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**Contemplating Abortion: HIV-Positive  
Women's Decision to Terminate Pregnancy**

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# Contemplating Abortion: HIV-Positive Women's Decision to Terminate Pregnancy

Sarah MacCarthy, Jennifer Rasanathan, Ann Crawford-Roberts, Ines Dourado,  
and Sofia Gruskin

## Abstract

Research on pregnancy termination largely assumes HIV status is the only reason why HIV-positive women contemplate abortion. As antiretroviral treatment (ART) becomes increasingly available and women are living longer, healthier lives, the time has come to consider the influence of other factors on HIV-positive women's reproductive decision-making. Because ART has been free and universally available to Brazilians for more than two decades, Brazil provides a unique context in which to explore these issues. A total of 25 semi-structured interviews exploring women's pregnancy termination decision-making were conducted with women receiving care at the Reference Centre for HIV/AIDS in Salvador, Brazil. Interviews were transcribed, translated into English and coded for analysis. HIV played different roles in women's decision-making. In all, 13 HIV-positive women did not consider terminating their pregnancy. Influential factors described by those who did consider terminating their pregnancy included fear of HIV transmission, fear of HIV-related stigma, family size, economic constraints, partner and provider influence, as well as lack of access to pregnancy termination services and abortifacients. For some HIV-positive women in Brazil, HIV can be the only reason to consider terminating a pregnancy, but other factors are significant. A thorough understanding of all variables affecting reproductive decision-making is necessary for enhancing services and policies and better meeting the needs and rights of HIV-positive women.

Abstract:

Research on pregnancy termination largely assumes HIV status is the only reason why HIV-positive women contemplate abortion. As antiretroviral treatment (ART) becomes increasingly available and women are living longer, healthier lives, the time has come to consider the influence of other factors on HIV-positive women's reproductive decision-making. Because ART has been free and universally available to Brazilians for more than two decades, Brazil provides a unique context in which to explore these issues. A total of 25 semi-structured interviews exploring women's pregnancy termination decision-making were conducted with women receiving care at the Reference Centre for HIV/AIDS in Salvador, Brazil. Interviews were transcribed, translated into English and coded for analysis. HIV played different roles in women's decision-making. In all, 13 HIV-positive women did not consider terminating their pregnancy. Influential factors described by those who did consider terminating their pregnancy included fear of HIV transmission, fear of HIV-related stigma, family size, economic constraints, partner and provider influence, as well as lack of access to pregnancy termination services and abortifacients. For some HIV-positive women in Brazil, HIV can be the only reason to consider terminating a pregnancy, but other factors are significant. A thorough understanding of all variables affecting reproductive decision-making is necessary for enhancing services and policies and better meeting the needs and rights of HIV-positive women.