or more. Early on emotions are more negative. Once you get to about a year after, it becomes more positive. There are 6 major negative emotions right away, sad, disappointed, guilty, blue, low, and feelings of loss. On the flip side, there are only 3 positive emotions right away, happy,

pleased, and satisfied (Major, 2000). The range of emotions can go far beyond only these and it all depends on the person and the situation, but after a year, most women say it actually benefitted them more than anything. In one study, 46 out of 58 women, did not experience any kind of severe emotional distress (Kero, 2004). For many individuals there is a feeling of relief and freedom. Most women who do get abortions are those who physically, mentally, or financially cannot support a child. Another reason may be for medical purposes, so getting an abortion makes them feel relief of not having to struggle and worry about the outcome of raising a child. I know if I ended up getting pregnant right now, as a college student living in the dorms, I would not be able to take care of a child.

While is usually looked at as negative and shameful, a lot of women experience positive emotions after enduring one. There are three main groups of women who experience an abortion. Then first group is women without emotional distress, the second group is women with mild/moderate emotional distress, and the last group is women with severe emotional distress. (Kero, 2004). Those who do not experience emotional distress are often those who already had in mind that they would have an abortion before ever becoming pregnant. These women either feel they have enough children, are not fit/is not the right time to become a parent and feel no outside pressure on the decision. The image below shows some of the reason these women chose to have an abortion, along with how they felt about it shortly after, and a year later.

Reason for abortion at the time of abortion	Statements 4 months later	Statements 1 year later
"...I do not want to have children now. I am not mature enough either mentally or practically to have children..." (Woman no 237)	"...knew what I wanted at once...pleased when it was over...I did not need to work on it, everything has gone fine..." (Woman no 237)	"...right decision, I would never have had the ability to care for the child...I do not want to have children... I was not ready/mature...it was a brave decision to an have abortion..." (Women no 237)
"...I do not want to have any more children..." (Woman no 213)	"...it was a very hard 10 days between the decision and the procedure ... something that surprised me...I became aware of new sides of myself...it was useful to work it through...it was not difficult afterwards...no regrets..." (Woman no 213)	"...I have not felt any doubt or any regrets... I know and I believe I can have children if I should want to...but I am not the same now as I was then...I have changed for the better...I did not know I had so much inside..." (Woman no 213)
"...the relationship is too new...my age I am 35 years old...together we have five children that we must be able to take care of..." (Woman no 219)	"... it was hard before the abortion, I thought I had been careless...I have worked it through and I have left the abortion behind me..." (Woman no 219)	"...the best thing I did...no guilt, no sorrow...am I inhuman...? (Woman no 219)

(Kero, 2004).

Within the 58 women in this study, 38 of them stated to have no emotional distress, 26/36 stated no conflict throughout the process (Kero, 2004). While reading on this topic I've noticed a trend in the positives. Women who experience none or little negative emotions often have feeling of empowerment, improved quality of life, improved relationships, increased self-respect, responsibility of their life, and increased maturity.

After one year of getting an abortion, a woman has gone through the steps of grief and was on the process of healing. She has the year to reflect, accept, and adjust to what her and her body went through. As the time passed by, she had the chance to gain a new perspective on abortions and maybe even change her morals and ethics on certain topics. She recognized the choice she made and had their chance to grow because of it. This is not saying the negative feelings disappeared and they may still linger from time to time, especially if the topic of pregnancy/abortion gets brought up. This diagram below clearly shows more of a positive effect after 1 year. Percentage of guilt, grief, emptiness, and shame all go down. Those are all part of

the most commonly felt list. While those are going down, emotions such as release relief, and powerlessness are all going up. Now there are some that indicate more negative feelings after a year such like, regret/doubt, and injustice. To put into percentages, positive feelings increased from 16% to 47% after one year, and negative feelings decreases from 30% to 3% (Kero, 2004).

	Facing abortion (n=57) ^a	1-Year after abortion (n=58)
Responsibility	20	86
Relief	54	72
Release	34	52
Grief	43	31
Injustice	11	24
Guilt	30	22
Emptiness	25	22
Anguish ^b	23	—
Impatience ^b	11	—
Anger	13	14
Regret/doubt	7	14
Shame	15	12
Powerlessness	5	12
Respect ^b	4	—
Crisis	9	2
Violation ^b	2	—
Self-respect ^b	4	—
Anxiety ^b	61	—
Maturity ^c	—	76
Indifference	0	0

(Kero, 2004).

One major setback with abortions is the social pressure. Society can affect someone self-esteem/respect in general. Have you ever walked or drove past a planned parenthood building? There are protesters surrounding those building the majority of the time. I know a friend in college who had to go to one in Minneapolis and she was getting screamed at and followed the whole time she was there. The abortion itself was already traumatizing than she had middle aged women and men screaming at her. What makes me mad about that certain topic is the protesters have no idea why those women are there. It could be a medical reasoning or simply for birth control, yet they are screaming, following, and shoving signs in their faces about killing babies. The judgment against abortions makes it an even more difficult time. The judgment is often tied to personal morals, beliefs, ethics, and religions. The people who follow these morals and

religions reflect their opinions on to others and force them to feel shame and guilt which is unfair because not everyone shares the same morals and religions. Same if legal and political views. A lot of religion is involved in politics, and it is not fair to decide everyone life based on one person religions. Social media is often used to pass on judgement as well. A lot of people will post about their bias experience which creates stereotypes. I even sometimes see signs on the side of the highways saying, "Save the babies, don't abort". This puts doubt and shame into someone's minds and forces them to think of making a decision they know is not best for their current lifestyle.

Overall having an abortion can be very negative towards a person mental health. There are lots of women who experience PTSD, depression, anxiety, disorders, guilty, shame, etc. An abortion carries all this weight with it. It does help if you have a partner or any type of support, by your side throughout the process because the outside pressure from society is real and everywhere. It is important to run through all the options and see if there is another way to go about the pregnancy and still have the life you want. However, going on with the pregnancy is not always the best choice and that is okay. Most women who do experience an abortion are satisfied with their choice and accept that it was the best decision for everyone involved, including the baby. They experience sense of relief and maturity after it is done with.

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