



The Role of Pastoral Counseling Services in Spiritual and Psychological Recovery After Spontaneous Abortion

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Abstract. Abortion is a condition where the fetus dies due to premature expulsion. Meanwhile, spontaneous abortion or miscarriage can occur without certain actions to trigger the expulsion of the fetus. Spontaneous abortions occur naturally, even when people maintain and want the fetus to grow. This results in physical disorders that have psychological impacts such as anxiety, easily giving up hope and an unsettled spirit. So it is very normal that everyone needs recovery after a spontaneous abortion. The role of a spiritual guide is very important in dealing with mental and spiritual recovery due to fetal loss. For this reason, pastoral counseling services guide the perspective of the Christian faith to find the true truth that will restore the soul. This article aims to provide understanding for Christians so that they can maintain a firm foundation of faith in facing every challenge in life such as spontaneous abortion. This research uses a qualitative approach by collecting data from various library sources, journals and the Bible as a source of truth and the basis of Christian faith.

Keywords:

Abortion; Pastoral

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INTRODUCTION

Abortion is a classic issue that has been debated in the fields of healthcare and religious perspectives throughout history. In today's world, when most people hear the word "abortion," they immediately think of the termination of a pregnancy. Although

some respond with empathy, thinking about it as a planned murder of a helpless fetus. The differences in viewpoints have become increasingly sharp, with those showing empathy referred to as pro-life and pro-choice individuals considering abortion a choice and a full right.

However, there are situations where abortion occurs not as a choice but as an "unfortunate event," something unwanted. This type of abortion is known as spontaneous abortion or, more commonly, miscarriage. Individuals who are at risk of experiencing a miscarriage make every effort to prevent it. The hope is that the fetus can survive in the womb and continue to grow, becoming the long-awaited and desired child.

Various methods are employed to prevent spontaneous abortion. Typically, these efforts include the use of uterine-strengthening medications, traditional herbal remedies, and complete bed rest for the expecting mother. Family members also provide support by offering attention, companionship, and hopeful prayers. However, despite all-out efforts, spontaneous abortions still occur frequently. Women with a history of miscarriages have a higher risk of experiencing premature births and recurrent miscarriages (Sunarti Sunarti, Sri Winarni, 2016). This, of course, has an impact not only on physical wounds but also on psychological wounds, including emotional pain, disappointment, a sense of failure, sadness, and inner turmoil.

Often, people are unaware that post-spontaneous abortion recovery should focus not only on physical healing but also on psychological well-being. Physical recovery can be aided by medical professionals in addressing the bodily trauma caused by the abortion. However, emotional recovery from the effects of miscarriage is also essential. Therefore, pastoral counseling services are provided by secular counselors as well as clergy to help counselees regain strength and find solace for their souls. Clergy members have a multifunctional role, serving not only as preachers but also as leaders, role models, counselors, and agents of life transformation (Zebua, 2020).

Biblical perspectives and principles are proclaimed to provide understanding, enabling the counselee to accept the current situation. A service that relies on God sincerely imparts the love of Christ to the counselee, touching and healing their inner being, promoting "inner healing." (Monroe & Schwab, 2009) Healing a wounded soul, especially when accompanied by feelings of guilt, can only be restored through a personal spiritual experience granted by the goodness

of God's grace to those who believe and seek His assistance. Counselors are merely instruments, channels of God's goodness, for only God as the Creator deeply understands His creation.

Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of the best counselor with a remarkable personality, knowledge, and incredible skills. He assists anyone in need. Jesus employs various methods depending on the situation, interests, and specific problems. He patiently listens, teaches, provides encouragement, and offers challenges and confrontations. He welcomes sinners but also demands repentance and obedience (Nainupu, 2017). The example set by Jesus Christ will motivate every servant of God in providing pastoral counseling for believers.

Based on this background, the author is interested in conducting research on pastoral counseling services for Christian individuals who have experienced post-spontaneous abortion. How this approach to pastoral counseling can assist counselees and restore their shaken souls due to spontaneous abortion, turning them into souls filled with peace, gratitude, and steadfast faith.

