

# **A Study of the Effects of Abortion in the United States:**

**The Reasoning Behind Abortions and  
Improving Access to Care**

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Boca Raton

*A Study of the Effects of Abortion in the United States:  
The Reasoning Behind Abortions and Improving Access to Care*

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Abstract

This research study examines legal, political, and social factors influencing women's decisions to undergo or forego abortion. It also suggests ways to increase accessibility of abortion services. Due to time and budgetary constraints, the study was conducted by utilizing secondary data, such as academic studies, scholarly publications, and newspaper articles. Studies have shown that common reasons for women having abortion are financial difficulties, rape/incest, and fear of life change. Barriers to abortion include lack of adequate information on abortion services or proper contraception use; fear of pain; geographic barriers, and state legislation. Factors that affect utilization of abortion include medical technology; anti-abortion movement; laws limiting provision of abortion, as well as religion and public opinion.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Context of the Problem

The topic of abortion has been a highly controversial issue with a long history. The Supreme Court ruling that legalized abortion in the case of Roe vs. Wade has only exacerbated the controversy further. Decades after the ruling of the Supreme Court case of Roe vs. Wade, the controversial debate over abortion rights remains consistent to this very day.

The rate of abortion in the United States has been significant enough to warrant investigation. “Each year, worldwide, an estimated 46 million women experience an induced abortion, 36 million in the developing world” (Benson, 2005, p.189). The public in the United States and internationally is concerned by the controversy surrounding abortion rights, abortion laws, and the physical, psychological, and sociological ramifications of abortion.

People have different views on abortion. Those in support of abortion often believe that a fetus is a human life and has the same individual rights to life as any human being. Proponents of abortion often argue that a woman has a right to choose what to do with her body, and nobody can make that choice for her. This of course includes the government, which is often criticized for either interfering in, or overlooking, moral issues related to abortion decisions.

Despite lengthy and heated debates, certain critical issues related to abortion have so far received a short shrift. One such issue discussed in this study is access to quality care for women seeking abortion. Therefore, the pro-life versus pro-choice argument is valid only if it is found that there is some correlation between this argument and the accessibility of abortion services. The study will not discuss the pro-life vs. pro-choice discourse outside of that scope.

However, the moral and legal issues revolving around the pro-choice, pro-life argument are not the only issues that are pertinent. Abortion cannot be thought of as strictly a legal issue

without ignoring the social ramifications of this practice. Abortion is, in and of itself, a social phenomenon so prominent that it necessitated the creation of laws. Therefore, this research proposal will also attempt to summarize social issues involving abortion laws, present the views of the defenders and the critics of abortion, and highlight their place within the legal system and the society, as a whole.

A significant number of women who seek abortion find that they face challenges in obtaining access to abortion clinics and to quality post-abortion care. Many of those women who ultimately decide to go through with abortion experience social or psychological concerns. Not all women are prepared emotionally to have a child. This is especially true for pregnant teenagers. For some women, lack of financial resources is a contributing factor in their choice to have an abortion. Likewise, lack of financial resources can also create a barrier for women in obtaining access to abortion services.

Detrimental post-abortion health complications are also a valid concern. Aside from psychological problems apparent in post-abortion patients, physiological problems may arise as well. Risks of breast cancer and subsequent fetal loss may discourage women from obtaining abortion.

Social stigma can also prevent women from having abortions. The fear of being reproached by friends, family members, and various political groups can create a barrier. In addition, a shortage of trained clinicians, clinics, and post-abortion care services can make it difficult for women to obtain much needed access to care. Availability of care may depend on geographical location as well. This is especially true for women living in rural areas.

### Statement of the Problem

Regardless of whether people support abortion or not, abortion has inevitable health and social impacts. Those women who choose to have an abortion have difficult decisions to make regarding the reasoning behind obtaining an abortion, the consequences of obtaining an abortion, and their physical, psychological and financial ability to go through with an abortion. Those that ultimately decide to have an abortion often need to overcome a multitude of barriers in order to access relatively safe and quality abortion services.

