Reviewer’s report

Title: The course of mental health after miscarriage and induced abortion: A five-year follow-up study.

Version: 1 Date: 13 July 2005

Reviewer: David Reardon

Reviewer’s report:

General

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?
   YES

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?
   YES

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?
   YES

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   YES

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   YES

6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   YES

7. Is the writing acceptable?
   YES

Additional comments:

This is a well written paper addressing important research issues. As noted by the authors, there are a number of limitations with the sample that may obscure or minimize the differences observed between women who miscarry and those who have abortions. A larger sample size and lower drop out rate, particularly for those who had induced abortions, would be preferable.

A confounding factor not mentioned is that both groups had prior pregnancy histories, with about 30% having prior history of induced abortion. It is possible that women who miscarry after an induced abortion may have more difficulty emotionally recovering from both. Also, over the course of the five years examined, many of the women certainly had subsequent pregnancies, the outcomes of which may also have impacted their mental health at T4. In my opinion, it would have been better to have avoided at least some of these confounding effects by having included only women whose first pregnancy had ended in miscarriage or induced abortion. Logically, however, it would then be most appropriate to also include as a control women whose first pregnancy ended in a healthy birth. With a large enough sample, you might also then exclude any women who had a subsequent pregnancy
loss. In that way, you would be comparing women who only had a single pregnancy loss during a first pregnancy.

Despite this shortcoming, I believe the present study is a valuable extension on the prior research of the authors, which examined reactions over only a two-year period. Reporting a 5-year follow-up is valuable and enlightening.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

NONE

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

See the above comment regarding lack of control for prior and subsequent pregnancy outcomes. This should at least briefly mentioned in the discussion of the study's limitations.

The paper is somewhat dated by the omission of some recently published studies that bear directly on the findings.

Regarding the discussion of anxiety associated with abortion, the recent study by Cougle is especially important and should at least be cited, and possibly discussed. (Cougle JR, Reardon DC, Coleman PK. Generalized anxiety following unintended pregnancies resolved through childbirth and abortion: a cohort study of the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth. J Anxiety Disord. 2005;19(1):137-42.)

Regarding the discussion of traumatic reactions associated with abortion, the recent study by Rue is should be cited, and possibly discussed in particular in regard to the finding of very high rates of avoidance reactions. It might also be mentioned in the discussion of the study's limitations as it reveals significant variations in reactions relative to nationality. (Rue VM, Coleman PK, Rue JJ, Reardon DC. Induced abortion and traumatic stress: A preliminary comparison of American and Russian women. Med Sci Monit, 2004 10(10): SR5-16.)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

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