



STUDY SHOWS LONG-TERM NEGATIVE IMPACT OF ABORTION ON MEN

White Paper

By Support After Abortion

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

Key Findings

CH 1 The role of men in abortion decisions

CH 2 The impact of abortion on men

CH 3 Grieving and healing

CH 4 Healing options

Conclusion

**What men who have experienced
abortion want America to know**

Methodology

About Support After Abortion

Works Cited

*The research will
help promote
compassionate,
nonjudgmental
care that can heal
hearts and spirits.*

MILLIONS SUFFER

Shining a light on men who are too often overlooked

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the 2022 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson* returning abortion legislation to the states, many recall the long struggle for women's rights and equality that led to *Roe v. Wade*. In the decade before *Roe*, the Court had granted women equal pay for equal work, legalized contraception, and prohibited sex discrimination in employment and education. In 1973 it was still legal to discriminate against women in many areas such as housing, banking, credit, jury selection, and control over jointly-owned property. The *Roe* decision was celebrated by feminists as a major victory for women's rights. (1)

Regardless of their views on abortion, the majority of men (83%) who experience abortion sought help or said they could have benefited from support.

With the pendulum swing in pregnancy decision-making from virtually no rights for women to complete autonomy for women, men lost any right to advocate for the children they helped conceive. Yet **some men are deeply impacted by abortion, regardless of their personal views on abortion or whether or not they had a voice in the decision.**

The [National Survey on Family Growth](#) reports that one in five men will experience abortion by the age of 45. (2) The [National Men's Abortion Study](#) (3), commissioned by Support After Abortion, a nonprofit focused on after-abortion healing research and education, shows that **the majority of men experience some negative impact from their abortion experiences including depression, anxiety, and anger.** Because the societal conversation surrounding abortion is primarily about women, **men's grief is often disenfranchised.**

Everything changed. Having to live life with this huge regret! I ask for forgiveness everyday of my unborn baby. My heart will forever be broken for the decision I made that day.
- Survey Respondent



Most men in the study - whether they identify as pro-choice or pro-life - said they tried to find help or could have benefited from talking to someone.

However, a lack of healing resources for men and a lack of their preferred options for care present obstacles to finding the type of support they desire. Further, **while most wanted help, very few knew where to go to get support.**

These challenges illustrate the need to support men who are impacted by abortion and the need to expand resources and providers to offer that care.

With abortion in the national conversation since the Dobbs decision, it is an opportunity to shine a light on men who are too often overlooked—the millions who suffer emotionally after abortion, sometimes years after the event.

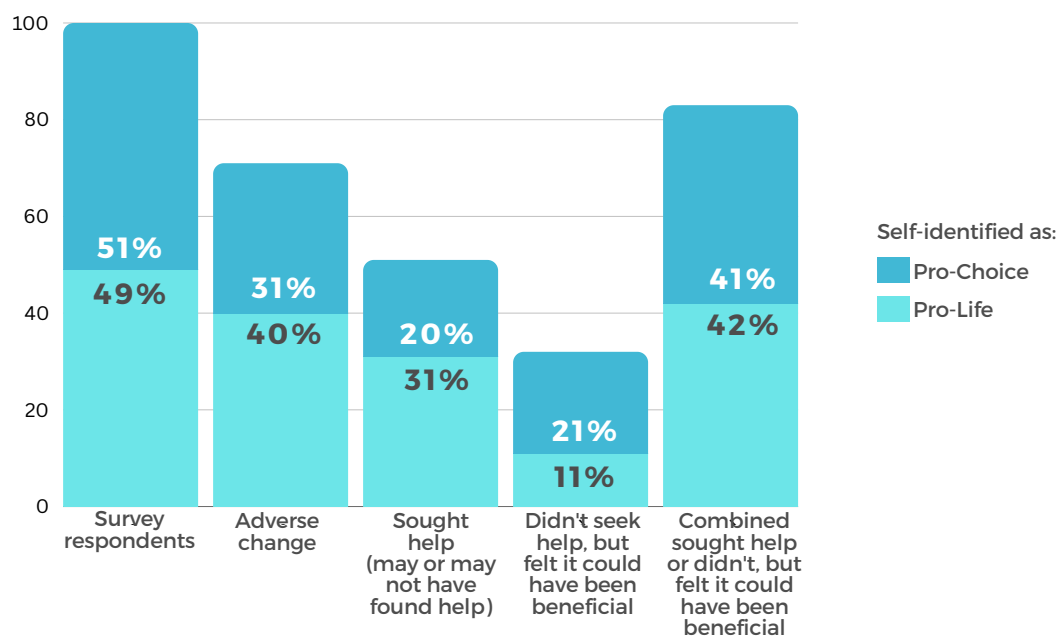
Many men experience depression, anger, regret, grief and other emotions - whether or not they were part of an abortion decision.