### Research Questions

#### *Primary Research Question*

The purpose of this study is to better understand the issues and concerns that women face when deciding whether or not to receive abortion services. This study also purports to discover the various types of barriers that women may have in obtaining abortion services. Therefore, the primary research question is as follows: What can be done to increase access to quality abortion services?

#### *Research Sub-questions*

The research question is quite complex. In order to answer this research question, three following qualitative research sub-questions will be explored. By carefully investigating qualitative sub-questions, one will determine a satisfactory response to the primary research question.

The research sub-questions are:

1. Which factors influence women's decisions to undergo or forego abortion? [Qualitative]
2. What are the barriers to quality abortion services? [Qualitative]

3. What role do current legal, political, and social issues play in influencing abortion utilization? [Qualitative]

### Significance of the Study

This topic should be of interest to women, in general, and to researchers and policymakers who are concerned with abortion accessibility, specifically. This study is also primarily of interest to pregnant mothers. Additionally, it may appeal to potential future pregnant mothers, as well as family and friends who may be directly or indirectly be responsible for a pregnant woman's well-being. Policy makers may also choose to read this study because of the legal issues surrounding abortion. Lastly, this study may interest healthcare providers who offer—or consider offering—abortion services, since healthcare providers are oftentimes in a position to influence barriers to healthcare access. Because of this, they can be invaluable in solving the problem.

This study is significant as it reviews the issues and factors that affect abortion decisions. The study also attempts to better understand the barriers that prevent women from having access to quality abortion services. These barriers are not limited to physical barriers. The barriers can be physical, financial, social, political, religious, and others that may go beyond the scope of this study.

An exploration of factors influencing women's decision to undergo or forego abortions can lead to a better understanding of barriers that prevent access to quality abortion services. Furthermore, various legal, political, and social issues may help to strengthen or eliminate barriers. An improved understanding of barriers hampering access to quality abortion services will help to pave the way for the implementation of policies and practices that can effectively eliminate these barriers, henceforth decreasing the number of illegal abortions and unwanted

births. This study is significant also because it may influence the direction taken in improving accessibility of quality abortion services. Each specific barrier will require a targeted action to overcome it; no single action will be able to bring down all of the barriers at the same time.

### Research Design and Methodology

The research question and its subsequent three sub-questions attempt to understand certain factors that may not necessarily be fully known beforehand. Therefore, the study will be of a qualitative nature. Specifically, this will be a phenomenological study that attempts to comprehend perceptions and understandings related to abortion and barriers to abortions services.

This research study should utilize both primary and secondary data. Since this is a phenomenological study, it has been determined that thorough interviews should be conducted with randomly selected participants. The participants would be chosen from randomly selected U.S. States. Within the selected States, participants would be chosen from both rural and urban environments.

It is the purpose of this proposal to explore barriers that impede access to care and determine ways to improve accessibility of abortion services. Since this research study is intended to understand the barriers to abortion services, the participants selected would not only consist of pregnant mothers. The participants would also include pregnant mothers considering abortion, those not considering abortion, those who previously had an abortion, and women in general who have never been pregnant. The reason non-pregnant women should be studied is due to the fact that they may conceive in the future and may be in a position of deciding whether or not they should undergo abortion. Potential situations may reveal potential barriers as well.

Because this study deals with barriers to quality abortions services, it is important to interview not only the patient, but the provider as well. For this reason, not only should patients be interviewed, but also healthcare providers from various selected regions would give their perspective on the abortion issue and barriers to abortion services. This group would include randomly selected current abortion providers and women's health providers who do not offer abortion services.

The methodology utilizing primary data from human subjects as described above would have been an ideal study. Unfortunately, at the time of this writing, time and budgetary constraints make this unfeasible. However, future research should be conducted with primary data extracted from person-to-person interviews, while utilizing the secondary data used in this study.

