Author’s response to reviews

Title: Posttraumatic stress among women after induced abortion: a prospective, longitudinal multi-centre study

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
Response to peer review:

We thank the reviewers very much for their comments. The suggested changes have really contributed to increasing the quality of our manuscript.

Our responses to the points raised by the referees are given below and the corrections we have made are marked in red the manuscript.

Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:

Reviewer: Gail Robinson

Reviewer's report:

Minor essential revisions:
1. How is it that lifetime prevalence of trauma decreased over the 6 mon follow-up. Why should a lifetime prevalence of anything decrease over a 6 mon period?

We appreciate and are thankful for your attention to this inaccuracy. There are two major reasons why lifetime prevalence of PTSD decreased over time, the most obvious reason being that a greater proportion of women with lifetime PTSD at baseline dropped out from the study. It should also be noted that lifetime PTSD was assessed by a questionnaire, not a structured psychiatric interview, and women may be inconsistent in their responses over time. This explanation has been added in the manuscript.

2. What were the traumas, either related to attendance at the abortion clinic, or non-related?

In the questionnaire, there was an open ended question where the women could define the trauma they had experienced, but only some women who had experienced a trauma answered this question. The most commonly reported traumas were related to physical and psychological threats from a partner or from other persons, followed by traumatic events in the family and accidents. Among the 57 women who had experienced a trauma, 14 reported experiences that were related to the abortion, without giving any examples of what kind of trauma they had experienced. Information about trauma experiences has been added in the manuscript.

If the abortion occurred at home, how did these women have trauma related to attendance at the clinic
We thank the reviewer for this comment. The follow-up questionnaires were sent by mail to the women. In consideration of the woman and in order not to reveal her abortion (in case it was unknown to her family), the follow-up questions about trauma experience had to be formulated as if the traumatic event was in relation to the treatment at the out-patient clinic instead of in relation to the abortion. Therefore, it is possible that the women’s trauma experiences could have occurred in connection with the visit at the out-patient clinic and not necessarily in connection with the abortion per se. In respect of this issue we wanted to express ourselves carefully by stating “trauma related to the attendance to the clinic”.

However, it is our interpretation that traumas reported by women who had their abortion at home, as well as by those having their termination at the clinic, were in relation to the abortion. For clarification, we have changed the wording to “in relation to the abortion” in the manuscript. If desired, we can also bring it up as a limitation in the discussion.

3. This rational was expressed as a theory re women who dropped out “it can also be argued that women who develop PTSD or PTSS as a result of their abortion care would be more inclined to report back to the clinic the trauma experiences they had had as a consequence of the given care”. This doesn’t make sense when one is looking at the characteristic of groups that got into trouble as their pre-abortion characteristics are not dissimilar to those who drop it.

We agree. The paragraph has been removed.

4. there are several sentences whose meanings are very unclear: a)Swedish follow-up study (n=58) after induced abortion reported at four months 12 women that had been in a crisis, while at 12 months only two women still expressed their feelings in relation to the abortion in terms of a crisis.

The paragraph has been rephrased and is hopefully more understandable now.

b) Non-responsiveness at follow-up after induced abortion was considerable"

The sentence has been removed.

5) The main problem is the poor return rate, however, the authors make a vaillant attempt to explain this an account for it.

6) this conclusion may not be valid, suffering people are probably the least likely to report.: “it can also be argued that women who develop PTSD or PTSS as a result of their abortion care would be more inclined to report back to the clinic the trauma experiences they had had as a consequence of the given care

Please see above.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being
Published.

The language in the manuscript has been edited by Edanz.

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests: I declare that I have no competing interests

Reviewer: Nada Stotland

Reviewer's report: This is a well-written report of a well-designed and well-executed study or considerable scientific and policy interest. There are two issues which might be commented upon, though there is probably no way the authors could actually answer them, and the answers are not essential to the paper.

1–What was the nature of the trauma that occurred to a few subjects at the time of the abortion?

Unfortunately, we are not able to answer this question. Among the 57 women who had trauma experiences, 14 reported experiences that were related to the abortion, without giving any examples of trauma experiences. Please, see also response to referee 1, Gail Robinson.

2–What was the nature of the psychosocial stressors that led the subjects to desire pregnancy terminations?

This is another question we cannot answer. It was not a study aim to explore reasons for termination of pregnancy. Also, in Sweden it is common practice not to ask women why they desire an induced abortion. This explanation has been added in the manuscript.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests: I am an author of one of the cited references, and I have testified on the topic in courts and legislative bodies in the United States. However, I accept no payment for these contributions. Therefore I declare that I have no competing interests

In addition to the reviewer’s suggested changes, we have made another change. It has come to our attention that 76 of our participants at the baseline assessment were never reported to the study centre, and thus never received the follow-up questionnaires. This information has been added in the manuscript, and response rates and dropouts have been recalculated in the Results section and in Tables 1 and 2.
We look forward to hearing from you again. Please let me know if there still are any unclear points.

Best regards,

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