My ex-girlfriend was pregnant and we decided to get an abortion. I'm feeling regret and having panic attacks about it. I need to talk to someone. - Client

I have an emptiness that always lingers. I had no choice. I couldn't save my baby. - Survey Respondent

I'm having a hard time coping with the abortion my wife had. We agreed to it, and I still believe it was the right decision, but I've been having anger issues since then. - Client

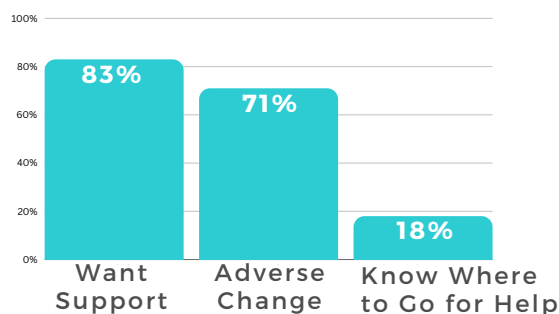
Men often struggle after abortion experiences regardless of their views on abortion itself.



The breakdown of men who self-identify as pro-choice and pro-life in this study is similar to a 1995-2022 Gallup survey that also found approximately half of men are pro-choice and half pro-life. (4)

KEY FINDINGS

The research found that **83% of men either sought after abortion help or said they could have benefited from talking to someone**. Yet only 18% of men were aware of organizations that provide care after reproductive loss. Seven out of ten men said they experienced an adverse change in themselves after their abortion losses, often for years.



71%

of men said they experienced an adverse change in themselves after their abortion losses.

In this study, **nearly half of men (45%) said they did not have a voice or choice** in the abortion decision, and almost three out of five men (57%) said they were not part of the decision - it was their partner's or someone else's.

The men's abortion study is one of four surveys conducted by ShapardResearch for Support After Abortion, including [research on the impact of medication abortion on women](#). The goal of the research was to determine the extent to which help is needed and the most effective ways to deliver healing to people who are hurting.

Other key findings from Support After Abortion's study on men and abortion:

82%

did not know where to go for help after abortion

51%

sought for help after their abortion experiences

32%

didn't seek help, but said they could have benefited from talking to someone

7%

said they would go to a clergy person for help

53%

said they seldom to never attend religious services

40%

prefer a religious healing program

77%

said anonymity was important in a healing program

While some men expressed relief (one man said, "she did me a favor," another man said "there was no loss,"), the majority experienced some negative effect, and many were deeply impacted, often for years. The study reinforces the need to validate men's experiences and provide support for their restored well-being.

Chapter 1

The role of men in abortion decisions

The legal status of women to make abortion decisions independently was codified three years after *Roe v. Wade* in *Planned Parenthood of Central Missouri v. Danforth* when the Supreme Court ruled spousal and parental consent unconstitutional, and again with *Planned Parenthood of SE Pennsylvania v. Casey* in 1992 when the court ruled spousal notification an undue burden. As a society, most Americans (72%) agree with the statement “the decision about whether to have an abortion should belong solely to the pregnant woman.” (5)

The Support After Abortion research findings reflect the reality that legally and culturally, men are often not involved in abortion decisions. Over half of the men (57%) said they were **not** part of making the decision. (3) This finding mirrors a Guttmacher study that shows “57% of [male] survey respondents would **not** have chosen to terminate the pregnancy if the decision had been their own.” (6)

Prevalence

About half of pregnancies (45%) in the U.S. each year are unintended. About 2 out of 5 of those unintended pregnancies (42%) end in abortion, excluding miscarriages. (7)

