Psychological status of women after late termination of pregnancy in those affected by major fetal structural and chromosomal abnormalities

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Objective
When a major fetal abnormality is diagnosed in Germany, the option is given to the pregnant woman (§ 218(a) StGB) to terminate the pregnancy even in the later stages of pregnancy. Only a few studies have evaluated the psychological status and wellbeing of the mother and partner with a history of late termination of pregnancy. The objective of this study was to evaluate the stress levels in couples with such an event in their history and possible influences.

Methods
In 2013 all pregnant women who had a late TOP because of major congenital abnormalities between 2008 - 2012 at our hospital were asked to participate in this study using a standardised questionnaire to evaluate their psychological stress level (BSI-18), their clinical/somatic symptoms (GBB-24), their stress reaction after the termination (IES), their wellbeing (WHO-5), their social support (OSLO-3), their evaluation of personal characteristics such as optimism and pessimism (LOT-R) and we also gathered information about the termination of pregnancy.

Results
64 women agreed to participate in this study. Mean maternal age was 32 years with a mean follow up of 21 months (min = 2 months, max = 58 months). 33. 0% of the women showed evidence of psychological trauma (IES) after the event. 15. 6% showed an abnormal psychological stress level (BSI-18). In almost 30% of the patients there were signs of depression (WHO-5). Optimism and social support were important impact factors for wellbeing as well as status of partnership and history of pregnancies without adverse pregnancy outcome.

Conclusion
Our results suggest that a termination of pregnancy is an important event in the life of pregnant woman and father to be. We found impact factors in this study which can be used to support patients to minimise the long term effects impacts of such an event.