A group of women who have experienced pregnancies resulting from rape or incest are petitioning Congress and state legislatures to hear their stories, saying women who become pregnant from sexual assault don't want or need abortions.

The petition from the Ad Hoc Committee of Women Pregnant by Sexual Assault (WPSA) asks federal and state legislators to “hold public hearings at which we and other women who have become pregnant through sexual assault will be invited to discuss our unique needs and concerns.”

WPSA was formed after the publication of Victims and Victors: Speaking Out About Their Pregnancies, Abortions and Children Resulting from Sexual Assault, a book of personal testimonies collected from women who have experienced a sexual assault pregnancy. The group says that pregnant sexual assault victims have been either ignored or misrepresented by politicians and the media because of the polarizing effects of the abortion debate.

“In most cases, it is only in the context of highly divisive debates over abortion that we are discussed,” the petition reads. “In virtually every case, the people who claim to be defending our interests have never taken the time to actually listen to us to learn about our true circumstances, needs, and concerns.”

Kathleen DeZeeuw, who became pregnant after being raped as a teen and gave birth to a son, Patrick, wrote in Victims and Victors that she feels “personally assaulted and insulted every time I hear that abortion should be legal because of rape and incest. I feel that we're being used to further the abortion issue, even though we've not been asked to tell our side of the story.”

WPSA members say that because women who have actually been pregnant following sexual assault have never been given a forum to describe their real experiences, public policies—including public funding for abortions for women who become pregnant through rape or incest—fail to offer pregnant sexual assault victims the care and support they need.

Instead, the women say, public funding for abortions following rape or incest may give women, their family members, and health care providers the false impression that abortion is proven to be helpful in these circumstances.

Scientific research on the matter is scarce. There are no published studies that have demonstrated any therapeutic benefits of abortion, either in general or in the specific case of pregnancies resulting from sexual assault. On the other hand, data collected from Victims and Victors shows that many women find abortion to be harmful—even in the “hard cases” of sexual assault pregnancy.

Nearly 200 women submitted letters or testimonies for Victims and Victors, making it the largest sample of information ever collected from women who have experienced a sexual assault pregnancy.

Of the women who responded to the survey, 88 percent of those who had abortions said they regretted their abortions and that abortion only compounded the trauma of the sexual assault. Only one woman reported no regrets about her abortion, while the remaining women either made no statements regarding their abortions or were uncertain whether their lives were better or worse after abortion. By contrast, none of those who carried to term said they subsequently regretted having given birth.

WPSA member Arlene Anzalone had an abortion after being raped at the age of 26. She says that “slowly but surely,” more women are being open about their abortions and the pain they experienced as a result.

"I believe that as each of us who are willing to speak out comes forward to talk about this issue, there will be more to come," Anzalone said.

Heather Gemmen, a WPSA member whose eight-year-old daughter, Rachael, was conceived in a rape, says that talking about her experience has helped her find healing.

"It's because I came out that I have restoration," Gemmen said. "When you're raped, you suddenly become part of a secret club you didn't know existed. And I don't want this club to be secret anymore. I want to help other people voice their pain."
A new Elliot Institute study published in the *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse* strengthens the case for a causal connection between abortion and substance abuse.

The study found that among women who had unintended first pregnancies, those who had abortions were more likely to report, an average of four years later, more frequent and recent use of alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine.

Researchers from the Elliot Institute and Bowling Green State University examined a nationally representative sample of women, including 749 women who had unintended first pregnancies and 1,144 women who had never been pregnant.

The effects of age, race, marital status, income, education, and psychological state prior to the pregnancies were statistically removed. All the data was drawn from the widely respected National Longitudinal Study of Youth, which is administered by the Center for Human Resource Research at Ohio State University.

Women who had abortions had higher subsequent substance use rates than both women who had never been pregnant and women who carried their unintended pregnancies to term. Delivering women were not generally different from their never-pregnant peers, with the exception that they used alcohol less frequently.

**Giving Birth Has a Protective Effect**

According to the lead author, Elliot Institute director Dr. David Reardon, this latter finding suggests that giving birth, even to an unwanted child, may produce a protective effect arising from the mothers' increased sense of responsibility to their babies.

The researchers report that the elevated rates of substance use among women who had abortions might be linked to higher levels of anxiety, depression, and unresolved grief that have been measured in other studies of women with a history of abortion.