Some amount of primary data, not personally extracted from human subjects will be used, such as a legal document. However, secondary data will be extensively used in this study. The secondary data will be based on peer-reviewed articles from various academic journals and some newspaper articles as well. Most of these academic journals will be related to healthcare, family, or sociological studies. The secondary data will attempt to suggest possible answers to the three sub-questions. Likewise, secondary data will also attempt to illustrate other researchers' perspectives on issues related to this study's three sub-questions. Through the critical analysis of various peer-reviewed academic articles, one can develop a satisfactory understanding of abortion-related issues before the research utilizing primary data is even conducted.

The literature review will be based on an extensive quantity of peer-reviewed articles dealing with various issues related to abortion. Many of the articles will utilize both quantitative and qualitative methods in their study. The literature review will serve as a general background for various issues linked to abortion. These will include the reasons women choose to undergo

abortions, access to abortion services, abortion laws and policies, social issues, unwanted pregnancies, and the impacts that abortions have on society. Having perused the literature review, one will be better prepared to explore specific questions pertaining to ways to decrease barriers to abortion services.

Once the general knowledge from the literature review is obtained, the study can dwell deeper into this phenomenon by studying the sub-questions of the research problem. As indicated above, the three sub-questions are as follows:

1. Which factors influence women's decisions to undergo or forego abortion? [Qualitative]
2. What are the barriers to quality abortion services? [Qualitative]
3. What role do current legal, political, and social issues play in influencing abortion utilization? [Qualitative]

The exploration of these sub-questions will facilitate the process of synthesizing a viable solution and satisfactory answer to the primary research question.

#### Limitations of the Study

As stated previously, a significant limitation to this study is the lack of primary data utilizing person-to-person interviews. While the use of primary data in the form of person-to-person interviews would be the superior method of conducting this study, certain factors made this impossible. Specifically, the lack of time and funding created an unrealistic environment in which to conduct research utilizing primary data.

Furthermore, although secondary data was used, not all issues were explored with the same level of detail. Due to time constraints and, partially, due to the lack of available information, certain abortion-related themes were only briefly discussed, while others received a

more detailed attention. Because not all issues were explored in extensive detail, the study may have missed some relevant information concerning abortion accessibility

### Organization of the Study

This paper is structured in a logical fashion. It provides readers with a basic background on issues related to abortion before acquainting them with the barriers that can impede access to quality and safe abortion services. The directed research proposal is organized in the following way:

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION, includes a basic introduction to the topic and highlights the topic's significance. It also describes the context of the problem and presents the research problem, the primary research question, and the three research sub-questions. A detailed methodology explains the reasoning behind a qualitative study, describes the methodology utilized, and suggests criteria for choosing study participants.

Chapter Two: LITERATURE REVIEW, presents a thorough literature review. As stated previously, the primary research problem is as follows: What can be done to increase access to quality abortion services? The first step towards this goal is to attain background knowledge about abortion-related issues that may affect access to care. This knowledge will serve as a basis for a better understanding of the problem at hand. This review contains detailed background information culled from numerous relevant sources and previous studies conducted in related disciplinary fields. The literature review consists of peer-reviewed articles and studies related to abortion laws, access to post-abortion care, and factors influencing women's decisions to seek abortion services. Although it is not always directly related to the sub-questions, the literature reviewed supplies information that is essential for the analytical synthesis of answers to the research question and sub-questions.



Chapter Three: FACTORS INFLUENCING ABORTION DECISIONS, explores the first sub-question to determine factors that affect women's decision to undergo or forego abortion. The factors influencing the pregnant woman's decision regarding an abortion may reveal barriers to abortion services. Factors that were previously unknown may be uncovered. It is difficult to understand the barriers without first understanding the women's needs. By evaluating the rationale for pregnant women's decisions, one can then understand which barriers impede these decisions, and what can be done to remove said barriers. There are a multitude of reasons why a woman may or may not choose to have an abortion. By detailing the reasons provided by women who chose abortion, studies conducted in this chapter allow for a better understanding of the factors influencing these decisions.