The National Survey of Family Growth, co-authored by Dr. Nguyen, found that 1 in 5 men experience abortion by age 45. (2)

Nguyen told the New York Times, “That’s likely an undercount. Not all men are aware of the pregnancies they cause and those that end in abortion.” (8)

[For 40 years it] always remains in my mind as I see babies enter our family. I wanted the child, my partner opposed.
- Survey Respondent

This is the latest study to show that men mostly do not have a voice. Guttmacher Institute, a leading researcher on reproductive rights, reports that their partners’ or parents’ desire for them to have an abortion was the most important reason for less than 1% of women. (9) In the longitudinal Turnaway Study of 1,000 women, 3% of women stated their partner wanting the abortion was a reason for their decision. (10) And in Support After Abortion’s [study of women and medication abortion](#), only 20% of women said their partner impacted the decision. (11)

While a few men described their abortion experience as one where they had a voice and part in the decision, many more identified their roles as: (1) Having a voice, but not a part in the decision; (2) Having no voice or part in the decision, but knew about the pregnancy; or (3) Having no voice or part in the decision, and didn’t know about the pregnancy or abortion until later.

“Men have been minimized, if not completely overlooked, in the conversation,” Dr. Brian Nguyen, Assistant Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Southern California and reproductive health researcher, told the New York Times. (8)

As a result of societal expectations, men may be less likely to express their true feelings about an unplanned pregnancy or an abortion. Yet this doesn’t mean they don’t have emotions surrounding that choice. And that begs the question: What emotional impact does abortion have on men?

Deference can lead to poor communication

Some participants in the Support After Abortion men's and women's studies shared feelings of uncertainty, pressure, fear, and regret. For example, one woman said she didn't think it through, another said, "it was a mutual decision...but kind of quiet one." One man said, "I feel like I may have made a bad decision," and another said he went along with it, but "I really didn't want the abortion."

As Planned Parenthood Vice President of Education and Training, Sara C. Flowers, told *Elite Daily*, "Ideally, the [two partners] would be able to talk about their feelings, thoughts, and concerns and come to an agreement." (12)

In some cases the societal narrative and expected male deference to his partner and the woman's role in deciding can lead to assumptions and a lack of communication that may result in an outcome that neither wanted. Support After Abortion has heard this experience from both men and women reaching out for emotional help, such as these clients:

“My ex and I had an abortion last year. When she found out she was pregnant, she got upset and I panicked and looked for abortion clinics. We started saying abortion as an option, but we didn't talk about what we each wanted. I messed up bad. I wanted our child. I think she did, too.” - Male Client

“I had an abortion a few days ago, and I feel like it's impossible to cope. I did it because my partner and I had previously agreed on it. But we didn't talk about it enough. We both thought it was what the other wanted. But when we talked about it later, we found out neither of us wanted it. Now I just can't stop regretting what I did.” - Female Client

Chapter 2

The impact of abortion on men

The majority of men (71%) in the study reported adverse changes in themselves after the abortion, including both men who identify as pro-choice (31%) and pro-life (40%). Applying this to the 20% of men who experience abortion in their lifetime (2), means **one in seven men may be coping with negative impacts from abortion.**

For some men, emotional pain around an abortion experience is felt immediately. For other men, it surfaces years later.

That pain manifests in many ways, as with any grief or trauma. **Men in the study reported depression, sadness, guilt, regret, anxiety, anger, thoughts of what could have been, emptiness, substance abuse, a sense of lost fatherhood, and other emotions.** These sentiments are supported in a *Psychology Today* article by Dr. Mary G. Lamia, professor of psychology (13) and a *study from Women's Health Options*. (14)

Dr. Lamia cites a 2015 Coyle and Rue study which captured comments of men after abortion. One respondent stated, “The absolute worst thing I have ever done. Words can't describe the pain and overwhelming guilt that is always with me. I have no one to blame but myself.” That man had carried the pain with him for 26 years at the time of the study. Another man, 13 years after his abortion experience said, “I wish I could know more about the baby. I often imagine what he/she would look like now.” (13)

I wonder what my child would've been like today. This really got bad after the birth of my only child. Major feelings of guilt and regret. - Survey Respondent

Men often have a difficult time talking about their abortion experiences and how they have been impacted. Dr. Nguyen said that their exclusion from the conversation “fosters a societal expectation that they shouldn’t speak about it even among their closest network of friends and family.” (8)

And sociology professor Jennifer Reich, who has conducted research about men and abortion said, “It is really challenging for men to acknowledge that there may be an emotional component that they’re grappling with.” (8)

People often need help navigating their feelings about experiences that negatively affect them. Yet if men have difficulty acknowledging their emotions, and they feel pressured by society to keep silent about it, they have no outlet to work through their grief.

