

Dealing with abortion or dealing with continuation of an unplanned pregnancy: shame & blame or console, help & growth?

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Dr Anne Verougstraete

-Hôpital Erasme : Université Libre De Bruxelles (ULB)

-Sjerp-Dilemma-VUB:
-Family Planning and Abortion Centre
Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB)

Anger of providers at repeat abortion or “abortion recidivism”

Safe abortion in an illegal context: perceptions from service providers in Belgium;
Studies in Family Planning 1993;24,3:150-161

- 2/3 expressed negative feelings to requests for repeat abortion
- 1/3 were accepting or neutral
- Negative emotional reactions
 - Physicians **70%**
 - Nonphysicians **47%**

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Doctors with nocebo effect!

- How many times did I tell you to take your pill properly?
- You were careless, so now: take your responsibility!
- Why don't you want this child? its time to grow up!
- You have the perfect age to be a mother
- Think it over, I'm sure you will regret this!
- Come back next week to talk about it => + 1w => +1w
- Ultrasound: Look at your baby! Listen to the heart-beat!
- Are you really going to do an abortion ?
- If you don't want this child, I suggest a sterilisation
- Abortion may harm your fertility; don't come crying if...
- You will have to live with this decision all your life!

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Anger of providers at repeat abortion or “abortion recidivism”

- Most felt that the woman had broken an unwritten contract stipulating that she would not have another unwanted pregnancy
- In Western culture, where highly effective contraceptive methods are available, an unwanted pregnancy is primarily considered the result of improper contraceptive use, and a societal expectation prevails that contraception will be practiced successfully
- So even for most abortion providers, abortion is considered, to a certain extent, inherently immoral

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My Poor lady....

- **Confirm the woman in her victim role**
 - Have you messed it all up again?
 - You are unable to cope with the difficulties of life
 - This contraception is what you need
- **OK for once**
 - I will help you this time, but in the future: be more careful!
 - &
 - **Dont' you dare to come back!**

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The militant pro-choice provider

- Women know what they want
- Stop patronizing women
- Abortion is a right
- Of course BUT:
 - Women coming for abortion may have the need to express conflicting feelings !
 - Abortion is still a big taboo and many women can't talk to their friends nor family about it, so its important they can talk to someone

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Empathic respectful listening

- Listen to **all** expressed feelings:
 - Pride
 - Sadness
 - Shame
 - Anger
 - Hate
 - Guilt
 - Helplessness
 - Ambivalence
 - I was always against abortion, and here I am!
 - I love children, and now I am going to do an abortion!
 - Abortion was ok for others, but I would never have one!

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Empowerment

- Respect for you, whatever your decision
- You are no better woman or mother either way
- Abortion is not the easy, egoistic way
- You have the right to choose what is best for you, because that will be the best for your family
- Staying pregnant should be a positive choice
- We will help you find help in case of:
 - Ambivalence
 - Situation of abuse

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Tell them: Shit happens!

- You are not alone!
- Unplanned pregnancy can happen to (nearly) all of us
- By the age of 50, depending on the country, 1/2 - 1/7 of women will have needed an abortion
- If you take 10 women of 50 years old, certainly a few will have had an abortion

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Impact on women

- Abortion has no impact on later mental wellbeing
- (Charles 2008, Major 2009, Buysse 2013)
- Keeping an unwanted pregnancy can have a negative impact **on women** and her child
 - Greater **relationship instability** (46% when unplanned versus 21% when planned have relationship changes within 5 years)
 - More **postpartum depression** when unplanned
 - **Later mental wellbeing** less good when unplanned (Leathers&Kelley; Buysse 2013)

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Positive points of this pregnancy

- You know you are fertile: no need to test this again
- Abortion is never neutral in a relationship
 - You may find out your boyfriend is helping, concerned; you feel closer; you will not keep this pregnancy, but maybe you will want to have children together later
 - Your boyfriend says terrible things: its not from me; he disappears, he is unable to help you: don't waste your time with him; he is not worth it!

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Long term psychosocial consequences for adolescent mothers

- **OR ***
- Low educational attainment 1,7-1,9*
- Single living arrangements 1,5-2,3*
- High Parity 2,6-6,0*
- Welfare dependency 1,9-2,6*
- Poverty
- Poor housing
- Mental health:
 - > depressions & suicides
 - > familial conflict situations & more separations

* Fam plann perspect 33:2001 Olausson Sweden: n=888044

What about the unwanted child?