"It seems most likely that we are looking at a cluster of interrelated reactions, not a simplistic, isolated, cause and effect reaction," Reardon said.

At least 21 previous medical studies had already shown that women with a history of abortion are more likely to subsequently use more drugs and alcohol than other women. But this is the first study to compare women who had abortions to women who carried unintended pregnancies to term.

**Abortion, Not Unintended Pregnancy, is the Link**

Reardon says this comparison is important since some have theorized that the link between abortion and substance abuse may be incidental.

"According to this theory, factors related to unintended pregnancies, not abortion, may explain the link to substance use," he said. "These new findings however, show that a history of unintended pregnancy alone is not linked to higher rates of substance use. The link only appears when the unintended pregnancy is aborted."

These conclusions are consistent with the reports of women who attribute their substance use problems to emotional problems stemming from their abortions.

"Not all women who have abortions face substance abuse problems, and abortion may be unrelated to the substance use patterns of some women," Reardon said. "But this data supports the views of women who report that their abortions caused or aggravated substance abuse or other psychological problems in their lives."

**References**

Many women are offered only one choice—abortion.

The epidemic of coerced, unwanted abortions is rarely reported. Yet every week, thousands of girls and women face threats and abuse from people who want them to abort without regard for their own feelings or desires.

A homeless woman was denied shelter until she submitted to an unwanted abortion ... a teen was ridiculed by a school counselor and bussed to the abortion clinic ... a daughter was pushed into an abortion clinic at gunpoint by her mother ... a girlfriend was injected with an abortifacient outside a parking garage ... a 13-year-old was returned to her molester after her abortion ... three sisters were raped repeatedly by their father and forced into abortions for nearly a decade ... a wife miscarried after her husband jumped on her stomach to force an abortion ... a waitress was fired after she became pregnant.

The headlines above represent just a few of the many women who were offered only one choice—abortion. They are just a few of the hundreds of appalling stories of abuse, violence, and manipulation that are found in the Elliot Institute's 21-page special report, “Forced Abortion in America.”

“Forced Abortion in America” is part of a larger series of materials examining ways in which legalized abortion has exposed women to unwanted, unnecessary, and dangerous abortions. It includes citations to research showing that 30 to 60 percent of women having abortions feel pressured to do so by other persons.

Release of the report coincides with the launch of a petition drive by a coalition of national post-abortion ministries asking both the Republican and Democratic national committees to adopt language in their national platforms condemning coerced abortions.

The free special report includes numerous examples of girls and women who were forced to undergo unwanted abortions by parents, sexual molesters, school officials, employers, and others. The report also examines how pregnant women who refuse to abort face increasing levels of abuse and violence intended to intimidate them or cause them to miscarry.

This violence against pregnant women has escalated to the point that the leading cause of death among pregnant women today is homicide. Dozens of cases of women who have been shot, stabbed, choked, burned, or bombed for refusing to abort are also included in the report.

You can download this free report from the Elliot Institute web site at www.afterabortion.info/petition. Feel free to make or print out copies and distribute them to others. Also, see page 7 for more information on other new resources that are available.
Editor’s Note: This is Part I of the Justice vs. Mercy series, which explores the pro-life movement’s attitude toward women who’ve had abortions and what we can do to show greater compassion and mercy. To sign up for this free email series, see below.

Thirty years ago, pro-lifers generally had very little understanding of women who have had abortions. At that time, most of us had never met a woman who was willing to discuss her abortion. And if we had, it was most likely in the context of a heated debate.

In 1982, however, Nancyjo Mann formed Women Exploited By Abortion (WEBA). She began to crisscross the country to speak at pro-life conferences about the years of trauma that followed her own abortion, the eventual healing she found in her profound religious conversion, and her efforts to bring the message of mercy and healing in Christ to others.

While a few other women had spoken publicly about their abortions before Nancyjo, in retrospect, it is clear that she was the first to have a major impact on the understanding and views of pro-life activists. Since then, hundreds of post-abortion ministries have been formed, and thousands of women have given witness to pro-lifers in verbal or written form.

Due to the witness of these women, it would be hard to find a pro-life activist today who has not met, listened to, or spoken to someone who has had an abortion. Moreover, most activists can probably identify at least one peer, colleague, family member, or personal friend who has had an abortion.

Furthermore, based on my own informal review of the groups with which I am most familiar, I believe that nearly all pro-life and pro-family groups and pregnancy centers have women who’ve had abortions on their staffs and/or their boards. Women and men who have been involved in abortions are literally everywhere within the pro-life movement, and they are increasingly being found in top leadership positions.

