

- 14 Bailey P. Emotional decisions. *Wellcome Science* 2007; **6**: 29–32.
- 15 Hemmerling A, Siedentopf F, Kentenich H. Emotional impact and accessibility of medical abortion with mifepristone: a German experience. *J Psychosom Obstet Gynaecol* 2005; **26**: 23–31.
- 16 Argent V. Induced abortion. *The Obstetrician and Gynaecologist* 2000; **2**: 2.
- 17 Coleman P, Reardon D, Strahan T, Cogle J. The psychology of abortion: a review and suggestions for future research. *Psychol Health* 2005; **20**: 237–271.
- 18 Major B, Cozzarelli C, Cooper L, Zubeck J, Richards C, Wilhite M, et al. Psychological responses of women after first-trimester abortion. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2000; **57**: 777–784.
- 19 Avalos L. Hindsight and the abortion experience: what abortion means to women years later. *Gender Issues* 1999; **17**: 35–57.
- 20 Coleman P, Nelson E. The quality of abortion decisions and college students' reports of post-abortion emotional sequelae and abortion attitudes. *J Soc Clin Psychol* 1998; **17**: 425–443.
- 21 Royal College of Psychiatrists. Position Statement on Women's Mental Health in Relation to Induced Abortion, 14 March 2008. <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/members/currentissues/mentalhealthandabortion.aspx> [Accessed 2 May 2008].
- 22 Gilchrist A, Hannaford P, Frank P, Kay C. Termination of pregnancy and psychiatric morbidity. *Br J Psychiatry* 1995; **167**: 243–248.
- 23 Adler N, David H, Major B, Roth S, Russo N, Wyatt G. Psychological factors in abortion: a review. *Am Psychol* 1992; **47**: 1194–1204.
- 24 Dagg P. The psychological sequelae of therapeutic abortion – denied and completed. *Am J Psychiatry* 1991; **148**: 578–584.
- 25 Goodwin P, Ogden J. Women's reflections upon their past abortions: an exploration of how and why emotional reactions change over time. *Psychol Health* 2007; **22**: 231–248.
- 26 Boyle M. *Re-thinking Abortion: Psychology, Gender, Power and the Law*. London, UK: Routledge, 1997.
- 27 Bradshaw Z, Slade P. The effects of induced abortion on emotional experiences and relationships: a critical review of the literature. *Clin Psychol Rev* 2003; **23**: 929–958.
- 28 Zolse G, Blacker C. The psychological complications of therapeutic abortion. *Br J Psychiatry* 1998; **160**: 742–749.
- 29 Söderberg H, Janzon L, Sjöberg N-O. Emotional distress following induced abortion. A study of its incidence and determinants among abortees in Malmö, Sweden. *Eur J Obstet Gynecol Reprod Biol* 1998; **79**: 173–178.
- 30 Muller M, Mercer R. Development of the prenatal attachment inventory. *West J Nurs Res* 1993; **15**: 199–215.
- 31 Marie Stopes International. *Late Abortion: A Research Study of Women Undergoing Abortion Between 19 and 24 Weeks Gestation*. 2005. <http://www.mariestopes.org.uk/documents/Late%20abortion.pdf> [Accessed 2 May 2008].
- 32 Ingham R, Lee E, Clements S, Stone N. *Second Trimester Abortions in England and Wales*. 2007. Centre for Sexual Health Research, School of Psychology, University of Southampton and School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research University of Kent, Canterbury, UK.
- 33 Trybulski J. The long-term phenomena of women's postabortion experiences. *West J Nurs Res* 2005; **27**: 559–576.
- 34 Hodson P. A woman's right to choose counselling. *J Fam Plann Reprod Health Care* 2002; **28**: 174–175.
- 35 Zoja E. *Abortion: Loss and Renewal in the Search for Identity*. London, UK: Routledge, 1998.
- 36 Moulder C. *Understanding Pregnancy Loss. Perspectives and Issues in Care*. London, UK: Macmillan, 1998.
- 37 Rando T. *Parental Loss of a Child*. Champaign, IL: Research Press, 1986.
- 38 Barger-Williams G. Induced elective abortion and perinatal grief. Dissertation thesis, New York University, New York, NY, USA, 1991. Available from UMI Dissertation Services, Ann Arbor, MI, USA (www.il.proquest.com).
- 39 Dyson L, While A. Termination of pregnancy: a difficult decision making process. *Br J Community Nurs* 1999; **4**: 476–482.
- 40 Zapka J, Lemon S, Peterson L, Palmer H, Goldman M. The silent consumer. *Med Care* 2001; **39**: 50–60.