- Keeping an unwanted pregnancy has a negative impact for the **unwanted child**
- David 2011: Prague 1960s: mothers denied abortion twice
 - Poorer school results (despite identical IQ)
 - Less popular with classmates
 - Difficult to handle
 - More dropped out of school
 - Less job satisfaction
 - More conflicts at work
 - More disappointments in love
 - Women: > no job, unmarried, parenting difficulties
 - More mental health problems (> treatment, anxiety, depression)

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Keep an unplanned pregnancy

- **Stay pregnant because you want a baby!**
- Not because you feel guilty about
 - Having had sex
 - Forgetting pills
 - Not using condoms
 - Not having positive feelings for this foetus
- A child should never be a punishment!
- Children are too important to be made by mistake!
- Children have the right to have parents who are happy to go for it!

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What about the unwanted child?

- Keeping an unwanted pregnancy has a negative impact for the **unwanted child**
- More preterm delivery and low birthweight
- Less breastfeeding
- Children 2 years old: Lower cognitive test scores (listening, vocabulary, problem solving, memory, communication...)
- More fearfull
- Poorer fysical and mental health
- Less close relationship with their mother
- More delinquency during adolescence

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Keep an unplanned pregnancy

- Did not benefit from preconception care (reduction in spina bifida)
- Promote healthy lifestyle
 - Medication?, Vitamins, food, alcohol, smoking
 - Initiate prenatal care
- Stimulate bonding
 - ultrasound

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Children of adolescent mothers

- Often live in single parent households
- > in poverty
- > in bad housing
- > poor nutrition
- > abuse
- > put under authority
- > suicides at adult age (x 2)
- > risk to be adolescent parents

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Regret after abortion?

- Most women are releaved!
- Some are amazed they don't feel bad and guilty and wonder if it is normal
- **If you need our help: we are there for you**
- Regret
 - after female sterilisation 5-10%
 - After abortion
 - Study choice
 - Job choice
 - Husband choice

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After abortion

- **Women tell us:**
- Thanks for your help and support but I hope never to see you again! I don't want to go through another abortion!
- **What can we answer?**
- Its best to protect yourself from unpleasant things in life!
- But If you need another abortion, we will be there
- Which contraception would suit you? (Not starting with contraception after abortion is a risk for having a repeat abortion).

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Conclusion

- Each woman needs to feel the empowering support and respect from care providers
-
- It will help her to respect herself and help her to take the right decisions needed to get on with her life in a positive way

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Impact of long-acting reversible contraception on return for repeat abortion Rose Am J Obstet Gynecol 2012

- After 24 months:
- **Lower return rates for repeat abortion with LARC**
- LARC: IUD & depo provera **6,45%** (95% CI 4.0-9.8)
- Non-LARC users **14,5%** (95% CI 9.9-20.2)
- **Postabortion method choice related to likelihood of repeat abortion** (P= 0.002) if pill is reference group for risk of repeat abortion:
 - IUD hazard ratio 0.36 (95% 0.17-0.77)
 - DMPA hazard ratio 0.55 (95% 0.21-1.45)
 - All other methods hazard ratio 1.8 (95% 0.83-3.92)

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Conclusion

- responsible parenthood may well be to interrupt an unwanted pregnancy
- Society should be carefull not to praise women who keep an unwanted pregnancy! Life of these women and children is not always great!
- If she decides to stay pregnant : help bonding!

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Immediate versus delayed IUD insertion after uterine aspiration, is associated with decreased risk of repeat abortion Bednarek NEJM 2011

- Randomized non-inferiority trial
- **Immediate-insertion** group: 258 women
 - **100%** inserted
 - 5% expulsions at 6 months
 - **92,3%** IUD use after 6 months
 - No pregnancies at 6 months
- **Delayed-insertion** group: 317 women
 - **71,3%** inserted
 - 2.7% 6 months expulsion risk
 - **76.6%** IUD use after 6 months (p<0.001)
 - 5 pregnancies at 6 months (all in women who never received an IUD) (P=0.07)

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