


Providing telemedicine abortion care in Poland:  
An analysis of 18 months of service delivery through Women Help Women

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### Setting the context



- In 1932, Poland was a European trailblazer, legalizing abortion for medical reasons and when pregnancy resulted from a criminal act
- In 1956, abortion legally permitted if the woman is experiencing difficult living condition
  - Broadly interpreted in the 1960s and 1970s
  - Site of abortion tourism
- In 1993, abortion law restricted to cases of life or physical health endangerment, rape or incest (with police confirmation), and serious fetal anomaly
  - Physician corroboration required
  - Most abortions obtained in private sector

Less than 1,000 "official" abortions each year



### Methods

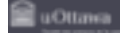
- Reviewed Women Help Women telemedicine logs
  - January 1, 2013-June 30, 2016
- Examined initial questionnaires, follow-up questionnaires, and email exchanges
  - Analyzed using descriptive statistics and for content and themes
- Conducted in-depth interviews with 20 Polish women who had used the service
  - Analyzed for content and themes using inductive and deductive techniques
- Received approval from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa (Canada)





### Results from the telemedicine logs


- 1,098 Polish women completed the initial online consultation
  - 813 women (74%) were less than 7 weeks pregnant
  - 285 women (26%) were between 7 and 8 weeks pregnant
- Nearly two-thirds (64%) were using some form of contraception during the month the pregnancy occurred
- Of those who indicated one or more reasons for seeking a medication abortion, the majority (n=232, 54%) cited financial problems
- Only 193 (18%) completed a follow-up questionnaire
  - Nearly 10% indicated they ultimately chose not to use the medications
  - Of the 174 women who took the medications, 173 (99%) confirmed their abortion was successful
- Most women reported sides effects were tolerable and that they felt relieved



### Results from the qualitative study

- Participants were overwhelming satisfied with their abortion care
- Women valued the privacy, confidentiality, and convenience of the telemedicine service
- All participants understood that their abortions did not fall within the legal exceptions
- Women felt strongly that the service should continue and expand

*"I think every woman should have free access to an abortion because it is her body, her life... Despite all the bans in the country, I had this abortion... I think if I ever needed that again, I would use the web again... I am grateful that such a service exists."*



### Conclusions

- Women Help Women is a major provider of abortion care for Polish women
- Outcomes are reassuring and suggest the strategy is effective
  - Low follow-up rate is a major limitation
- Women Help Women's telemedicine service is culturally appropriate for women who are not eligible for legal abortion care in Poland
- Efforts to reform restrictive abortion laws are critical
- Identifying ways to expand the reach of this and other telemedicine services appears warranted





Questions?

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The image contains three logos. On the left is the logo for the Society of Family Planning Research Fund, featuring the letters 'sfp' in a stylized font. In the center is the logo for The European Society of Contraception and Reproductive Health (ESCRH), which includes a circular emblem with 'ESCRH' and the full name of the society. On the right is the logo for uOttawa, featuring a building icon and the text 'uOttawa' and 'Faculté des sciences de la santé / Faculty of Health Sciences'.