

# CONTINUED...

## Fathers

**Continued from page 1**

Like other experts on the effects of abortion, Reardon emphasized that no exhaustive study of abortion's effect on men exists, and that virtually all the information about abortion's effects on men is anecdotal. In fact, only one book, Arthur B. Shostak's 1984 study titled *Men and Abortion—Lessons, Losses and Loves*, comes close to serving as a benchmark study on the issue, experts said, and its scope is limited to men who actually accompanied women to abortion clinics.

In a phone interview, Shostak, a professor of sociology at Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pa., said he studied 1,000 men who had accompanied their wives or girlfriends to 32 abortion clinics in 18 states. He found:

- 84 percent of the men felt the decision to have an abortion had been made jointly.
- 34 percent felt the decision had been imposed on them.
- 95 percent said it was the most difficult experience of their life.
- 90 percent said they would never be back because they would be more careful about using contraception.

A small percentage of the men considered what they did to be immoral, Shostak said, adding that 70 percent of the men said they resented the presence of pro-life protesters at the clinics.

The fathers also resented the facts that they were not allowed by the clinics to be with the women during abortions, and did not receive any counseling or family planning information while they waited. He added that the clinic staff blamed pro-life protesters for occupying the time and energy of staff members who could have provided the men with such services.

Although he criticized pro-life activists who picket and blockade clinics, and he supported the type of family planning the Catholic Church opposes, Shostak said he believes abortion is an "unmitigated social tragedy." He also said he has found that men who must experience what women go through at an abortion clinic almost never find themselves in such a situation again.

"When a male sweats the abortion de-

cision, there isn't a second abortion," he said.

Men whose lives are touched by abortion can be categorized in five ways, according to several observers.

- He didn't know the woman was pregnant, and didn't know she had an abortion.
- He pressured her to have an abortion.
- He opposed the abortion, and even fought against her having one. Such men often feel great anger at the woman after the abortion, and against those, including the doctors, who helped her obtain it.
- He abandoned her, and cared nothing for what happened to her.
- He told her he would support her no matter what decision she made.

The majority of men fall into the final category, according to the Rev. Wayne F. Brauning, a Pennsylvania-based minister in the Presbyterian Church of America. The minister founded a group called Men's Abortion ReCovery, or MARC, which works with men suffering from the effects of abortion. Dr. Brauning noted his belief that fear keeps many men from opposing their mates' decisions to abort. "I think men don't want conflict with women because they feel they're going to lose," he said.

Yet, Dr. Brauning said he believed that by playing a passive role in a woman's abortion decision, men do a disservice to themselves and their mates. Many relationships end following an abortion, he said, and even those that survive are often scarred forever.

"When you've got a dead baby between the two of you, you're always going to be blaming each other for what you did," he said.

He also believes that by refusing to stand up for their unborn offspring, men reap a harvest of guilt, shame and anger. Even pregnant women set on aborting may change their minds if they sense their men will stand by them, he said.

"I've heard a few women say, 'If only he had done that, we would have had the baby,'" he said.

Worse yet, standing by while abortion occurs often renders many men incapable of seeking God's forgiveness for years after the abortion, he said.

"I am sure that we have many, many men in our Catholic and Protestant services, sitting in the back, who bear this

tremendous guilt in their lives, but who are unwilling to come for help because they think people will think of them as the scum of the earth," he said.

Millions of abortions have taken place since the early 1970s, and that means that the men who fathered those children now carry the memories of those abortions, observers said.

"We now have a country filled with walking wounded," said Victoria Thorn of Milwaukee, founder of Project Rachel, a nationwide post-abortion reconciliation helping network that the Diocese of Rochester adopted last year.

"I desperately want fathers to be given chances to do their own healing," she added during a telephone interview with the *Courier*.

Thorn also heads up the National Office of Post-Abortion Reconciliation and Healing, Inc., which provides a network for post-abortion researchers and therapy experts. The office also gathers and produces post-abortion resources for use by people interested in the effects of abortion on men and women.

Thorn, and other post-abortion experts, noted that they believe that fathers often turn their pain over an abortion against themselves through substance abuse, or against women through physical and verbal abuse. That's because abortion strikes at the very heart of a relationship, Thorn said.

"When an abortion occurs, it is the deepest rejection of intimacy that can happen to a couple," Thorn said.

In his study, Shostak found, however, that abortion generally affects a relationship by "crystallizing" it—in other words, if a couple was becoming closer at the time of the abortion, they continue in that direction following it. However, if abortion occurs when the couple are drifting apart, the relationship tends to end following the abortion, he said.

For men who regret abortion, healing is available, according to experts. Men, and women, need to confess their deed before God, forgive each other, and even, in some cases, hold rituals or services that commemorate their dead children's lives, observers said.

"They have to grieve the death of this child who was never named, that was never allowed to be born," said Sister Julie LeVeque, a Sister of St. Joseph who serves

as a pastoral counselor at the Sister of St. Joseph's Spirituality Center in Rochester. Sister LeVeque, Ph.D., is also a counselor for Project Rachel in the Rochester diocese.

She added that parishes should publicize Project Rachel, and she noted that those affected by abortion can benefit from the church's sacrament of reconciliation.

Warren Williams, a Protestant layman from Boulder, Co., is also the founder of Fathers and Brothers, a post-abortion ministry to men, and has talked to 100 men who have been through an abortion experience. People ministering to men suffering from the effects of abortion need to move the public discussion of abortion toward the deeper significance of what has happened to these men, he said in a phone interview.

"We have to talk about lost children, lost relationships, lost fatherhood," he said. "It wasn't an abortion that caused this—it was a choice not to become a parent."

One thing no one should do when talking to a father who has lost a child through abortion is consider the experience any less important to him than it is to the mother, experts said. The anonymous young man who grieves for his aborted child summed it up this way:

"I have to live with this for the rest of my life now," he said. "Do you realize, whether I have one child or 30 more, I always know that my first child was aborted?"

The following resources are listed for people interested in post-abortion counseling and/or research:



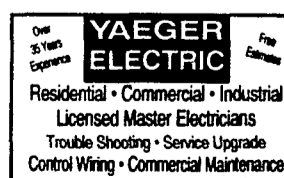




In the Diocese of Rochester, post-abortion counseling is available through Project Rachel, which can be contacted at 1-888-9-RACHEL (722435).

Men's Abortion ReCovery can be contacted at 610/394-3210, or by writing Dr. Wayne Brauning, 237 S. 13th Ave., Coatsville, PA, 19320. Dr. Brauning also has lists of other organizations devoted to post-abortion ministry and counseling.

Fathers and Brothers can be contacted at 303/494-3282, or by writing: Fathers and Brothers Ministries, 350 Broadway Suite 40, Boulder, CO, 80306.

The Post-Abortion Review's address is P.O. Box 7348, Springfield, IL, 62791.

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