Lingering Resentments

Yet despite this progress, many women who’ve had abortions and are active in pro-life work tell me that they continue to run into pro-life activists who shun them, judge them, or otherwise treat them with the type of fear and suspicion normally associated with bizarre alien life forms.

Some pro-lifers continue to treat women who’ve had abortions with fear, hostility, and suspicion.

While this lingering hostility towards women who’ve had abortions exists among only a minority of pro-life Christians, it nonetheless poses a significant obstacle to our efforts. Just as it only takes a few violent persons who proclaim they are “pro-life” to give us a bad image, it only takes a few people who are disdainful or demeaning toward those who’ve had abortions to do the same.

The transition toward a pro-woman/pro-life strategy that reflects concern for both women and their unborn children is well underway. Indeed, I would even say the trend is irreversible. But I’m also convinced that God is withholding our pro-life victory until we, the pro-life side, have learned the lessons He intends for us to learn—particularly the lesson that we must be ambassadors of both truth and mercy.

To the degree that we emphasize only the truth about the horror of abortion and hide the truth about God’s mercy and love for those who have been trapped by this sin, we will deprive ourselves of the graces need to transform this culture of death into the culture of life.

Since Jesus came into the world to save, not condemn (Jn 3:17), surely those of us who claim to be His followers are called to do the same. While we can and must judge the morality of acts, we must leave the judgment of persons to God alone (Lk 6:37).

Due to a series of recent events, I now believe it is time to turn our attention inward, to our own movement, in an effort to better understand why attitudes toward women who’ve had abortions pose a stumbling block for some pro-lifers. Just as we have worked diligently to oppose the tactic of violence, we must now work diligently to oppose the tactic of condemnation.

Resentment Leads to Sabotage

I’m asking pro-life activists and leaders who share my passion for a more effective and integrated pro-woman/pro-life movement to reflect with me on the sources of this hostility and judgmentalism. We need to address this thoughtfully and openly because (1) it is impeding the spiritual growth of our pro-life brothers and sisters who are stuck in this mode of anger and resentment, and (2) it is already undercutting our efforts to end abortion while helping women.

I’ll give you a concrete example of the latter. A couple of years ago several pro-life groups in a southern state were working to pass my proposed law that would make it easier for women to sue...
abortionists for psychological injuries resulting from abortion, especially if the abortionist fails to screen for known risk factors. One of the groups asked me to speak with their legislative lobbyist to prepare her to promote the bill to a key government official. When I spoke to her, she explained that even though her organization was backing the bill, she was refusing to lobby for it.

When I asked why, she said, “These women are murderers. We shouldn’t pass laws that will let them get millions of dollars for killing their babies.”

Her blunt antagonism shocked me, but rather than argue about her characterization of women who’ve had abortions, I decided to appeal to her fundamental desire to end abortions.

“Look, women won’t get millions of dollars because the abortionists will close up shop,” I said. “With the extended statute of limitations this bill provides, abortionists will finally be held properly liable for the injuries they’re causing. Rather than face that liability, the assembly-line abortion mills will shut down.”

“That may be,” she replied. “But there’s a right way and a wrong way to stop abortion, and this isn’t the right way. These women shouldn’t be rewarded for killing their babies.”

“But they’re not being rewarded,” I explained. “Factory workers don’t get ‘rewarded’ for being exposed to toxic gases. Patients aren’t ‘rewarded’ for undergoing the wrong treatment. Women won’t be ‘rewarded’ for having dangerous abortions. This isn’t prize money; it’s compensation for injuries they’ve suffered and will continue to suffer for a lifetime.

“Believe me, they’ve suffered a lot! And they were never told the truth ahead of time. In many cases, they weren’t even given a true choice. They were pressured into unwanted abortions by others, and the clinic did nothing to prevent it. Instead, they helped those pushing her to have the abortion to get what they wanted. Why should victims of this form of malpractice be denied compensation just because it’s an abortion?”

“Precisely because it’s an abortion,” she responded. “They’re not victims. They’re guilty.”

We discussed it further, but my arguments fell on deaf ears. For this lobbyist, and perhaps many other pro-lifers, any legislative proposal that relies on civil remedies for abortion complications must be opposed on the grounds that it may “reward” immoral behavior.

