

# ‘Bad choices’: Unintended pregnancy and abortion in nurses’ and counsellors’ accounts of providing pre-abortion counselling

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## Abstract

Little research tackles healthcare providers’ experiences in conducting pre-abortion counselling sessions in circumstances where pregnant persons may request an abortion. We report on a study conducted in South Africa, in which two nurses and two counsellors were asked about how they conduct these counselling sessions. Using a synthetic narrative approach, we present these health workers’ micro-narratives about their motivations for providing abortion services, the purpose of the counselling, their information-giving practices, and whether and how third parties are included in the counselling. We highlight how these micro-narratives are premised on discursive resources that problematise unintended pregnancy and abortion. These resources enable and justify directive counselling that undermines pregnant peoples’ reproductive autonomy. We locate such directiveness within dominant anti-abortion discourse and call for training to reframe normative understandings of abortion.

## Keywords

abortion counselling, discourse, healthcare provider, narratives, South Africa

## Background

In South Africa, abortion is legal on request in the first 12 weeks of gestation and on various grounds thereafter. It is governed by the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act (No. 92 of 1996; hereafter CTOP Act). The CTOP Act stipulates that voluntary and non-directive pre- and post-abortion counselling<sup>1</sup> must be made available in abortion facilities.

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