Author's response to reviews

Title: Experiences of abortion: a narrative review of qualitative studies

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr Graham

We thank the reviewers for their helpful comments on our paper. Our responses to these are below.

**Reviewer 1.** We thank Prof van der Spuy for her supportive comments. We note that she regards our paper as an article of importance in its field. She notes two typographical errors that need correcting. (On P4 reference is made to 13 studies in Table 2 but 14 are included, and on P6 data "are" not "is"). These corrections have been made in the resubmitted manuscript.

**Reviewer 2.** We also thank Prof Ekeberg for his very detailed critique of the paper comments. His major concerns are

1a “The introduction is very sparse”.

We respond. This is true. We were conscious that our paper was already in excess of 6000 words and did not wish to add unnecessarily to its length.

1b “There is no information about previous results from studies of surgical or medical TOP methods.”

We respond. This is also true. However, studies of surgical or medical TOP have focused on clinical and cost effectiveness rather than women’s experiences. This review focuses on the latter, not the former, as we note in the introduction. Nevertheless, we have added specific references to several clinical trials and to two systematic reviews of literature in our revised version.

1c “Neither are there sufficient arguments for using a qualitative method rather than quantitative”.

We respond. It is not clear why we would need to argue for using a qualitative method over a quantitative one, when we present a review of qualitative studies. We do not seek to defend the method (indeed, there is no need for us to do so) but rather to review the results of studies.

2. “It is not clear how the inclusion and exclusion criteria were, how many studies that were found initially, how many were excluded, and whether assessment of each study were made by more than one person”.

We respond. We made clear in the methods section that we searched for qualitative studies of women’s experiences of TOP, and that studies of other aspects of TOP (for example their beliefs about or attitudes to TOP) were excluded. We state that we identified 17 relevant studies and that all were included in the review. The note on contributors answers the question on assessors.
3. “It is not clear why a systematic review was not made (page 4).”

We respond. The material is too heterogenous for a systematic review (see page 4). A reference to a discussion of systematic and narrative reviews has been included.

4. “Accordingly, evaluations of the methodological quality were not used (page 4). This is a critical limitation.”

We respond. It would have been a critical limitation if we had not acknowledged it, but we did. We did not exclude on the basis of methods because there was insufficient methodological information in the literature reviewed to make an informed decision to do so (see page 4).

5. “Nine of 18 included studies acknowledged study limitations and recruitment biases. The authors do not discuss how this may influence the results.”

We respond. We had previously noted that studies were small scale and limited in scope and that ‘participants were self-selected’. We have now inserted the following form of words. “In common with other narrative reviews of qualitative studies, this means that we do not seek to assess the ways that participant selection may have influenced results.”

6. “There were three main results, about choices, experiences and environment. It is very difficult, however to see what are the main topics in each of these areas. Accordingly, it is not clear how the authors get from rather diverging experiences to the four main conclusions.”

7. “There is no discussion of main results, methodology and generalizability.” And,

9. “The tables show study populations, but no main results.”

We respond. We discuss the results of these studies in considerable detail. We do not present them in table format because this is a narrative and not a systematic review (i.e. a discussion of interpretive analyses, rather than a comparison of outcomes). We have already noted that results of qualitative studies are not generalizable.

8. “Is it necessary to conduct a qualitative review to arrive at e.g. the first conclusion that ‘women’s choices are related to negotiating finite household and psychosocial resources’?.

We respond. This first conclusion sets the context for the other conclusions.

We hope you will find that the above responses satisfactorily address the comments from the reviewers.

Mabel Lie, Steve Robson and Carl May