

New Research Concerning Men's Disclosure of Their Abortion Experience

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A newly published study¹ in the *European Journal of Counselling Psychology* (Coyle & Rue, 2015) describes the positive and negative aspects of men's disclosure of their personal abortion experience. Using an online survey, researchers collected data from men who chose to disclose and analyzed the nature of that disclosure. Responses were obtained from 101 men who ranged in age from 18 to 71 years. The time lapse since the abortion occurred ranged from one day to 43 years.

Only two of the men did not tell anyone about their experience while most disclosed to more than one person. The most frequently chosen person for disclosure was a friend and about half confided in a counselor or clergyperson. Approximately one-third chose to disclose to a parent, sibling, or other individual. For the men who participated in this study, disclosure was perceived positively more often than negatively. Using content analysis, researchers identified the following as the positive aspects related to disclosure: relief, spiritual benefit, support, acceptance, empathy, forgiveness, opportunity to help others, acknowledgment of the child, and increased understanding. Negative aspects related to disclosure included: a lack of empathy from the person disclosed to, pain of facing reality, lack of resolution, and condemnation.

While others have identified a need to offer men pre- and post-abortion counseling, only two studies (Coyle & Enright, 1997; Gordon, 1978) have formally investigated counseling programs developed for male partners of women undergoing elective abortion. In spite of clinical observations (Rue, 1996) and scientific evidence (Coyle, Coleman & Rue, 2010) that men may suffer psychological trauma from abortion, little research has focused on men's needs related to abortion and routine counseling is not offered to them. Therefore, there is a critical need to evaluate current programs, identify effective practices, and develop evidence-based counseling protocols for men. This study is an early step toward the development of such protocols.

Abortion involves a deliberate human death experience which raises existential and/or spiritual challenges. Common sense informs us that elective abortion may be challenging for both men and women. In the context of abortion, men are too often acknowledged solely as supportive or unsupportive partners rather than as separate individuals with their own needs. This research attempts to understand men's unique roles in and reactions to a partner's elective abortion.

¹ Coyle, C.T. & Rue, V.M. (2015). Men's perceptions concerning disclosure of a partner's abortion. *The European Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 3(2), 159-173.
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