

Post Abortion Stress (PAS)

Many people experience a sense of relief immediately after an abortion. For others, at any time - sometimes years later - painful feelings may emerge. Evidence is conflicting but it is thought at least 10% of women will have marked, serious or persistent psychological problems. It is unknown how many men are affected - but a number have attended Pregnancy Crisis Centres for counselling.

Risk Factors

There is evidence that some people are more at risk of developing PAS. Risk factors include: adolescence, ambivalence for the pregnancy itself or the abortion procedure (if religious), termination on medical grounds, late termination, having children already, poor social support, previous psychiatric problems including depression, feeling pressurised by others (e.g. partner or parents) or by circumstances.

Triggers

Various life events may trigger the onset of PAS including:

- Subsequent pregnancy or pregnancy loss
- Media articles on foetal development and abortion

- Another loss or traumatic event
- Infertility or menopause

General symptoms

- Alcohol and/or drug abuse - to dull painful emotions or escape reality
- Anger - may be generalised or specifically aimed at those involved in the experience
- Anxiety - sometimes panic attacks
- Brief psychosis
- Denial/repression - pushing down of intolerable emotions
- Depression
- Deterioration of self-worth and self-image
- Disruption in relationships - inability to be intimate or social with friends or family
- Disturbance of sleep patterns
- Feelings of helplessness or powerlessness
- Grief
- Psychological numbing
- Regret
- Remorse

- Suicidal thoughts or attempts

Specific Symptoms

- Anniversary syndrome
- Anxiety over fertility
- Avoidance behaviours - avoidance of pregnant friends, babies, vaginal examinations
- Eating disorders
- Maternal confusion
- Inability to bond with children
- Preoccupation with becoming pregnant again
- Psychological disorders - promiscuous behaviour or inability to engage in sexual activity
- Sudden uncontrollable crying

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