METODE

The research method employed in this study is a qualitative approach. Data is collected from various literary sources, journals, and the Bible as sources of truth and the foundation of the Christian faith. This research also involves the analysis of texts and content from various sources to gain a deep understanding of pastoral counseling services for Christian individuals who have experienced post-spontaneous abortion.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

The definition of Abortion/abortus is the premature expulsion of conception/fertilization. Meanwhile, according to the Black's Law Dictionary, it is the expulsion of an embryo or fetus as the termination of pregnancy before the fetus reaches 100 grams (Ensiklopedi Indonesia, 2009, p. 22). In medical terms, abortion is the cessation of pregnancy with the expulsion of the fetus, resulting in fetal death, occurring before 20 weeks of gestation with an

approximate weight of less than 500 grams (Sianturi & Kasiadi, 2020).

The issue of abortion is not a new one. Early Christian Church's response to abortion dates back to the Roman Empire's rule. They held on to the philosophical thinking influenced by Jewish beliefs due to Greek cultural influences, which stated that humans were created in the image and likeness of God. This was seen as the pinnacle of God's creation that elevated human dignity. However, in general, ancient Romans and Hellenistic cultures viewed abortion as acceptable through the teachings of Plato. His doctrine stated that a child conceived through incest should be aborted. Aristotle also explained that a male fetus is formed at 40 days, while a female fetus at 90 days, and Aristotle's thinking was embraced for centuries as the theory of "delayed animation" or "late animation." (Kusmaryanto, 2005, pp. 27–33) This theory posits that the human soul does not exist at the time of conception but rather emerges several days/weeks after fertilization has occurred. However, during the Middle Ages, the teachings regarding abortion were considered wrong, and abortion was punishable as it was seen as an act of murder (Kusmaryanto, 2005).

The definition of abortion is terminating a pregnancy by expelling the product of conception before the fetus or embryo can survive outside the womb, resulting in its death (Sinaga, 2023). However, abortion rates are steadily increasing from year to year and require more serious attention in their management. Global data records that out of 121 million pregnancies, 61% underwent abortion during the period of 2015-2019 (Putri & Ronoatmodjo, 2022). This is predicted to continue rising with the advancement of Science and Technology (IPTEK), especially in the field of informatics, and the global impact of globalization.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there are approximately 50 million pregnancies out of 75 million unintended pregnancies that result in intentional abortions, and around 20 million of these abortions are performed in an unsafe manner ("Pengetahuan Dan Sikap Terhadap Aborsi Provocatus," 2017). In the United States, every 4 ½ minutes, a baby is born with a birth defect. This means that nearly 120,000 babies experience birth defects

each year (Lemacks et al., 2013). Since abortion was legalized in the United States in 1973, it has grown into a business with a total income of \$1.02 billion (Earickson, 2013, p. 106).

The Indonesian government has legally regulated the issue of abortion. It is stated in the Health Law of Indonesia, Article 75 paragraph 1, which mentions, "Abortion is prohibited for everyone," with some exceptions outlined in Article 75 paragraph 2 of the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 36 on Health in 2009 (Rini, 2022). As for the exceptions, they are outlined in Government Regulation Number 61 of 2014, Article 32 paragraph 1 letter b, which allows medical doctors to perform abortions in a safe and healthy manner under specified conditions. The condition is that they must have strong and medically accurate evidence that the fetus is deemed "discardable" due to illness or congenital defects.

Congenital birth defects are structural changes that occur at birth, affecting various parts of the fetal body. They can affect the appearance or the functioning of fetal organs. Congenital defects can vary in severity, ranging from mild to moderate, to severe and very severe. Body and internal organ defects can be detected before birth, immediately after birth, or at any time after the baby is born (Hermanto & Wirianto, 2022).

Therefore, abortion based on reasons of congenital defects is highly unjustified and constitutes an act of homicide. Everyone, if given the choice, would prefer to be born without defects. However, birth and death are not within human control; there is a greater and almighty power that determines human birth, including the formation of humans, in accordance with His work.

The Biblical View on Abortion

The Bible asserts that unborn babies are created by God and are protected by the law, as stated in Exodus 21:22, because the fetus is not an extension of the mother's womb but is already a human being (Tedjo, 2021, p. 100). Abortion from the perspective of positive law and the Christian religion is seen as life being a gift bestowed by God, both in the womb and after birth in the world.

While the Bible does not record Jesus' teachings on abortion, and there are no

specific passages that directly address abortion, there are many things that Jesus taught that are relevant to the act of abortion. In Matthew 5:21-26, 38:42, and 43:48, He emphasizes the importance of not acting violently, causing harm, or taking a life. Instead, He teaches to cherish human life just as the Father in heaven does, as stated in Matthew 5:45,48.

