Title
Of ambivalence, shame and guilt: Perceptions regarding termination of pregnancy among South African women

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Termination of pregnancy (TOP) for health or other reasons is an emotive and contentious issue, steeped in the context of a political, moral and religious climate. For most women, the decision to have a TOP is not easy, regardless of the reason. While early literature[1-3] supported the notion that there is little in the way of negative sequelae following TOP, more recent long-term studies[4-9] have suggested that negative sequelae may be more common than was previously thought. Risk factors for the development of negative sequelae include the attitude projected by those providing the procedure (negative attitudes of providers tend to promote emotional sequelae in women undergoing TOP), previous psychological/psychiatric history (associated with higher rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression[10] following TOP), and low income (with women from low-income groups having higher admission rates for depression and PTSD after TOP[4]).

A recent survey involved 102 women undergoing TOP at two clinics in Johannesburg, SA (51 from each), one serving women with few economic resources (site 1) and the other serving women with adequate resources (site 2). The women were recruited and followed up for 3 months. At baseline, biographical data were obtained and there were no significant demographic differences between women recruited from the two sites.

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI),[7] a 21-item self-rating scale that is validated and reliable instrument to assess depression, was administered to all the women.

To explore the meaning that the decision to undergo TOP had for women, the consensual qualitative research method[9] was used to analyse the transcripts of 22 women, 13 from site 1 and 9 from site 2. The women were recruited and followed for up to 3 months. At baseline, biographical data were obtained and there were no significant demographic differences between women recruited from the two sites.

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