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Women's experiences with a 72-hour waiting period for abortion

In 2012, Utah enacted the first 72-hour waiting period for abortion in the U.S. Since 2012, four U.S. states have followed suit. While there is some research about women's experiences with 24-hour waiting periods, there is little information about women's experiences with these longer waiting periods.

Researchers at ANSIRH followed 500 women presenting for abortions in Utah under the recently enacted 72-hour waiting period. Women completed an iPad survey at the time of their state-mandated abortion information visit and were interviewed again three weeks later¹.

The 72-hour waiting period and two visit requirement caused hardships for women, most of whom had already made their decision to have an abortion.

Key Findings

- Utah's 72-hour waiting period and two-visit requirement:
 - burdened women with financial costs, logistical hassles and extended periods of dwelling on decisions they had already made.
 - led some women to worry that they may not be able to have the type of abortion they preferred.
 - pushed at least one woman beyond her facility's gestational limit for abortion.
 - did not prevent most women who presented for information visits from having abortions.
- Having to wait did not appear to change women's minds.
 - Most women had made the decision to have an abortion and were not conflicted about their decision when they presented for their abortion information visit. Only 8% reported high conflict. Most (86%) went on to have an abortion. This confirms other studies that find the vast majority of women have made their decision and go on to have an abortion regardless of waiting periods²⁻⁴.
 - 8% reported changing their minds, but most of those women had been conflicted at the information visit. Only 2% of women who were not conflicted about their decision at the information visit did not have an abortion.
- As a result of having to wait and make two visits, women experienced hardships.
 - Women had to pay 10% more for their abortion.
 - Women had to wait, on average, eight days (rather than the required 72 hours) between attending the information visit and having the abortion.
 - Some women had to disclose that they were seeking an abortion to additional people in their lives (6%).

Among 309 women completing follow-up:

- 86% had an abortion
- 8% were no longer seeking abortion
- 3% had miscarried or discovered they had not been pregnant
- 2% were still seeking abortion
- One woman was still deciding
- One woman was pushed beyond her facility's gestational limit

References

- ¹Roberts, et al., Utah's 72-hour Waiting Period for Abortion: Experiences Among a Clinic-Based Sample of women. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 2016
- ²Gatter, M., et al., Relationship between ultrasound viewing and proceeding to abortion. *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 2014. 123(1): p. 81-7.
- ³Foster, D.G., et al., Attitudes and decision making among women seeking abortions at one U.S. clinic *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 2012. 44(2): p. 117-24.
- ⁴Cameron, S.T. and A. Glasier, Identifying women in need of further discussion about the decision to have an abortion and eventual outcome. *Contraception*, 2013. 88(1): p. 128

For more information about this research and other ANSIRH work, please visit www.ansirh.org