

Cultural Practices as a Coping Measure for Women who Terminated a Pregnancy in Adolescence: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract : Unintended pregnancy often results in pregnancy termination. Most countries have legalised the termination of a pregnancy, and pregnant adolescents can visit designated clinics without their parents' consent. In most African and Asian countries, certain cultural practices are performed following any form of childbirth, including abortion, and such practices are ingrained in societies. The aim of this paper was to understand how women who terminated a pregnancy during adolescence coped by embracing cultural practices. A descriptive multiple case study design was adopted for the study. In-depth, semi-structured interviews and reflective diaries were used for data collection. 13 women aged 20 to 35 years who had terminated a pregnancy in adolescence participated in the study. Three women kept their soiled sanitary pads, burned them to ash and waited for the rainy season to scatter the ash in a flowing stream. This ritual was performed to appease the ancestors, ask them for forgiveness and as a send-off for the aborted foetus. Five women secretly consulted Sangoma (traditional healers) to perform certain rituals. Three women isolated themselves to perform herbal cleansings, and the last two chose not to engage in any sexual activity for one year, which led to the loss of their partners. This study offers a unique contribution to understanding the solitary journey of women who terminate a pregnancy. The study challenges healthcare professionals who work in clinics that offer pregnancy termination services to look beyond releasing the foetus to advocating and providing women with the necessary care and support in performing cultural practices.

Keywords : adolescence, culture, case study, pregnancy

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