

One in 10 Ohio women thought abortion illegal amid attempts to ban at 6 weeks

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Though Ohio never formally enacted a so-called "heartbeat bill" banning abortions after six weeks of gestation, legislative and legal actions appear to have fueled beliefs that abortion is illegal in the state, a new study has found.

One in 10 Ohio women surveyed for the study thought [abortion](#) was prohibited. The percentage with that belief increased from 5% to 16% during the study period, corresponding to sustained activity to limit abortions from fall of 2018 through summer of 2019. The study appears in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*.

Maria Gallo, the study's lead author and a professor of epidemiology at The Ohio State University, said repeated legislative attempts at extreme restrictions on abortion, the veto by one governor and support of another, and court actions on the legislation were confusing, even to her.

"There was this long period of time where a lot of different things were happening around this proposal and if you weren't keeping up with every twist and turn it would be easy to think that abortion had been outlawed in Ohio, even though it never was," Gallo said.

The 10% of women in the study who thought abortion was illegal included a disproportionate number of women with other barriers to [reproductive health care](#)—those who were younger, of lower socioeconomic status, unmarried or Black.

"Women who are already facing structural barriers to getting care were more likely to believe it was illegal, so that makes the situation even worse," Gallo said.

During each of the eight months of the Ohio Survey of Women, women who completed the survey answered the question: "Based on what you know or have heard, is it legal to get an abortion in your state?"

Most of the 2,359 participants, 64%, understood abortion is legal in Ohio. Another 26% were unsure, and 10% thought it was illegal.

Abortion is legal in Ohio up to 20 weeks of gestation.

Health care providers should be aware that their patients may not understand their [reproductive rights](#) and options, Gallo said.

"It's important to make sure that Ohio [women](#)—and people everywhere—know what their health care options are. They may be hesitant to ask, particularly if they are under the impression that abortion is illegal," she said.

"Abortion may be hard to access, but it's still an individual's legal right to obtain this health care if she wants to."

Other Ohio State researchers who worked on the study are John Casterline, Payal Chakraborty, Alison Norris and Abigail Norris Turner. Danielle Bessett of the University of Cincinnati is also a co-author.

The study was done as part of the Ohio Policy Evaluation Network (OPEN), a multi-center research collaborative launched in 2018 to study how policy affects reproductive [health](#) and equity in Ohio and surrounding states.

More information: Maria F. Gallo et al, Passage of abortion ban and women's accurate understanding of abortion legality, *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ajog.2021.02.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajog.2021.02.009)

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