

Access to abortion services across the United States

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Introduction

In view of newly enacted and pending abortion-related restrictions and limits on public and private insurance coverage for abortion care, more information is needed about women's difficulty receiving abortion services across the United States.

Methods

Between 2008 and 2010, as part of the UCSF Turnaway Study, we interviewed 956 women seeking abortions at 30 U.S. abortion facilities. Each facility was selected for having the highest pregnancy gestational limit [range 10-28 weeks] within 150 miles. Facility staff recorded both the number of women who successfully obtained an abortion and the number of women who were ineligible for an abortion because they presented within three weeks beyond the gestational limit of the facility.

Women who were ineligible for an abortion were asked to enroll in our study, as were the next two women obtaining an abortion who were within two weeks of the facility's gestational limit and the next woman obtaining a first-trimester abortion. We conducted telephone interviews one week after the women sought their abortion. Using data from these interviews, we examined travel, financial and logistical barriers to receiving an abortion.

Results

Among 956 participants, 231 women were denied an abortion because their pregnancy gestation was just over the provider's limit, 452 received an abortion at a gestation just under the provider's limit, and 273 received a first-trimester abortion. In terms of geographic diversity, 30% resided in the southern United States, 27% in the Midwest, 15% in the northeast and 28% in the West. The mean age was 25 (range: 14-46); 37% were White non-Hispanic, 33% African American, 21% Hispanic, 5% American Indian and 4% Asian/Pacific Islanders.

What causes delay?

Twelve percent of the women interviewed travelled more than 120 miles to seek an abortion and averaged \$188 in travel/lodging costs (range \$0-2,200). One in eight first-trimester patients and one in four second-trimester traveled more than three hours. Seven in eight called more than one abortion provider; two in three visited more than one facility.

The rate at which women were unable to obtain an abortion because they presented just beyond a facility's gestational limit was one woman every three weeks. Nearly half (45%) who were denied an abortion reported that they were delayed because they did not realize they were pregnant. Raising the money for the

abortion or securing insurance coverage were leading causes of delay: 46% and 35% respectively (see Fig. 1). Just over one third attributed their delay to trouble deciding if they wanted to have an abortion; nearly one quarter to disagreement with their male partner about whether to have an abortion.

What predicts inability to receive an abortion?

Young women (under age 20) are more likely to be beyond a provider's gestational limits when they present for care, as are those who discover their pregnancies after the 13th week of gestation. (See Table 1.) Compared to women with private insurance or incomes above 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, poor women in states where Medicaid covers abortion have 81% higher odds of being unable to get an abortion, and women in states where Medicaid does not fund abortion have 121% higher odds. Women who can visit more facilities or travel more than 120 miles are less likely to present beyond the facility's gestational limit. Women reporting difficulty deciding to have an abortion are no more likely than others to present beyond the gestational limit, but women reporting conflict with their partner over the decision have 67% higher odds.

Discussion

Abortion providers set gestational limits for their facilities in accordance with state laws, the technical skills of their clinicians, and patient volume. This study suggests that numerous personal, financial and travel barriers impede women's ability to meet these gestational limits.

As late recognition of pregnancy is a significant factor, effective interventions are needed to assist women in recognizing pregnancy earlier. In addition, efforts to help women pay for abortions are critical. Finally, support is needed to help women in underserved geographic areas travel to facilities that can perform their abortions and to help local facilities increase gestational limits to meet the need of women who seek abortion later in pregnancy.

Fig. 1. Reasons for delay among women denied abortion due to gestational age beyond the limit of provider

