

# Post-Abortion Syndrome: A Trauma-Informed & Faith-Based Counseling Approach



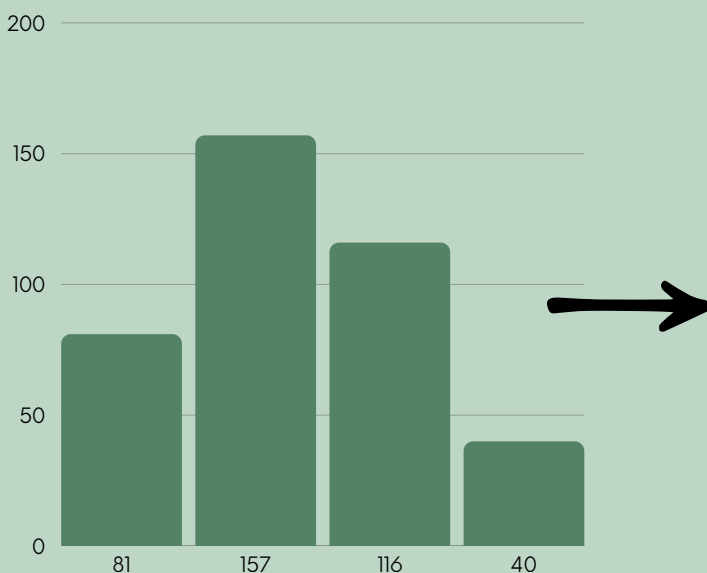
## What Is PAS?

PAS is a traumatic psychological disturbance similar to that of posttraumatic stress disorder that can occur for women following an abortion (Liu, 2023). The trauma that ensues from the death of one's unborn child can be an emotionally disturbing experience. (Katz, 2019).

While PAS is not a clinical diagnosis within the DSM-5, it is noted as a form of PTSD and many abortion patients experience symptoms of emotional disturbance, both short-term and long-term (Students for Life of America, n.d.).

## The Hidden Emotional Toll: Mental Health Statistics

- 1 in 4 women in the U.S. will have an abortion by age 45.



- 81% ↑ risk of psychiatric hospitalization
- 157% ↑ risk of hospitalization for substance use disorder
- 116% ↑ risk of hospitalization for suicide attempt
- 40% show symptoms of PTSD or posttraumatic stress

Data sources: Charlotte Lozier Institute (2025); Liu (2023)

# PAS SYMPTOMS

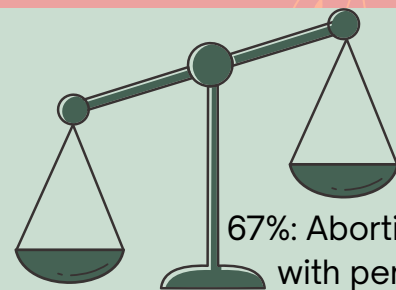
- Depression - over 1/3 post-abortionive women experience (Khaja, 2023).
- Guilt & Self-Blame (Katz, 2019).
- Anxiety & Avoidance (Broen, 2005).
- Substance Abuse, Self-Harm, & Suicidal Ideation (Students for Life of America, n.d.).
- Flashbacks or Intrusive Thoughts (Katz, 2019).
- Relationship Difficulties (Katz, 2019).



## CAUSES & CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

(Lundell et al., 2013); (Coleman et al., 2017).

- Previous mental health disturbance
- Efforts to keep the abortion a secret
- Feelings of coercion or pressure to abort
- Ambivalence or uncertainty about the decision
- History of sexual abuse or adverse childhood experiences
- Perceived opposition from family, friends, or community
- Lack of emotional or social support during or after the abortion



67%: Abortion conflicted with personal values; many felt pressured.



60%: Would have continued pregnancy with more emotional or financial support

(Reardon, 2023).