BOOK REVIEW

We Need to Talk About Kevin (L Shriver). London, UK: Serpent's Tail, 2005. ISBN-13: 978-1-852-42889-1 Price: £7.99. Pages: 436 (paperback)

Early in this book you learn that Kevin is in prison after killing classmates at his school (a subject I would normally avoid). The book format is of the letters written by his mother, Eva, to her absent husband. The letters recount Eva's interpretations and emotions about Kevin's early and teenage years. The format limits the exploration of the themes in some ways, but also allows the reader to form an opinion about Eva, mostly unfavourable, as she obviously dislikes herself. Well written, the letters carry the reader compulsively through all the unpleasant events and later horrors.

Why is a book about the peculiar phenomenon of teenage killers of interest to health professionals? The letters have an appeal in a personal way to many women who have enjoyable pre-parenting lives that are, or would be, utterly changed by motherhood. Eva, the founder and chief executive of a travel book company, decides to have a baby mainly to please her husband, who feels he is not complete without. (Or perhaps, he resents her success and feels that having a baby will reduce her hubris?) The letters describe the loss of status and purpose, the lack of reward, and feelings of

responsibility for everything the child does, as well as the change in circumstances that are so familiar to many mature women embarking on parenthood. It also illustrates many of the fears and fantasies that we hear in the consulting room from women thinking about embarking on pregnancy, or who are already pregnant. For example, the feeling that the body and later, the mother's life, is taken over by an alien being, sucking the life force out. Or the fear that the baby will be a monster, as indeed Kevin turns out to be. He is so difficult to look after and get along with, that au pairs, babysitters, and even co-attendants at nursery school flee. In psychoanalytical terms, the loss of Eva's own childhood to her own agoraphobic mother might lead to identification of the child as a rival. Eva describes her coldness, boredom and exhaustion, far from the accepted picture of joy and absorption that mothers are 'supposed' to feel.

The conviction that she will deliver her baby without an epidural, the perceived unkindness of the birth attendants, the impossibility of bonding to the baby or of breastfeeding are familiar scenarios to any health professionals involved in women's care. Here they are wearily described in the uncompromising style of Eva's letters to her husband. Eva recounts how difficult Kevin is to care for, only for Franklin, the uncomprehending father, to increasingly believe that she is untruthful or even deranged. The dialogue

between Eva and Kevin during Eva's visits to the prison gives a clear insight into Kevin's maturing. She recounts her experience of Kevin coming out of that temporary madness that is part of adolescence, and which must bear some of the responsibility for his bizarre actions.

Eva scrutinises her own behaviour and tries to determine how much responsibility she must bear for Kevin's anger and cruelty, subscribing to the myth that if things go wrong, "It must be the fault of the parents." How often do we hear mothers praised for being marvellous parents when their children do well? Oh, that's just "She was lucky to have such a gifted, pleasant, successful child". Eva's description of her second child – pleasant, passive and fearful – might contradict the premise that the responsibility is solely parental. Society blames her, she blames herself and punishes herself for what has happened, but the novel leaves the reader uncertain by how much she should be held to blame for this instance of violence – one of the many spectacles that fill our TV screens and strangely fascinate so many of us.

No, I didn't enjoy the book, but it was absorbing.

Reviewed by **Gill Wakley**, MD, FFSRH
Advisory Editor, *Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care*

We hope that journal readers enjoyed reading *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, and also discovering whether their opinion of the book matched that of our guest reviewer. In the October issue, the fiction book under scrutiny will be *Christine Falls* by Benjamin Black (400 pages, Picador, 2007, ISBN-13: 978-0-33044-532-0). We want to remind journal readers that if they would like to offer to review an appropriate fiction title of their own choosing then they should contact the Journal Editorial Office by e-mail (journal@fsrh.org) in the first instance with details of their nominated title.