Dr. Lamia said, “I believe women should have a right to choose, but at the same time, **both women and men may also have a need to grieve.**” (13)

We went through an abortion last year and I find myself so angry now - at myself and my partner. **When I try to speak to her about my feelings, she tells me I’m not allowed to have feelings about the abortion because it wasn’t my body.** I feel like I failed her and the relationship, and then I get even more angry because that pushes her away. She stops talking to me and acts like I’m non-existent, which makes me angrier. I used to be a calm person, but now I struggle to control my anger. And once it’s passed, I’m so remorseful and disappointed in myself that I’ve let the abortion affect me this much.

- Male Client

Chapter 3

Grieving and healing

“Grief is a natural response to loss, but it is something that men are not prepared for, and they often struggle to understand how it can affect their lives,” says Dr. Eric Bui, Associate Director for Research at the Center for Anxiety and Traumatic Stress Disorders and Complicated Grief Program at Harvard-affiliated Massachusetts General Hospital. (15)

In an article on “How to Overcome Grief’s Health-Damaging Effects” that was directed toward widowers, but applicable to all grief, Dr. Bui said, “Men may try to resist grief, but it’s important not to ignore these symptoms.” (15)

The Cleveland Clinic describes how grief reactions vary among people and can include emotional, physical, and behavioral changes, and can differ in severity such as short, delayed, and complicated. “Grief can affect every aspect of your being - your mind, body, and spirit.” (16)

Dr. Lamia described how the legal and cultural narrative around men and abortion can make it challenging for them to address their emotions and grieve. She said, **“Male partners of women who have an induced abortion may experience disenfranchised grief; namely that they do not have a right to grieve.”** (13) Dr. Reich echoed this feeling. (8)

Disenfranchised Grief

Grief that is not openly acknowledged, socially accepted, or publicly mourned.

- Family Health Psychiatric and Counseling Center (17)

Disenfranchised grief can also be described as emotional invalidation -

“dismissing or rejecting someone’s thoughts, feelings, or behaviors,” according to a PsychCentral article medically reviewed by Jennifer Litner, PhD/LMFT/CST. “It says to someone: ‘Your feelings don’t matter. Your feelings are wrong.’” The article explains that **it can impact day-to-day life, relationships, other negative emotions, and even mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety, which were two of the most commonly named adverse changes stemming from abortion by men in the study.** (18)

[I’m a] more anxiety-filled, depressed person than before.

- Survey Respondent

A lack of control and stress can also affect emotional well-being -

regardless of the underlying reason. The Canadian University Health Network illustrates this in telling cardiac patients, “Feeling that you have no control can lead to anxiety or depression ... These emotions and feelings can get in the way of your daily living and can affect how you react to the people around you.” (19)

*Almost 10 years ago I got my girlfriend pregnant. She didn’t want to keep it. Being a dad is what I always wanted. **To this day it haunts me to the core. I sunk into a depression and lost who I was.** I still have trouble being around babies. I still would like a family of my own, but I need to get around this first. Please, help me. - Client*



Some therapists refer to a Bill of Rights for those who are grieving developed by Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD, Director of the Center for Loss & Life Transition. These include the right to experience your own unique grief, feel a multitude of emotions, and talk about your grief. (20)

Support After Abortion has found that as men tell their stories, other men share theirs. Someone sharing their pain, journey, and healing offers a door to healing for others, and serves as permission to speak and seek support.

At a recent event, one male participant said, “Just talking about men’s abortions and knowing I’m not the only one and that there is hope for healing is priceless.”



Chapter 4

Healing options

Once men recognize their emotions and impacts from abortion and desire help, the next step is to find support.

Men currently face three challenges in finding support.

