

## PEER REVIEW HISTORY

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### ARTICLE DETAILS

<b>TITLE (PROVISIONAL)</b>	The economics of abortion: A scoping review protocol
<b>AUTHORS</b>	Coast, Ernestina; Lattof, Samantha; van der Meulen Rodgers, Yana; Moore, Brittany

### VERSION 1 - REVIEW

<b>REVIEWER</b>	Mark Connolly University of Groningen and Global Market Access Solutions
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	24-Feb-2019

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>My main concern is the context in which the decision to abort was made. At the micro level you can quantify the cost and frequency of abortion, however at the meso and macro level you don't know if the overall abortion was positive or negative. I believe in most studies the women/couples don't report the reason for the abortion. If there were underlying medical issues then this could be positive benefit for economy. There could be an overarching assumption which may or not be true that all abortions are of unwanted children and therefore would have been a negative economic consequence. For this reason I am uncomfortable with the synthesis of the data because you don't know the underlying reason for the reasons to abort. I see value in the searching and categorising of data, but the synthesis requires that you understand the circumstances that led to the abortion which are not likely to be reported in the studies.</p>
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Soohyung Lee Associate Professor, Sogang University, South Korea
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	11-Mar-2019

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>Review of manuscript "The economics of abortion: A scoping review protocol"</p> <p>The authors aim to examine the existing research in social science on abortion, focusing on its economic consequences. To do so, they plan to use 8 electronic databases containing peer-reviewed articles along with the NBER working paper series and extract relevant papers. The authors will examine the economic effects of abortions on three levels: micro (women and households), meso</p>
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(communities and health systems), and macro (societies and nation states).

I find this manuscript addresses an important but relatively understudied topic and clearly lays out its goals and methodology. In that regard, I think this manuscript is worth publishing in the BMJ Study Protocols with minor revision. My comments are mostly about clarifications.

#### 1. Research question

I wish the authors could make their research focus clearer. Specifically, what is the counterfactual scenario the authors want to study? Is it the case when people did not abort their children? Or is it the case when people used alternative medical procedures for abortions (e.g., safe abortion instead of unsafe abortion without medical experts)?

This confusion partly comes from the fact that the authors use the term “abortion-related care” in the manuscript instead of “abortion.” From the introduction, I thought the authors were interested in the latter question, but, judging from Table 2, I suspect the authors are interested in the former.

#### 2. Abstract

It would be nice if the authors defined what they mean by micro-, meso-, and macro-levels in the abstract.

#### 3. Micro-level factor

On the individual level, it is important to examine to what extent abortions are prevalent and what types of women/households are likely to use abortions. Relatedly, the prevalence of contraception is also important to examine. It is not clear whether the authors plan to review these factors in the manuscript.

Let me give an example illustrating why these factors are important. Suppose that to control for fertility, the rich use contraception while the poor use abortion because the poor may underestimate the health risks for women associated with abortion. Then, inequality in using contraception tools, instead of inequality in accessing abortion-related care, would be the determinant affecting abortion behavior. Furthermore, the correlation between women’s socioeconomic status and the likelihood of using abortion enables us to infer the types of labor market opportunities for women who had abortions relative to those who did not.

#### 4. Page 8. NBER paper

NBER working papers are not peer-reviewed.

#### 5. Missing keywords (page 10)

It may be worth including terms that are directly related to individual outcomes such as human capital, health, labor supply, education, and income. These terms capture the mechanisms

	<p>through which abortions may affect women/households and thereby have economic consequences.</p> <p>6. Impact terms</p> <p>It is not clear how the authors define “value” differently from costs and benefits. Do the authors mean welfare or utility?</p>
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Desiree Govender University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa School of Nursing and Public Health Discipline of Public Health Medicine
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	23-Apr-2019

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>The economics of abortion: A scoping review protocol</p> <p>I am sure the study will yield interesting results.</p>
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<b>REVIEWER</b>	Stephanie Begun University of Toronto
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	09-May-2019

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	<p>This is a very well-conceptualized and well-researched methodological article on the economics of abortion. I look forward to reading more on the practical implications of the findings obtained from studies generated through such methodologies, but at this time, have no further question about the design of the study as outlined and organized.</p>
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### VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Comment	Response
Reviewer #1	
<p>My main concern is the context in which the decision to abort was made. At the micro level you can quantify the cost and frequency of abortion, however at the meso and macro level you don't know if the overall abortion was positive or negative. I believe in most studies the women/couples don't report the reason for the abortion. If there were underlying medical issues then this could be positive benefit for economy. There could be an overarching assumption which may or not be true that all abortions are of unwanted children and therefore would have been a negative economic consequence. For this reason I am uncomfortable with the synthesis of the data</p>	<p>The reason for the abortion is irrelevant to our scoping review; we disagree that knowing the underlying reason(s) for or circumstances of the abortion are relevant for our synthesis of data. Not least because any individual trajectory to abortion may include multiple and changing reason(s) for abortion.</p> <p>We have rewritten the section on data synthesis and removed the focus on the context in which the abortion decision is made.</p>