Even though she did not question that this bill would stop more than 95 percent of all abortions because they are inherently dangerous, she argued that it was the wrong solution, perhaps as immoral as abortion itself. The consensus we had been building to get the bill through committee collapsed and the bill died.

I am thankful to this woman for being honest about her objections and stating them clearly. In other cases, I’ve had people object to my strategy or legislative proposals without ever being able to clarify why they were objecting to them. Perhaps their objections are actually the same as hers, but they feel it is too awkward or embarrassing to say: “I don’t want to help these ‘murderers’ get rewarded for having abortions.”

**How Far Should We Go?**

This is one of the reasons why I think it is especially important now, at this crucial turning point in the abortion controversy, for pro-lifers to examine our collective conscience and identify (1) what we really think and feel about those who’ve had abortions, (2) what are we really willing to do to help them, and (3) whether there are truly any moral problems with helping them in the ways proposed by the pro-woman/pro-life strategy.

In prompting this reflection, I should hasten to underscore that my purpose is not to throw stones at those who disagree with me. It is not my goal to show that they are unkind, uncharitable, or unreasonable. My goal is simply to reflect on aspects of our fallen human nature that often make it hard for us to actually live the ideal of hating the sin but loving the sinner.

My preliminary guess is that the difficulties we face in this regard fall into three categories: ignorance, lack of empathy, and love of justice.

Regarding ignorance, sometimes we really don’t understand what other people face. We have no experience or even intellectual understanding of what it would be like to “walk in their shoes.”

Regarding empathy, even if we understand intellectually what others have faced, our hearts are sometimes hardened toward them for any number of reasons. In this case, the question of how to soften our hearts may be secondary to the question, “Is there any reason why I ought to soften my heart?” Why not hold an uncompromising attitude to those who don’t “deserve” our empathy?

Finally, regarding love of justice, which I suspect is perhaps the most fundamental issue, I believe there are both real and imagined tensions between the love of justice and the call to be merciful. What is the proper balance between justice and mercy? Or is there one? And if not, are we obligated to first follow the path of justice or the path of mercy?

I’m not certain that I have all the answers to these questions. But I am certain that they need to be more fully discussed. Therefore, I invite every pro-lifer who reads this article to join me in examining our collective conscience to identify ways in which we fail to react with compassion toward post-abortive women, to examine how our attitude effects our efforts, and to seek out a proper response.

* * *

To receive the complete “Justice vs. Mercy” series free of charge via email, sign up for our email list at www.afterabortion.org.
Case Study, continued from page 8

with my abortions. I never had experienced depression nor even known anyone who had. I was in uncharted territory.

During the divorce (he had all the money and friends), the only support I had was my family, who were Catholic and very outspoken about abortion. Because of my experience I couldn’t turn to them at the time I needed them the most. I isolated myself from them; expecting that I would be “disowned,” I disowned myself.

I became a very outspoken “pro-choice” advocate. It was as though the only way I could feel better about my experience was to convince others to do the same. If others had abortions and didn’t experience the pain then somehow I could free myself of the guilt I was expending most of my energy denying.

During my adversarial divorce I got pregnant again. I really was getting scared about the possible risks of abortion now that I was on my third, but again the counselors at Planned Parenthood assured me the risks were minimal. When I went to the abortionist’s office the personnel there were less sympathetic. The nurse warned me that I could have trouble conceiving or carrying a baby full-term from having had multiple terminations.

They treated us like cattle. I was rushed in and rushed out. The staff were too cold-hearted to be called “caring professionals” and they looked at me with disdain. I realize now it was probably my own shame that I saw in their eyes.

My boyfriend (the unborn baby’s father) drove me home from the clinic and that was the last I saw of him. A couple of weeks later I took an overdose of the tranquilizers my psychiatrist had given me to cope with my ongoing depression. I was hospitalized in a psychiatric ward for 72 hours. I told the psychiatrist about the abortion, yet he curiously didn’t suggest any connection with my abortion even though this had precipitated the overdose.

I was released from the hospital to care for my two children. I still wanted to die and desperately needed help. I couldn’t cope with the needs and demands of my two young children and wound up kicking my six-year-old son.

I called child protective services and they put my children in their father’s custody for three months. I spent several years (and thousands of dollars) in counseling until I no longer had a desire to hurt myself or others. Never once were my abortions discussed, dealt with, or mourned.