Chapter Four: BARRIERS TO ACCESSIBILITY, explores the second sub-question that asks about current barriers to obtaining quality abortion services. Barriers can be physical, physiological, psychological, sociological, and financial, among others. Barriers often have a direct impact on abortion accessibility. It is impossible to remove barriers to quality and safe abortion services without a thorough understanding of various factors that hinder access to quality and safe abortion services. This chapter aims to determine these barriers and explain why they exist. This research study also strives to make recommendations that may either remove or, at the very least, mitigate these barriers in order to facilitate access to reliable abortion services for all pregnant women seeking them.

Chapter Five: INFLUENCING UTILIZATION, explores the third sub-question. This chapter attempts to determine the role of various legal, social, and political issues influencing abortion utilization. It is important to understand these issues at play as they could affect access to quality abortion services. Various legal, political, and social issues may directly or indirectly influence access to abortion services. For example, a strong anti-abortion public opinion may

instill fear in women seeking abortion services. Certain policies, laws, and regulations can have a significant impact as well.

Chapter Six: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECCOMENDATIONS, summarizes the research proposal and draws a conclusion. It also investigates limitations of this research proposal. Furthermore, this chapter provides recommendations for further study.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Due to the large attention drawn to abortion issues, many articles have been written regarding abortion. A number of studies exploring abortion have been conducted as well. It is important to research previous literature so that current solutions may be formulated.

A number of articles have been written, regarding the effects of abortion rates on various social and economic factors. Legal issues also come into play. This literature review will explore the many issues surrounding abortion.

### Abortion and Crime

Various studies have been conducted on the topic of abortion. Each one is as varied in its perspective as could be possible. Some studies explore the correlation between abortion incidences and certain social or political phenomena.

For instance, one study looked into the correlation between the incidences of abortion and the crime rate. “The five states that legalized abortion in roughly 1970 as opposed to the national legalization resulting from the January 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe v Wade*, experienced a somewhat earlier drop in crime” (Donohue & Levitt, 2004, p. 30). Donohue (2004) also stated that during the 1970’s, states that had higher abortion rates typically had a lower crime rate than those states that had lower abortion rates.

While this doesn’t necessarily mean that there is a causal effect, it does show a notable correlation. Donohue and Levitt claimed that “the legislation of abortion in 1973 explains over half of the recent decline in crime across the United States” (Donohue & Levitt, 2004, p.30).

Joyce (2004) stated that “a 50 percent increase in the mean abortion ratio is associated with an 11

percent decrease in violent crime, an 8 percent decrease in property crime and a 12 percent decrease in murder”(p. 3). Advocates of legalized abortion can use this argument to demonstrate the sociological benefits of giving women the right to choose.

Although laws legalizing abortion were not intended as a crime deterrent, they had a significant impact on crime rates nonetheless. There are a number of possible reasons for this drop in crime rate. One obvious and potentially easily overlooked cause of the lower crime rate resulting from increased abortion rate is the fact that a lower population equals lower overall crime.

There are however other possible reasons. A number of studies conducted on pregnancy resolution revealed “women who abort are at lower risk of having children with criminal propensities than women of similar age, race, and marital status who instead carried to term” (Joyce, 2004, p. 26). While this may not be very surprising, the opposite effect may also be true.

For example, studies of teens in Ventura County, California in the early 1970’s found that pregnant teenagers who were good students, had higher education, and were not on public assistance were more likely to abort than pregnant teenagers who were poorer and less educated (Joyce, 2004, p. 26). This leads to obvious questions: Which is the cause and which is the effect? Do high abortion rates lead to lower crime rates, or do lower crime rates lead to high abortion rates? This is a perplexing puzzle, which cannot be solved using a simple correlation analysis.

Joyce (2004) stated that, although legalized abortion has improved the lives of many women by allowing them to avoid an unwanted birth. Joyce (2004) found little evidence to suggest that the legalization of abortion had appreciably lowered criminality in subsequent generations. Whether the effect was appreciable or not is up to debate. However, pro-choice advocates could still use this argument to justify their support for a woman’s right to have an abortion.