- Lack of awareness of abortion healing and where to go for support. Only 18% of men said they knew where to go for help.
- Lack of abortion healing resources and providers. Historically, there are far fewer materials produced for men.
- Lack of options for the type of healing men prefer.

Support After Abortion advocates identifying and connecting each person to the abortion healing option that best meets their needs. They do this for clients who reach out to their AFTER ABORTION LINE. And they encourage providers to do so with their clients.

This concept is supported by a meta-analysis of 53 studies and over 16,000 clients published in the Journal of Clinical Psychology, which found that it is important to accommodate client preferences to yield better outcomes. (21)

The Support After Abortion research studies on men and women identified types of options that people prefer. These include in-person, group, one-on-one, self-guided, virtual, secular, religious, peer-led, and clinical therapy options.

Also needed are programs for different levels of healing and different modalities such as books, online materials, audio, video, and music.



Key challenges to be overcome in meeting client preferences as identified in the study are the need for clinical, anonymous, and secular healing options.

Challenge 1: Clinical

About half of men (51%) prefer a licensed counselor, and half (49%) prefer a peer who also experienced reproductive loss and could relate to their feelings. This was true whether men identified as pro-life or pro-choice. Yet most current abortion healing programs are peer-facilitated.

This preference for clinical care by half of men illustrates a need for mental health practitioners to provide support for those hurting and grieving after abortions.

However, "Many social workers, therapists, and other clinicians in abortion-healing related workshops have said that their intake process does not generally include reproductive loss assessments," says Lisa Rowe, a licensed social worker and private-practice therapist who is the CEO of Support After Abortion. "They share that their training and practice typically avoids talking about abortion due to politics and religion." (22)

Challenge 2: Anonymous

Seven out of ten men in the study said they value anonymity when seeking help.

There was little difference in this desire whether men self-identified as pro-choice (32%) or pro-life (39%).

Anonymity means different things to different people. Some don't want to disclose their name or any personal information. Some want to receive support away from anyone they know and in a way that assures they are not identified as someone who has experienced abortion.

Anonymity is valued in many areas of healing such as Alcoholics Anonymous and other addiction recovery groups, who say, "Anonymity allows for a safe space to open up to others and address issues they wouldn't feel as comfortable discussing in a more public setting." (23)

The preference for anonymity can be met by helplines, virtual programming, and self-guided programs and resources. As with recovery programs, in-person services and groups can also be conducted in a way that protects anonymity.

Challenge 3: Secular

The study shows that almost half of men (49%) want a secular approach to healing.

Yet Support After Abortion estimates that close to 95% of abortion healing programs and materials are religious. This gap illustrates a need for clinicians, social service agencies, organizations, pregnancy centers, and churches to meet people where they are and offer secular options for abortion healing in order to focus on the humanity of the individual and their emotional healing and well-being.

Meeting People Where They Are

*I need help to overcome the feelings after abortion. I looked around but haven't found a support group that makes me feel included. Most are Christian or Catholic. While I respect all walks and beliefs, I just want a **neutral**, supportive approach. - Client*

*I need **secular**. If I'm going to share, I want to share my truth and experience so I can actually heal. - Client*

Meeting People Where They Are

*I'm not ready to talk about my abortion experiences yet, so being able to go through the online Keys to Hope and Healing program **on my own** is just what I need now. - Client*

*I'm struggling after the abortion with lots of anxiety. I'm interested in **one-on-one counseling**. - Client*

*My wife and I need emotional support after our abortion two years ago. Things are surfacing now. Are there **support groups** near us? - Client*

Support After Abortion hosted a webinar in February 2023 on supporting clients with diverse belief and cultural systems that included Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Atheist, and African-American speakers. During the webinar, Monica Snyder, Executive Director of Secular Pro-Life spoke to this issue from an atheist's perspective. She said, "Lots of healing programs are based on beliefs such as divine mercy and forgiveness - beautiful ideas, but secularists don't believe in them and can't access that to move on. And if, in order to seek abortion healing, you have to constantly be mentally and emotionally filtering out this undercurrent, it could just be a barrier to entry." (24)

Support After Abortion stepped into this gap along with the worldwide Catholic publisher The Word Among Us, to produce “[Keys to Hope and Healing](#),” an introductory abortion healing program with secular and religious versions for men and women. This resource can be used independently, in groups, or one-on-one, and either in-person or virtually.

