

This requires us to engage in "costly love," a love that demands a real sacrifice of time, energy, and resources. Anything less, they will interpret as "You don't really care." Anything less, and they will be right.

**Notes:**

1. Hilgers, et al, *New Perspectives on Human Abortion* (Frederick, Md.: University Press of America, 1981) 156.
2. Garfinkel, et al., *Stress, Depression and Suicide: A Study of Adolescents in Minnesota*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Extension Service, 1986).
3. Reardon, "A Survey of Psychological Reactions," (Springfield, IL: Elliot Institute, 1987).

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Originally published in *The Post-Abortion Review* 1(2) Summer 1993. Copyright 1993 Elliot Institute

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**The Evangelization Station**

Hudson, Florida, USA

E-mail: [evangelization@earthlink.net](mailto:evangelization@earthlink.net)

[www.evangelizationstation.com](http://www.evangelizationstation.com)

Pamphlet 626

## The Abortion/Suicide Connection

David C. Reardon, Ph.D.

In the 1960's, when abortions were available only for "therapeutic" reasons, it was not uncommon for persons with the means and know-how to obtain an abortion on psychiatric grounds. In some states, all that was necessary was to find an agreeable psychiatrist willing to diagnose every woman with a problem pregnancy as "suicidal."

Yet all the studies done on this issue show that pregnancy is actually correlated with a dramatic *decreased* rate of suicide compared to non-pregnant women. This has led some psychiatrists to suggest that pregnancy somehow serves a psychologically protective role. The presence of another person to "live for" appears to reduce the suicidal impulses of a mentally disturbed or deeply depressed woman.<sup>(1)</sup>

Although pregnancy weakens suicidal impulses, there is strong evidence that abortion dramatically *increases* the risk of suicide. According to a 1986 study by researchers at the University of Minnesota, a teenage girl is 6 times more likely to attempt suicide if she has had an abortion in the last six months than is a comparable teenage girl who has not had an abortion.<sup>(2)</sup> Other studies have found similar statistical significance between a history of abortion and suicide attempts among adults. Thus, the actual data

suggests that abortion is far more likely to drive an unstable woman to suicide than is pregnancy and childbirth.

This abortion/suicide link is well known among professionals who counsel suicidal persons. For example, Meta Uchtman, director of the Cincinnati chapter of Suiciders Anonymous, reported that in a 35 month period her group worked with 4000 women, of whom 1800 or more had abortions. Of those who had abortions, 1400 were between the ages of 15 and 24, the age group with the fastest growing suicide rate in the country.

Sometimes a post-abortion suicide attempt is an impulsive act of despair. For example, 18-year-old "Susan" writes: "Two days after the abortion I wrote a suicide note to my parents and boyfriend. I just couldn't fathom how I could possibly live with the knowledge of what I had done. I killed my own baby! I went down to the basement and figured out how to shoot my father's pistol. Hysterical and crying I put the barrel of the gun into my mouth. All of a sudden I heard someone upstairs. For some reason my father had stopped by to pick up something. I stopped what I was doing and went upstairs. He saw that I was upset and asked me if I wanted to have lunch with him at noon. I felt I at least owed him lunch. By the time lunch was over I was too scared to do it."

Other times, the suicidal impulses result from years of repression, depression, and lost self-esteem. A 1987 study of women

who suffered from post-abortion trauma found that 60 percent had experienced suicidal ideation, 28 percent had attempted suicide, and 18 percent had attempted suicide more than once, often several years after the event.<sup>(3)</sup>

Sadly, in at least one documented case, an 18-year-old committed suicide three days after having a suction abortion because of guilt feelings over having "killed her baby." Later examination of the clinic's records revealed that she had not actually been pregnant.

Perhaps one reason for the strong abortion/suicide link exists in the fact that in many ways abortion is like suicide. A person who threatens suicide is actually crying out for help. So are women who contemplate abortion. Both are in a state of despair. Both are lonely. Both feel faced by insurmountable odds.

Some "right-to-die" groups argue that we should legalize suicide and even create suicide clinics where facilitators would ease people through their suicide decisions. If we did so, there would be no shortage of desperate people willing to exercise their "freedom to choose." Promised a "quick, easy and painless" solution to their problems, suicide rates would skyrocket just as abortion rates did in the 1970's.

Like the suicide clinics described above, abortion clinics also exploit desperate people. They promise to release clients from the darkness of their despair. They appeal to

our consumer society's demand for instant solutions to all our problems. They pose as places of compassion, but they are actually reaping huge profits through the harvest of the lonely, frightened, and confused people who are "unwanted" by society. In place of life, they offer the "compassion" of death.

Granting the wish for suicide or abortion is not an aid to desperate people. It is abandonment. It is a false compassion that protects us from getting entangled in the "personal problems" of others. It is "cheap love."

To those who look deeply, and care deeply, it is clear that people who express a desire for suicide or abortion are really crying out for help. They are crying out for the support and encouragement to choose life, cherish life, and rejoice in life. They are crying out for an infusion of hope.

Just as a suicidal person is crying out for help when she tells others she wishes she were dead, so a woman who is distressed over a pregnancy is crying out for help when she tells others she is considering abortion. In both cases, the desperate person is reaching out in the hope that someone will announce they truly care, and will truly help them. They need to see the value of life, their own as well as their child's, reflected in the love of those who would help them preserve that life. They need to hear that they are strong enough to triumph in the life that is theirs, and that whenever they grow weak, we will be there to strengthen them and even carry them.