### Abortion Laws

Abortion laws have existed for a number of years. “In the 1960’s and 1970’s, policy-makers in Britain and the United States considered and eventually enacted, abortion reform proposals that sought to make abortion more readily available” (Halfmann, 2003, p. 567). Physicians had varied responses to these proposals. Initially, the American Medical Association (AMA) opposed abortion as it wanted to retain its power to diagnose the necessity of this medical procedure. However, AMA reversed its stance in 1970 (Halfmann, 2003), quite possibly due the increasing awareness of abortion issues.

During the 1970’s, abortion laws were dictated by states. Most of the time, if a woman wished to have an abortion, the physician would have to determine if the pregnancy posed a grave threat to the health of the mother. Only in this situation were abortions allowed. This changed in 1973 due to the case of *Roe vs. Wade*. Abortion now became a federal issue.

It is virtually impossible to discuss abortion laws and how they address legal issues related to abortion without at least mentioning the Supreme Court case of *Roe vs. Wade*. The significance of *Roe vs. Wade* is hard to overestimate. Not only did it overturn any previous state and federal laws restricting abortion, but it also sparked further debate on abortion that continues to this very day.

At the time, many state laws typically allowed for abortions. However, abortions were only permitted if continued pregnancy posed a direct threat to the mother’s life, regardless of the stage of pregnancy (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973). Texas law made it a crime to "procure an abortion, as therein [410 U.S. 113, 118] defined, or to attempt one, except with respect to an abortion procured or attempted by medical advice for the purpose of saving the life of the mother" (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973). Most other states had similar statutes.

Roe instituted a federal action in 1970 against the district attorney of her county in Dallas (Roe v. Wade, 1973). Roe argued that the Texas criminal abortion statutes were not constitutional. Roe was a single, pregnant mother-to-be and wished to terminate her pregnancy by an abortion “performed by a competent, licensed physician, under safe, clinical conditions” (Roe v. Wade, 1973).

Roe also argued “the Texas statutes were unconstitutionally vague and that they abridged her right of personal privacy, protected by the first, fourth, fifth, ninth, and fourteenth amendments” (Roe v. Wade, 1973). Though right to privacy is not specifically mentioned in the constitution, the court did agree that the roots leading to the right of privacy could be found in various contexts through the constitution and its amendments (Roe v. Wade, 1973). “The majority relied on a legal principle that recognized the right of privacy. Specifically, the Court argued that the principles underlying earlier privacy decisions, such as *Stanley v. Georgia*, should be applied in the context of abortion” (David, 2004, p. 1234).

The court found that Texas law was violating the Due Process clause of the fourteenth amendment. The court stated that during the first trimester, abortion should be performed at the discretion of the physician attending to the pregnant woman (Roe v. Wade, 1973). The court ultimately ruled that the Texas statute was unconstitutional and must be abolished (Roe v. Wade, 1973). It should be noted that this ruling reversed any previous State or federal laws restricting abortion. Abortion would be allowed for any reason before the infant is viable. After viability, abortion would only be allowed when there is an inherent danger to the mother (Roe v. Wade, 1973). This case was important because, in many ways, it confirmed a woman’s right to make her own decisions regarding her unborn child. This however, did not end the constant controversy surrounding this issue. Nor did it stop critics from attempting to reverse *Roe vs. Wade*. As a matter of fact, this ruling was challenged in 1992. “When the Supreme Court

reconsidered and upheld the merits of Roe in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* in 1992, the majority put front and center the importance of stare decisis (to stand by that which is decided)” (David, 2004, p. 1221).

Even in recent years, there have still been movements against legalized abortion. On January 23, 2003, President George W. Bush assured abortion protesters that he would protect the lives of innocent children waiting to be born and promote compassionate alternatives (David, 2004). David (2004) stated that at the time of the writing, the Supreme Court likely stood one vote away from overturning Roe.