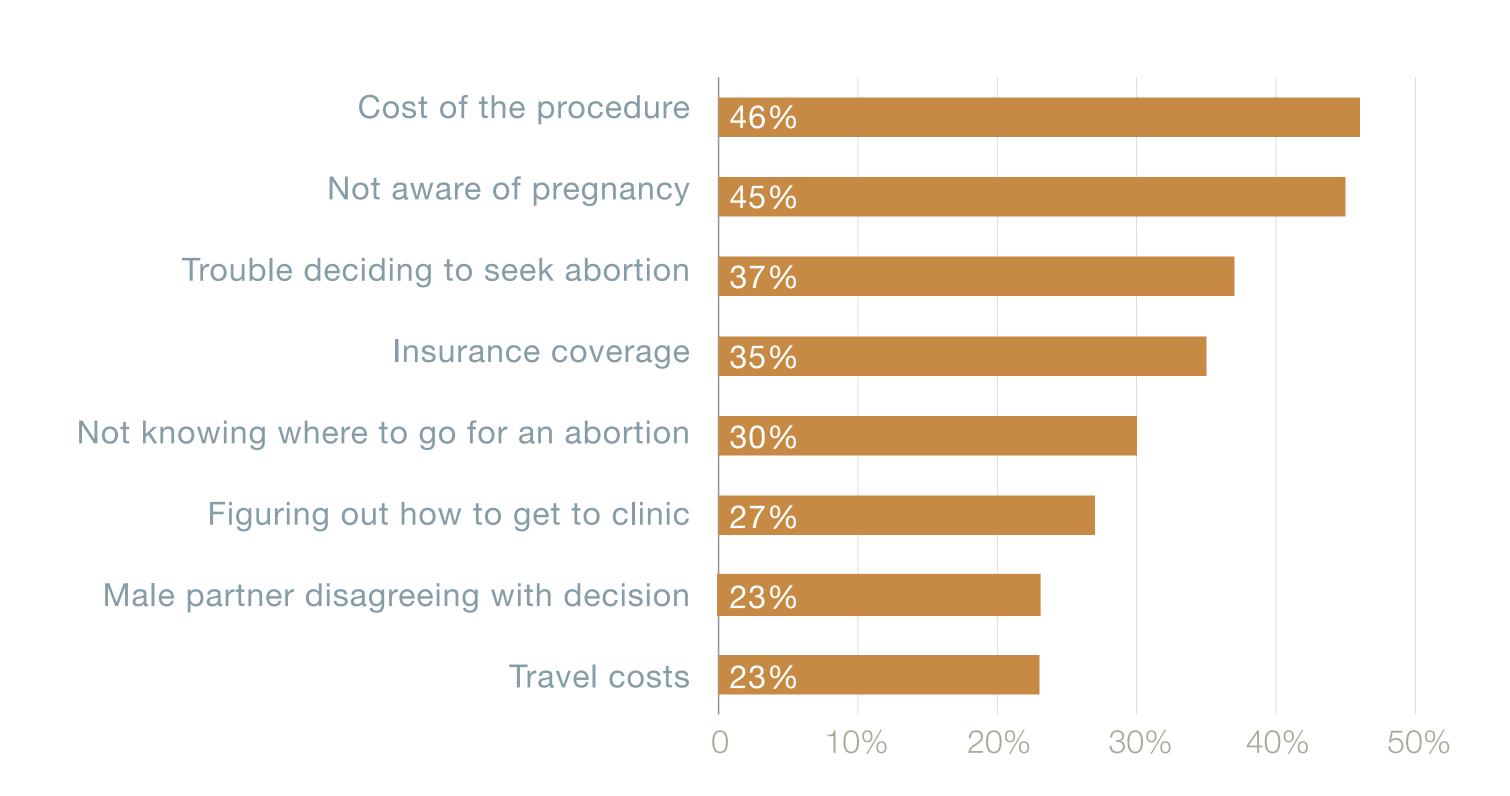


Table 1: Predictors of not being able to receive an abortion

Predictor	Odds ratio	95% CI
Race/ethnicity:		
African American	0.90	[0.59, 1.37]
Hispanic	1.75	[0.79, 3.85]
■ White/Other	reference	
Age:		
■ <20*	2.65	[1.41, 4.98]
2 0-24	1.16	[0.59, 2.30]
25-29	1.12	[0.60, 2.08]
3 0+	reference	
Health:		
Chronic health condition	0.92	[0.59, 1.45]
History of depression	0.93	[0.58, 1.47]
■ Obese: 30<=bmi<40	1.38	[0.69, 2.75]
■ Obese: bmi>=40	1.44	[0.58, 3.55]
Late discovery of pregnancy:		
■ Discover after 13 weeks*	4.37	[2.79, 6.83]
Access:		
Lives in a non-urban area	0.92	[0.49,1.72]
■ Visited >1 clinic*	0.53	[0.38,0.73]
■ Travel >120miles*	0.31	[0.19,0.52]
Call >2clinics	1.42	[0.88,2.28]
Insurance and Medicaid coverage:		
Poor, uninsured, no medicaid funding*	2.21	[1.31,3.72]
Poor, uninsured, medicaid funding*	1.81	[1.15,2.85]
■ Private health insurance or >200% fpl	reference	
Difficulty deciding:		
Reports personal difficulty deciding	0.89	[0.65,1.22]
■ Reports conflict with partner over decision*	1.67	[1.18,2.37]
*<0.05 level significance		

What women say about reasons for delay

"My son being sick, and financial problems... the cost... how to get there" (22-year-old African American woman in Florida ineligible for an abortion at 14 weeks)

"I didn't know that I was so far along... Money—it took me two months to save up for an ultrasound." (21-year-old Hispanic woman in Texas ineligible for an abortion at 21 weeks)

"I thought I could just go to clinic but Medi-Cal wouldn't pay for it... traveling down to the clinic and the insurance not covering." (19-year-old White woman from California who obtained an abortion at 21 weeks)

"I have never heard of [the clinic]. I found it on a website after two other clinics I called said they couldn't do it." (23-year-old African American woman from New York who obtained an abortion at 22 weeks).