The need for programming that supports those who prefer a secular approach is being recognized by providers who also offer religious programs. For example, the secular video versions of Keys to Hope and Healing for men and women will be added to the programs offered by BrightCourse (BC) and BrightTraining (BT) in 2023, “in order to meet clients where they are,” said Annette Torno, BC Relationship Manager. BC/BT are video-streaming services used by 2,000 social service agencies, counselors, pregnancy centers, and others to assist clients in prenatal care, parenting, relationships, and related topics. (25) Keys to Hope and Healing will be their first men’s programming and one of only a few secular resources they offer.

Meeting People Where They Are

We’ve served many clients with your secular Keys to Hope & Healing who didn’t want a religious program.
– Sisters of Life

Religious

The vast majority of existing abortion healing programs are religious. Yet often the only option available is in-person groups, and **few are for men**.

The study showed that 40% of men want a religious approach to healing. Although only 7% of men said they would reach out to a clergy person for help, which may be related to the desire for anonymity.

Abortion is experienced regardless of religious affiliation. Of those who have abortions, 30% are protestant, 24% Catholic, and 8% other faiths. (27) While not all who identify as religious desire religious programming, churches and people of faith can help support them.

Lisa Connors is a licensed therapist and pastor who participated in the webinar panel on supporting clients with diverse belief and cultural systems. She spoke from evangelical Christian and African-American perspectives. Connors said she was one of the many people in churches who keep silent because they don’t feel safe enough to share their abortion stories out of a fear of judgment. She addressed the need for churches to show compassion, create safe spaces without judgment or shame, and care for people grieving abortion. (26)

Meeting People Where They Are

I feel forgiven by God, but I’ve never gone through any healing program. I would like a Christian one. - Client

I’d like a religious program, but not where I’m known. Is there something virtual? - Client

Offering Options

Sara West, Director of Hospital Programs for the Institute of Reproductive Grief Care, urged providers to give clients options, be flexible and respecting of their cultural and religious identities, preferences, and grief processing during a Cultural Competency panel at the Institute’s 2023 Grief Care Symposium. The panel addressed the need for being aware of one’s own cultural perspectives, how they may differ from clients’, and how best to support clients through their grief journeys. Providers were encouraged to ask during intake, “Is there anything cultural or religious that I should know for your care today?” (28)

Conclusion

What men who have experienced abortion want America to know

Support After Abortion research shows that for seven out of ten men, abortion is a painful experience that can include emotional distress and lasting feelings of loss and grief. One survey respondent described his emotions as “Insurmountable guilt. Regret. Feeling like a horrible person.” His story is not unlike those other men have shared.

Their grief, a natural response to loss, is often invalidated. Men perceive that their thoughts and feelings are dismissed or not valued, and many remain silently in pain. **Men need safe spaces and compassionate support to tell their stories, grieve, and move forward on their path to healing.**

The study shows that the majority of men want support, but don't know where to go for help, indicating a need for greater awareness. Currently few resources are available for men.

Accommodating preferences is critical to successful outcomes. The study shows many men desire clinical care (32%), anonymity (77%), and secular programming (49%), yet the majority of abortion healing providers offer religious and in-person programs, illustrating the need for more preferred options and trained providers to care for men so they can get the help that they desire and deserve to restore their emotional well-being after abortion.

The Support After Abortion study was commissioned to understand men's experiences with abortion to provide emotional healing. The knowledge gained from the research will help Support After Abortion to promote compassionate, nonjudgmental care that can heal hearts and spirits, empowering people impacted by abortion to live with dignity, strength, and joy.

Methodology

The research was commissioned by Support After Abortion and conducted by Shapard Research of Oklahoma City. Shapard is an accredited market research firm that conducted a nationally representative study sampling 1,000 men over age 18 across the United States via online survey. 100 men met the criteria of having personally experienced abortion at some time and participated in the study with a margin of error of +/- 9.18%.

About Support After Abortion

Shifting the conversation to compassion and support

Support After Abortion is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to healing people who have been impacted by abortion. It does this in two ways: (1) Connect people who suffer after abortion(s) to the type of healing they desire. (2) Equip healing providers by active leadership in creating, aggregating, and elevating abortion healing resources.



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