Explicitly, in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, there are no teachings either in favor of or against abortion. However, Jesus' teachings consistently emphasize how to love and preserve human life and how to resist forces that seek to destroy human life. Theologian Edmond Jacob stated that in the Old Testament, breathing at birth is seen as a sign of becoming a human person, and conversely, when one ceases to breathe, it is a sign of death (*Theology of the Old Testament*, 1958, p. 63). The Bible regards an unborn child as having the same status as a child who has already been born.

Genesis 2:7 depicts the first human being being formed from the dust of the ground, and God breathed the breath of life into their nostrils. However, there is an argument that a developing fetus receives oxygen through its mother's placenta, so its first breath is obtained when the baby is born. Yet, this argument contradicts the condition of premature babies. Premature infants are capable of breathing on their own outside the mother's womb. The Bible affirms that God has formed humans from within the womb, that God knows the individual and future of a person even before their birth (*ALKITAB*, n.d.). God is involved in the process of preparing a human individual for their birth into the world. The development from zygote to embryo, fetus, baby, child, adolescent, to adulthood and into old age is a complete continuum of human life development (Stassen & Gushee, 2008, p. 277).

Several Bible verses that affirm this include Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations." Psalm 22:10-11, "I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother's womb You have been My God." Luke 1:31, "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus."

Psalm 139:13-16, "For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in secret and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book, they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them."

From the above biblical evidence, it can be summarized that: 1) Babies are human creations and gifts from God that are greatly desired. 2) The Bible acknowledges the role of God as the Creator in the mystery and magnificence of the formation and development of unborn fetuses. 3) God knows those who are still in the womb, even before they are born into the world. 4) The Incarnation began with the miracle of Jesus' conception in the womb, by the Holy Spirit, within a woman. 5) Babies are divine creations and gifts from God that should be welcomed when they enter the world, just as Mary welcomed Jesus.

Abortion and Reasons

In general, abortion and miscarriage are distinct concepts. Abortion is often referred to as a pregnancy termination, which is the deliberate and provoked termination of pregnancy through various means to "end" the fetus's life. There are three known types of abortion to date: Spontaneous Abortion (natural), Induced Abortion (abortion intentionally performed due to unwanted circumstances), and Therapeutic Abortion (abortion performed for medical indications due to a complication that poses a danger and threat to life) (Sianturi & Kasiadi, 2020).

Provocatus Abortion, also known as intentionally induced abortion, is often motivated by various personal reasons. For instance, in cases of adultery, abortion is typically carried out to conceal the sin (shame), embarrassment, and guilt. Intentionally induced abortion is the deliberate termination of pregnancy for specific reasons that support it. These reasons can range from medical, psychological, sociological to economic factors (Sianturi & Kasiadi, 2020). The most commonly found reasons why people undergo abortion include

career disruption, financial constraints, giving birth without the presence of a father, being a student, or to erase shame within the family.

Spontaneous abortion, known as a miscarriage, occurs due to natural factors. Usually, it happens unintentionally, such as accidents, diseases, and genetic errors. The natural and unavoidable fetal death in the process, which is ethical and does not raise concerns. This type of abortion is often referred to as a miscarriage. A miscarriage is a pregnancy that stops due to natural factors, occurring at some point after the fertilized egg is implanted (early stages) ("Makna Tindakan Aborsi Illegal Menurut Islam Dan Kristen," 2016).

So, a spontaneous abortion is typically a miscarriage that occurs in the early stages of pregnancy. The diagnosis and treatment of spontaneous abortion involve obtaining medical history through intravenous therapy or blood transfusion when necessary. Factors that can lead to spontaneous abortion include advanced maternal age, low educational attainment, obesity, or conversely, being underweight, long pregnancy intervals, a history of miscarriage, poor dietary habits, the type of work the mother does, failure to undergo early pregnancy check-ups, exposure to cigarette smoke (active or passive smoking), and stress (Purwaningrum & Fibriyana, 2017).