# TREATMENT & HEALING

## Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

- CBT has been shown to be highly effective in addressing anxiety, depression, and post-abortion grief (Bagheri et al., 2023).
- Identifying maladaptive thoughts and replacing them with self-compassionate statements (Katz, 2019).
- explore self-blame: determine if blame is internal, external, or both (Kolski & Jongsma, 2014).
- Develop a hopeful future plan, focusing on strengths, affirmations, and routine (Kolski & Jongsma, 2014).
- Address behavioral avoidance with gradual exposure to triggering situations (Thomas et al., 2018).
  - Ex: attending doctor appts., social events, or intimacy.
- Incorporate activity scheduling for self-care: exercise, nutrition, quality time with loved ones (Tan, 2022).
- Include mindfulness and distress-tolerance (Katz, 2019).
- Integrate biblical guidance for Christian clients: “Take every thought captive” (English Standard Version, 2001, 2 Cor., 10:5).



- Thought Reframe Journal
- Journaling Thoughts & Emotions
- Relaxation Exercises
- Guided Imagery
- Exposure Techniques
- Activity Scheduling
- Meditation on Scripture



## Trauma-Informed Approaches

Recommended when working with reproductive trauma (Sachdeva et al., 2022).

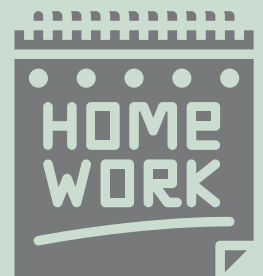
### Trauma-Informed CBT (Santarneccchi et al., 2019).

- Focuses on the maladaptive thoughts that encompass the traumatic experience.
- Includes in vivo exposure to address avoidance patterns.
- Uses relaxation techniques for managing intrusive thoughts.

### EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing)

(Santarneccchi et al., 2019).

- Uses saccadic eye movements to lessen the emotional impact of traumatic memories
- Helps clients process trauma without verbal unpacking (Vereecken & Corso, 2024).



- Grounding Techniques
- Relaxation Exercises
- Vagus Nerve Stimulation
- Musical Interventions

# TREATMENT & HEALING *Continued*



## Grief and Loss Counseling

- 33% of post-abortive women report frequent feelings of loss, grief, and sadness (Sullins, 2025).
- Grief may be delayed or uniquely intense because her grief is hidden and society tells the story that the death of her child is not acknowledged (Reardon, n.d.b).
- Grief is cyclical, not linear; encourage recognition of emotional and bodily cues (Mayo & Doney, 2024).
- Use rituals and expressive tools (Thomas et al., 2018).
- Incorporate forgiveness work: self-forgiveness, forgiving others, bibliotherapy.
- Integrate faith-based healing for Christian clients: Christ's love, forgiveness, and redemption.

- Meaningful Ceremonies
- Naming the Child
- Letter-Writing to Child & Self
- Bibliotherapy
- Forgiveness Exercises
- Grief Journaling

## Group Therapy



- Provides a safe space to process with women who share similar experiences.
- Helps improve self-worth, self-forgiveness, and acceptance (Sebola & Risenga, 2023).
- Incorporates tools from CBT, grief work, and trauma-informed therapy.

### Faith-based group options offer spiritual support and healing rituals:

- Project Rachel: Retreats, counseling, memorial naming ceremonies (Reardon, n.d.).
- Rachel's Vineyard: Worldwide retreats for healing in Christ (Rachel's Vineyard, n.d.).
- Bibliotherapy: *Forgiven and Set Free & Surrendering the Secret* (Cochrane, 2022 & Layton, 2008).
- "Bear one another's burdens" (English Standard Version, 2001, Galatians 6:2).

## *Biblical Perspectives*

- Christ offers true freedom, forgiveness, and restoration.
- Grief is a God-designed process that transforms into healing (Mayo & Doney, 2024).
- Help clients see God's love, presence, and care for both them and their child.
- Emphasize forgiveness through grace — "He removes our sins as far as the east is from the west" ((English Standard Version, 2001, Psalm 103:12).



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