Nearly ten years later I found myself pregnant once again. Even though we weren’t married, we had been together several years and I was excited about having this baby. The father wasn’t and begged me to have an abortion. I refused; I would rather lose him than lose the baby.

Then early in my pregnancy I woke up in the middle of the night with excruciating, painful cramps. I was bleeding. The next day I went to the ob/gyn. Without even examining me or the baby, he told me I’d had a miscarriage and would have to have a D&C.

I asked him what were the chances my baby was still alive and he said “less than a 10 percent chance,” without even doing an ultrasound. I felt pressured into deciding to go ahead with the procedure, with the doctor advising me that at my age (40) there could be genetic problems, my boyfriend begging me not to go ahead with the pregnancy, and now this. To this day that small “10 percent chance” haunts me.

Days later I found part of my baby in the toilet. It looked like a miniature but well formed foot. I became hysterical. I held on to that foot as all that was left of my baby and saved it in my jewelry box. By doing so I allowed myself to feel the remorse of all those other abortions.

By seeing and holding that foot, I knew it was a baby that died, not just a “piece of my own flesh” as I’d been told. It broke through my denial and allowed me to grieve. I was even able to share the story of this “miscarriage” with my Catholic family and receive their support and consolation.

Almost 20 years since my first abortion I came back to the Catholic faith and found Rachel’s Hope post-abortion counseling. Even though with their help and support I’ve mourned the losses, received counseling, and am once again in communion with the Catholic faith, I still feel shame. I haven’t come out publicly about my abortions for the single fact that I just cannot bring myself to tell my mom.

I’m now almost 50 years old and I have a darling little grandson. He reminds me all the time of my precious little unborn children by giggling with delight as he grabs his little foot and holds it up for Grandma to kiss.

I am so grateful that I lived in spite of my efforts otherwise. I worry about women going through this who don’t know there are others that feel the way they do, that there is help and that it’s okay to hurt and mourn the loss of a child even if it’s by your own “choice.” I hope that telling my story may save not only a child’s life but a mommy’s life.

I didn’t feel I could turn to my family just when I needed them the most.

Contributions

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July-Sept. 2004

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I had my first abortion when I was 26 years old. I was married at the time to a successful chiropractor. We had two young children, a boy and a girl, ages four and two. You wouldn’t think I would be a candidate for an abortion; we had everything needed to bring another child in to the world except faith and a secure marriage.

When I told my husband I was pregnant he was ambivalent. When I asked if he wanted the baby he said, “No.” When I asked if I should have an abortion he said, “That’s your choice.” I felt such complete and total rejection from him. He had rejected the most important, most valuable purpose of our marriage—our life-giving love.

He had placed all his hopes in his practice and in making huge sums of money, and our family came last. This was the final straw in a year-long battle to convince him to be more of a dad and play a part in our family besides the “bread winner.” I had the abortion.

When I went to the Planned Parenthood clinic they asked me a few questions but seemed only interested in whether I was pregnant. That was the only criteria for having an abortion. They didn’t ask about my marriage, my family status, my religion, or my upbringing. They didn’t ask whether I had any support in my decision.

All they asked for was a positive pregnancy test. I had more “counseling” when I went to have breast implants than when I went to have an abortion. (At least the plastic surgeon had me fill out a personality and family history questionnaire to determine “suitability” for the procedure.)

Planned Parenthood also didn’t prepare me for the procedure. They downplayed the experience to the point of telling me I would feel some period-like cramping, and pinching like one feels during a Pap smear.

There were no warnings of possible risks, i.e. perforated uterus, hemorrhaging, sterility, breast cancer, or depression. I was told that abortion was safer than carrying a child full term. I was totally unprepared for the pain, both physical and emotional, that I would endure.

Because I had long ago left the faith of my youth, the Catholic church, and belonged to a “New Age” group, I didn’t believe I was “killing” my child. I believed the “soul” enters the child at birth. Given that belief, however, made it impossible to mourn the loss—and all the harder to come to terms with an ensuing depression.

After the abortion I felt like a zombie—I had shut down my feelings. It affected my parenting of my two young children. It affected my already shaky marriage. Three months later I was pregnant again and had another abortion. One month after that abortion I asked for a divorce. I didn’t feel any love for my husband, only resentment.

I no longer had purpose or value. I felt disassociated from my “self” and I wanted to die. I was on a course of self-destruction, all the while not aware that these feelings had anything to do

continued on page 6