

POST-ABORTION COUNSELLING: WHO NEEDS IT, WHY DO PEOPLE SEEK IT, AND WHAT DOES BEST PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?

VALLURY K¹, CABAN A¹

¹ Children by Choice Assn Inc, Brisbane, Australia

Background:

Post-abortion counselling is a critical component of holistic abortion care, yet there is a dearth of research regarding the characteristics of people who seek, and of best-practice post-abortion counselling, beyond its impact on clinical and contraceptive outcomes. With a preponderance of post-abortion counselling services globally driven by anti-abortion activism goals, the implications of limited evidence on the availability of quality pro-choice post-abortion counselling are significant.

Methods:

The first research of its kind, this mixed methods study analysed the case notes of 455 post-abortion counselling clients from Children by Choice to identify characteristics of clients, of their abortion experiences, and of the care they required and received. Case notes were qualitatively analysed using inductive thematic analysis. Demographic client data recorded numerically were analysed using descriptive statistics.

Results:

Post-abortion counselling clients are more likely to report experiencing domestic and family violence and reproductive coercion and abuse (RCA) than Children by Choice's pregnancy-options counselling clients. A mismatch between expectations of abortion and lived abortion experiences driven by insufficient information/knowledge pre-abortion, stigma and shame, social isolation, and RCA were primary determinants of clients seeking post-abortion counselling.

Conclusion:

Circumstances that restrict truly autonomous and informed pregnancy outcome decision making can lead to guilt, shame, and social isolation among abortion seekers. While abortion itself doesn't result in poorer mental health outcomes, this study shows that limited reproductive autonomy and social isolation can. Non-judgmental and empathetic post-abortion counselling should be available to all abortion seekers. Clients have described how it can have immense benefits to long term emotional and social wellbeing.

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