Therapeutic Abortion is the type of abortion performed due to medical indications or complications during pregnancy. These issues can pose a threat to the safety of the mother, the child, or both. Based on medical reasons and with the recommendation of a medical specialist, abortion can be legally performed. The government allows this action, provided that strong evidence is presented as the basis for the decision to proceed with the procedure. However, the abortion must be done with the knowledge and consent of the uterus owner who makes the decision. If abortion is performed without the patient's consent, it will be in violation of the law, as stated in the Criminal Code (KUHP) Article 347 paragraph (1), "Anyone who intentionally terminates or ends a woman's pregnancy without her consent shall be punished by imprisonment for up to twelve years. (2) If this act results in the death of the woman, the

punishment shall be imprisonment for up to fifteen years." (Abdullah, 2015)

Post-Miscarriage Impact

Pregnancy is a special and joyful time that serves as proof of a woman's perfect nature. However, not all women who become pregnant can experience and carry the pregnancy smoothly and healthily. The causes of a miscarriage are not fully understood, but some factors are indicated as triggers, including hormonal imbalances, acute illnesses, and psychological disturbances.

Globally, one in four women experiences fetal loss due to miscarriage, and 50% of these women experience psychological disturbances within a span of weeks to months after the miscarriage. Psychological disturbances can manifest as symptoms of depression, anxiety, sadness, anger, guilt, self-blame, social isolation, panic, fear, feelings of failure, and a lack of understanding (Rahayu & Wahyuni, 2019).

The struggle of someone who desperately wants to have a child can be immensely stressful and frustrating when a miscarriage occurs. Especially when such incidents happen repeatedly, they can cause severe psychological trauma. Uncertainty and despair about one's ability to conceive and successfully give birth to a child can create a sense of uncertainty. A person is declared to have a miscarriage by a responsible medical doctor. According to the Republic of Indonesia Law No. 44 of 2009, Article 29, medical records are essential documents for healthcare institutions in providing services. Therefore, according to the Indonesian Ministry of Health Regulation No. 269/MENKES/PER/III/2008, Article 1, paragraph 1, medical records are files containing records and documentation of a patient's identity, examinations, treatments, procedures, and other services provided to the patient (Kardila & Barsasella, 2018).

Age maturity is one of the factors that significantly influences the occurrence of abortion. Age reflects the maturity of a person's reproductive organs. Teenage marriages have a twice higher likelihood of experiencing abortion compared to the healthy reproductive age group (Suryaningsih et al., 2019). The general public views spontaneous abortion as a tragedy, and many people express sympathy with condolences.

However, some mothers who experience repeated miscarriages may perceive spontaneous abortion as a "shame" that makes them feel self-conscious because they often fail to maintain their pregnancies. Usually, family and relatives begin to seek the causes, which can intimidate the mother who experiences spontaneous abortion frequently. It's like the saying "adding insult to injury." This means the mother has already experienced the loss of a child in her womb, and then there are accusations from others blaming her. It's not uncommon for someone in this situation to blame themselves due to depression. Additional issues arise when in-laws get involved in marital problems because of the issue of offspring. Offspring is highly important in culture. The consequences of not having offspring can be seen from psychological, medical, socio-cultural, economic, and religious perspectives (Sirait, 2020).

The promise of offspring is God's initiative, and Israel serves as one of its examples. Every Israeli family makes having children a priority. The presence of a child becomes the hope of every family, and the absence of children leads to disappointment and is considered suffering. However, understand that if you haven't had children due to miscarriages, it is by God's permission, as the will and sovereignty of God alone (Hutabarat, 2022).

According to June Hunt, the post-abortion impact will manifest as inner emotional turmoil that will become visible externally (Hunt, 2015, p. 13). This can be seen in Table 1.

Therefore, spiritual counseling and guidance are highly necessary for those experiencing post-miscarriage situations to provide comfort and direction, enabling their mental state to remain surrendered and patient. Someone going through physical pain often experiences psychological disturbances as well. Pastoral counseling services can help reduce anxiety, stress, disappointment, and despair, while providing motivation and support to restore inner peace and enthusiasm. Considering that emotional wounds can have negative impacts on a person's life, the healing of these emotional wounds through forgiveness is essential (Opit,

2020). The Christian faith perspective is shared to help individuals understand this issue so that patients can make decisions and feelings in accordance with God's will.

Table 2. Internal Symptoms and Their External Evidence

Internal Symptoms	External Evidence
Anger	Relationship breakdown
Anxiety	Difficulty sleeping and eating
Resentment	Hostility towards oneself and others
Depression	Substance abuse (alcohol and drugs)
Distrust	Sexual dysfunction
Fear	Avoiding the subject of abortion
Guilt	Recurring reactions since abortion
Sadness	Risk of suicide
Deep Regret	Poor relationship with children
Low Motivation	Disorganized thoughts, self-absorption
Rejection	Paranoia (fear of judgment)
Shame	Uncontrollable crying
Stress	Psychosomatic
Trauma	Illnesses
Feelings of Worthlessness	Nightmares, flashbacks Isolation, reluctance to socialize

Pastoral Counseling After Spontaneous Abortion

The origin of the word 'poimen' (Greek) and 'pastoral' 'pastor' (Latin) means one who is like a shepherd who protects, helps, and cares for the sheep. In the Bible, the word shepherd is also used to describe the role of a servant of God, who guides and cares for His people as the flock of God (Pattinama, 2018).