The reason for this constant struggle may be due to the fact that the decision made in *Roe vs. Wade* utilized both sides to make the final ruling. From one side, the court recognized a woman’s right to privacy based on an earlier constitutional case law. It was concluded that the right to privacy could be linked to the right to have an abortion (David, 2004). From a different side, the court also considered the state’s interest in protecting potential life, which became more potential as the gestational age increased. (David, 2004). Generally speaking, the decision made by the court utilized positive strengths from both sides, encouraging both opponents and defenders of abortion to continue debating the issue.

Those that are anti-choice (or pro-life to avoid bias) obviously disagree with the Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe vs. Wade*. Those who are confident that the court reached the wrong decision typically make one of two arguments. “First, one may believe that the court correctly identified the proper principles to balance, but improperly balanced them” (David, 2004, p. 1241). One may agree that Roe should have been decided by balancing both interests. However, at the same time, one may believe that the interest in protecting an unborn life overrides that of the mother’s privacy (David, 2004).

“The second form of confidence that a particular precedent was wrongly decided is based on the belief that the court did not even consider the proper principles” (David, 2004, p.1241). In this situation, a person who is against abortion may believe that the right to privacy is not related to the right to an abortion. Furthermore, the person may argue that the court should have considered other principles such as American traditions within society beliefs (David, 2004).

### Abortion Incidence

The act of measuring the incidence of induced abortion rates can be quite challenging. Legal abortions are authorized procedures and are generally easy to record (Rossier, 2003). Statistics can then be inferred from these records. In countries that do not maintain substantial records for legal abortions, independent agencies are able to gather and record information necessary for statistical analyses (Rossier, 2003).

However, it is difficult to track abortion incidences in countries where abortion is illegal. Legal induced abortion is only a fraction of all abortions performed in the world. In countries where abortions are illegal or where abortions are legal but abortion services are insufficient, abortion is practiced outside the law (Rossier, 2003).

To complicate matters further, the data gathered on unlawful abortion is influenced by the techniques illegal abortion providers utilize. Some illegal abortion providers utilize surgical or mechanical methods, while others use medicinal or herbal methods to induce abortion (Rossier, 2003). When it comes to using medical abortions, “abortion providers may have less information about their clients and about the result of the interventions than do those providers who perform abortion procedures” (Rossier, 2003, p. 88).

Furthermore, insufficient information is also due to the fact that many illicit abortions are under-reported as many women are reluctant to admit to having an abortion if abortion is



banned by law. This, however, does not explain why many legal abortions are under-reported by women as well (Rossier, 2003). Part of this could be due to privacy concerns, the fear of social stigma, the fear of harassment, and possible guilt. In a society where abortion is considered commonplace and acceptable, the rate of under-reported abortions could potentially decrease.

There are various strategies that can be used to alleviate under-reporting. The first strategy is to “ask questions about abortion in an unobtrusive way” (Rossier, 2003, p 93). This may involve rephrasing some words and using terms such as -unwanted pregnancy- and inquiring how women reacted to their unwanted pregnancy (Rossier, 2003). Women may have a better reaction and be more responsive to less biased phrases, as opposed to a controversial word such as abortion.

The second strategy is to attempt to protect the privacy of the women (Rossier, 2003). This may be achieved in various ways. One possible way to keep identity anonymous is to have the woman answer the questions utilizing a computer instead of having her talk to a human (Rossier, 2003).

The third strategy is to create an environment that the woman trusts (Rossier, 2003). “One way of circumventing the problem of developing trust between survey respondents and interviewers is to allow respondents to fill out questionnaires by themselves” (Rossier, 2003, p. 93). If these procedures prove to be effective, the reporting of abortion incidences will be more accurate. This is important as abortion is becoming more common in the United States. Without accurate statistical information, it will be difficult to plan for social and educational programs. Likewise, it will be difficult to increase the availability of abortion services without having accurate information as to the number of services needed and the locations in which these services are lacking.