with those who delivered their babies. Emotional support for and behavioural problems among children of women who have had abortions may also be adversely affected.[6]

It would appear that the study by Reardon and associates[2] published recently in *CMAJ* is not the first to present empirical evidence that abortion is a severe risk factor for substantial emotional and physical trauma.

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One problem with the study by David Reardon and associates,[1] which Brenda Major[2] mentions only briefly in her commentary, is that the most relevant comparison was not performed. Reardon and associates compared women who delivered babies with women who had abortions. Compared with women who are willing to have babies, women who abort their pregnancies may indeed experience greater psychological suffering. However, it might be more appropriate to ask about the differences between women who undergo abortion and those who want to have an abortion but choose not to because of external pressures or guilt. In such a study, it might be found that abortion was in fact a relatively healthy psychological event.

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The health sequelae of abortion are surrounded by enormous controversy, as indicated by the recent article by David Reardon and associates[1] and Brenda Major's related commentary.[2] My colleagues and I have also obtained evidence that women's well-being is adversely affected by abortion. We found that Canadian women who had had an abortion were significantly more likely to experience diminished well-being in the postmenopausal years than those who had not.[3]

However, both research studies (that of Reardon and associates[1] and our own[3]) must be interpreted with caution. Many will rush to conclude that it is the abortion procedure itself that is associated with psychological harm resulting in mental illness or diminished well-being. These studies appear to provide evidence that women who have abortions are significantly less likely to experience health and wellness in the short- and long-term compared with women who have not undergone this procedure. Yet from the data in these studies, it is impossible to determine whether it is the procedure, the life circumstances or demographic profiles of women seeking abortion, or concomitant medical factors more commonly found in women seeking termination of pregnancy that predispose the women to poorer health outcomes. Surely those on both sides of the debate would agree that more research is needed to explore these questions.

Because the abortion debate is highly charged and clouded with ideological, political, religious and economic influences, it is sometimes difficult to objectively determine what is factual and credible scientific information and what represents sexual and philosophical ideology. The medical and academic communities are becoming aware that "researcher neutrality" may well be an oxymoron. *CMAJ* is to be commended for allowing both sides to present their evidence. With such open debate, it is less likely that the truth will be stretched for theological or philosophical reasons or that factual evidence will be dismissed or negated for ideological and political reasons.

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**[One of the authors of the research article responds:]**

With few words to respond to these letters on my article[1] and Brenda Major's commentary,[2] I refer readers to *Forbidden Grief*[3] wherein my literature review provides a context for the interpretation of our results. See also *Stephen's Guide to the Logical Fallacies*,[4] giving attention to fallacies of distraction, ad hominem attacks and appeals to authority.

Our methodology was identical to David and colleagues.[5] Both David and Major were on the American Psychological Association (APA) panel established in 1987 to defend abortion's safety during the inquiry conducted by US Surgeon General C. Everett Koop. All members of that panel have publicly advocated for liberal access to abortion. They especially cited David's study as an example of important research. To dismiss our study one must dismiss the expertise of both David and the APA panel that relied on his work.[6]