Counseling service is a dynamic process of God's guidance through counseling. Counselors guide counselees to find answers from Jesus Christ as the source of life that provides relief (Selivianti, 2018, pp. 253–266). Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you

who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Knowledge about abortion can be viewed from both general scientific knowledge and also from a Christian ethics perspective based on the truth in the Bible. A servant of God serving in pastoral counseling must do so with love and sincerity. They must have faithfulness and love to be an extension of God's voice for His people. If a servant of God forgets their calling, it will have a negative impact on their ministry (Talan & Siboro, 2022).

The purpose of counseling services for post-abortion individuals is not only to help the counselee overcome their problems but, more importantly, to achieve its main goal, which is a transformation of life. The counselee undergoes a significant change in their attitude towards life, striving to always please God in every aspect of life. This requires perseverance and a longing to become more like Jesus Christ (Selivianti, 2018). The application of God's Word and the spirit to take every step of recovery for the counselee requires structured, scheduled, and guided pastoral counseling guidance. To help the counselee overcome these issues, a Christian counselor intends to assist the counselee with full responsibility, not just with the aim of "helping." The main goal is to share the Word of God in words, attitude, and example, as the Word of God is beneficial for repentance, improving behavior, educating, and disciplining (Pattinama, 2017). The proposed counseling steps are as follows: Give the counselee time for introspection, seeking forgiveness from God if there has been wrongdoing (Ps. 32:5, 103:12, Col. 3:13). Acknowledge remorse and lead the counselee to willingly accept this bitter experience, so they are willing to share their experience. Unpleasant feelings and loss must be accepted as they are (Prov. 20:5).

Pastoral counseling for post-spontaneous abortion is carried out with empathy and love by the spiritual counselor. It can be highly effective in healing wounded hearts. The Word of God has the power to provide strength, heal the wounded, and uplift the weak to give them new hope. God is near to those who are of a broken heart (Ps. 34:18). All the effects of spontaneous abortion that occur press on the soul and body, and none are left by God. Everyone who calls on the

name of the Lord will be helped. God's help is well-proven.

The counselor listens with love to all complaints and regrets and gently responds to provide support and strength (Eccl. 3:7, Prov. 15:1, 1 Pet. 3:7, 1 John 3:1). The counselee can move forward with a new plan filled with joy because they are living in God's grace after the miscarriage (Jer. 17:7, Matt. 6:12, Phil. 4:4). Provide the counselee with an understanding that the child lost due to spontaneous abortion is now in the presence of God (Rom. 8:1, 2 Cor. 5:17). God will make everything beautiful in His time, and nothing is impossible if it is God's will. He will bless the womb for the perfect development of the fetus. Everything that happens is part of God's beautiful plan. The Christian faith must acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit as the Divine personality who leads believers to experience spiritual growth. The counselee will live according to God's truth and become a witness of God through their experience after spontaneous abortion (Arifianto & Sumiwi, 2020).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Of all moral issues, matters concerning life and death, such as abortion, are among the most devastating. Abortion is opposed by both general revelation and special revelation because they both declare that taking the life of an innocent human being is wrong. This is different from spontaneous abortion, which is a natural miscarriage that occurs without any deliberate action causing it. Often, the exact cause of spontaneous abortion is not known. The consequences of spontaneous abortion go beyond physical injuries that need treatment; the psychological "wounds" with all their symptoms that affect the soul must also be addressed promptly. Christian individuals who experience spontaneous abortion should be cared for and ministered to.

Pastoral counseling is an appropriate and effective way to help Christian individuals who have experienced spontaneous abortion to restore their spiritual and mental well-being. Pastoral counseling guides the counselee to accept the issue at hand and be ready to face it with gratitude.

Spiritual growth occurs when a personal spiritual experience with God is lived out. Faith becomes steadfast when one is confident that everything that happens is by God's permission. God's plan is the best, a plan for peace and prosperity, not a plan for disaster. Sincere ministry will produce sweet fruits of faith that honor God.

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