



Pregnancy Termination

Media Module 1

Trainee Guide

Contributors

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Overview

Our goal for this session is to understand discrepancies between media reports and well-designed studies about abortion and mental health sequelae.

The scientific community has long sought to understand if pregnancy termination causes mental health sequelae. However, the research in this area has historically been fraught with methodological errors, so much so that the American Psychological Association issued a statement calling for caution when interpreting research in this field (Majors 2009). Such problematic research has had an impact on legislation. As well, popular media often cites these misleading and problematically designed studies which can disseminate misinformation to our patients. Therefore, it is crucial that trainees be able to understand and interpret this information so that we can share accurate, evidence-based information with our patients.

In this session, we will review an article in the popular media about abortion and mental health. We will then appraise a piece of scientific literature with the summary of the Turnaway study findings, a landmark study that examines abortion and mental health, physical health, and socioeconomic outcomes. We will then role play a psychiatrist and patient interaction where we explore how to discuss this topic with patients.

Learning Objectives

At the end of this Media Module, the learner will be able to:

- Describe common methodological flaws in research about pregnancy termination and mental health outcomes.
- Critique media coverage about pregnancy termination and mental health.
- Communicate thoughtfully and accurately with a lay audience (e.g. a patient) in order to combat misinformation.

Structure of the Session (Total: 55 minutes)

- Review of media items (10 minutes): Faculty and residents will review the media items.
- Review of medical literature (15 minutes): Faculty and residents together will briefly assess the comparable medical literature.
- Role play (10 minutes): Small groups of residents will role-play a discussion with a patient who has read misinformation about abortion
- Large group discussion (10 minutes)
- Wrap up and Q+A (5 minutes)

Resources Required

- Faculty moderator
- Media samples (provided)
- Article references (provided)

Required Pre-Reading

Guttmacher Institute: Abortion Fact Sheet. <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-united-states>

A Summary of Publications on The Turnaway Study. December 2022. Accessed November 27, 2023.

<https://www.ansirh.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/turnawaystudyannotatedbibliography122122.pdf>

Major, B., Appelbaum, M., Beckman, L., Dutton, M. A., Russo, N. F., & West, C. (2009). Abortion and mental health: Evaluating the evidence. *The American psychologist*, 64(9), 863–890. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017497>.

Presentation of Media Items

Article: Newsweek. “Abortion Fuels Hidden Mental Health Crisis.”

<https://www.newsweek.com/abortion-fuels-hidden-mental-health-crisis-opinion-1839614>

Critique of Media Coverage

1. What is the central claim of this media piece?
2. Does this article make problematic claims?
3. Does this article use research in problematic ways?
4. How does this media piece influence (and potentially bias) the lay reader?

Appraisal of Scientific Literature

A Summary of Publications on The Turnaway Study. December 2022. Accessed November 27, 2023.

<https://www.ansirh.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/turnawaystudyannotatedbibliography122122.pdf>

1. What is the study design?
2. Who were the patients?
3. Who were the two groups of patients being compared?
4. What were the main outcomes being studied?
5. What were the conclusions?
6. What are the limitations of this study?

Role-Playing Exercise

Trainees should separate into groups of 2-3 with one trainee playing the role of the psychiatrist, and another playing the role of a female patient who has questions about abortion from an article they read in the news. If a third person is in the group, they may role-play the partner of the patient.

N.B. This scenario is not about obtaining informed consent for abortion, but rather dispelling misinformation.

A female patient asks her psychiatrist about a recent article in the media that indicated that depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder are caused by abortion, as well as future relationship problems. The patient asks the psychiatrist, **“What are the actual mental health risks of an abortion?”**

Discuss appropriate responses

The patient then asks the psychiatrist, **“But the media said that medical studies proved that abortion causes mental health issues. How can you say it doesn’t?”**

Discuss appropriate responses

The patient then says, **“So, how do you pick and choose which study to believe?”**

Discuss appropriate responses

Wrap-Up and Q&A

For the learner role-playing the physician: What was challenging about this interaction?

For the learner role-playing the patient: How did it feel to be in the patient role? Did you feel convinced or comforted by the physician’s responses to your questions?

References (and Optional Supplemental Reading)

ACOG. Abortion Access Fact Sheet.

<https://www.acog.org/advocacy/abortion-is-essential/come-prepared/abortion-access-fact-sheet>

ACOG. ACOG Guide to Language and Abortion.

<https://www.acog.org/contact/media-center/abortion-language-guide>

A Summary of Publications on The Turnaway Study. December 2022. Accessed November 27, 2023.

<https://www.ansirh.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/turnawaystudyannotatedbibliography122122.pdf>

Biggs MA, Neuhaus JM, Foster DG. Mental Health Diagnoses 3 Years After Receiving or Being Denied an Abortion in the United States. *Am J Public Health*. 2015 Dec;105(12):2557-63. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2015.302803. Epub 2015 Oct 15. PMID: 26469674; PMCID: PMC4638270.

Biggs MA, Rowland B, McCulloch CE, Foster DG. Does abortion increase women's risk for post-traumatic stress? Findings from a prospective longitudinal cohort study. *BMJ Open*. 2016 Feb 1;6(2):e009698. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2015-009698. PMID: 26832431; PMCID: PMC4746441.

Boonstra HD, Gold RB, Richards CL, Finer LB. Guttmacher Institute: Abortion in Women's Lives.

<https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/pubs/2006/05/04/AiWL.pdf>. p. 5.

Guttmacher Institute: Abortion Fact Sheet. <https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-united-states>

Major, B., Appelbaum, M., Beckman, L., Dutton, M. A., Russo, N. F., & West, C. (2009). Abortion and mental health: Evaluating the evidence. *The American psychologist*, 64(9), 863–890. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017497>.

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Rocca CH, Moseson H, Gould H, Foster DG, Kimport K. Emotions over five years after denial of abortion in the United States: Contextualizing the effects of abortion denial on women's health and lives. *Soc Sci Med*. 2021 Jan;269:113567. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113567. Epub 2020 Nov 29. PMID: 33309441.