<p>because you don't know the underlying reason for the reasons to abort. I see value in the searching and categorising of data, but the synthesis requires that you understand the circumstances that led to the abortion which are not likely to be reported in the studies.</p>	
<p>Reviewer #2</p>	
<p>1. Research question. I wish the authors could make their research focus clearer. Specifically, what is the counterfactual scenario the authors want to study? Is it the case when people did not abort their children? Or is it the case when people used alternative medical procedures for abortions (e.g., safe abortion instead of unsafe abortion without medical experts)? This confusion partly comes from the fact that the authors use the term "abortion-related care" in the manuscript instead of "abortion." From the introduction, I thought the authors were interested in the latter question, but, judging from Table 2, I suspect the authors are interested in the former.</p>	<p>We are interested in both questions. The first question the reviewer mentions here is related to abortion policy, and the second is related to abortion care. To address this point, we replaced most instances of "abortion-related care" with "abortion care and abortion policies." We also added our primary research question to the section on scoping review objectives.</p>
<p>2. Abstract. It would be nice if the authors defined what they mean by micro-, meso-, and macro-levels in the abstract.</p>	<p>We have amended the abstract to include the definitions presented in the main text and tables. By micro-level, we mean abortion seekers and their households. By mesolevel, we mean communities and health systems. By macro-level, we mean societies and nation states.</p>
<p>3. Micro-level factor. On the individual level, it is important to examine to what extent abortions are prevalent and what types of women/households are likely to use abortions. Relatedly, the prevalence of contraception is also important to examine. It is not clear whether the authors plan to review these factors in the manuscript. Let me give an example illustrating why these factors are important. Suppose that to control for fertility, the rich use contraception while the poor use abortion because the poor may underestimate the health risks for women associated with abortion. Then, inequality in using contraception tools, instead of inequality in accessing abortion-related care, would be the determinant affecting abortion behavior. Furthermore, the correlation between women's</p>	<p>The reviewer makes an excellent point. In the introduction, we now place greater emphasis on the literature on inequalities in access to modern contraceptives and abortion. We also added a new citation focusing on the example discussed here by the reviewer.</p>

<p>socioeconomic status and the likelihood of using abortion enables us to infer the types of labor market opportunities for women who had abortions relative to those who did not.</p>	
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<p>4. Page 8. NBER paper. NBER working papers are not peer-reviewed.</p>	<p>We have amended the text to include NBER working papers as an exception.</p>
<p>5. Missing keywords (page 10). It may be worth including terms that are directly related to individual outcomes such as human capital, health, labor supply, education, and income. These terms capture the mechanisms through which abortions may affect women/households and thereby have economic consequences.</p>	<p>We tested these search terms and found them too broad to return meaningful results. In PubMed, for example, adding these terms expanded our results from 1,670 to 88,635. While we want to ensure that we cast a wide net with our searches, the search sensitivity with these additional terms is too low to warrant screening hundreds of thousands of abstracts from the eight databases we proposed. We have added a paragraph directly below Table 2 arguing that the impact terms are broad enough to capture these outcomes, and we will consider these examples as potential outcomes (i.e. cost(s), benefit(s), value(s), impact(s)) when reviewing studies for inclusion.</p>
<p>6. Impact terms. It is not clear how the authors define “value” differently from costs and benefits. Do the authors mean welfare or utility?</p>	<p>We revised the definition of “economic value” in footnote f to include welfare gains and utility. We also added a sentence to the new paragraph under Table 2 that explains why we include both “value” and “benefit” as impact terms.</p>
<p>Reviewer #3</p>	
<p>I am sure the study will yield interesting results.</p>	<p>Thank you. We are happy to see this reviewer’s positive assessment of the study.</p>
<p>Reviewer #4</p>	
<p>This is a very well-conceptualized and well-researched methodological article on the economics of abortion. I look forward to reading more on the practical implications of the findings obtained from studies generated through such methodologies, but at this time, have no further question about the design of the study as outlined and organized.</p>	<p>Thank you. We are happy to see this reviewer’s positive assessment of the study.</p>

**VERSION 2 – REVIEW**

<b>REVIEWER</b>	Soohyung Lee Associate Professor Department of Economics Sogang University South Korea
<b>REVIEW RETURNED</b>	24-Jun-2019

<b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b>	Dear Editor The authors addressed all of my comments and I have no further comments on the revised draft. Sincerely, S Lee
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