

Adolescents are aware of and invested in the potential impacts of abortion restrictions, study says

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On July 1, North Carolina's new abortion limits go into effect. As restrictions on abortions are being tightened across the United States,

adolescents may encounter mounting obstacles that could prevent them from accessing abortion care.

Bianca A. Allison, MD MPH, an assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics, sought to examine the awareness and knowledge that adolescents have about the legal landscape of [abortion](#) and how these changes might affect them and their communities.

The study, published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, found that many adolescents—across a diversity of ages, genders, and geographies—are aware of and concerned about the potential impacts of abortion restrictions.

"This research demonstrates adolescents' capacity to understand and engage in complex current events and their implications for themselves and society," says Allison. "Understanding and amplifying the voices of adolescents during this critical time is necessary to inform novel access solutions and policy initiatives that center the unique needs of youth."

Giving youth a voice

After *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in 2022, researchers noticed that discussions about its effects on [younger people](#) were frequently ignored, or it was thought that their needs and opinions were similar to those of the majority, such as those over 18 years of age.

Allison and her research team designed this study to "give youth a voice" and to ensure that their priorities, concerns, and preferences are taken into account by those attempting to change abortion policies and practices.

To conduct their study, the researchers used an existing nationwide weekly text message poll of more than 800 adolescents between the ages

of 14 and 24 years old, called "MyVoice," run by the University of Michigan. The platform recruited participants through targeted social media advertisements and community events using weighted demographic benchmarks from the American Community Survey to ensure that there was a diverse array of participants.

The questions fielded to MyVoice participants on May 20, 2022 (18 days after the leaked Supreme Court draft opinion on the Dobbs case) were:

- Abortion is a medical procedure that ends a pregnancy. When you think about abortion, what comes to mind?
- Where do people your age get information about accessing abortion?
- The [federal government](#) and many state governments may soon change the rules on what abortions are legal. What kind of changes to abortion access have you heard about?
- How do you feel about these potential changes to abortion access? Why?
- What factors do people your age consider when deciding whether or not to have an abortion?

The 654 participants who responded had a range of emotional reactions to the potential changes to abortion access. The majority expressed mixed or [negative emotions](#)—including anger, fear, and sadness—and identified the consequences of restricted access, including negative effects on reproductive autonomy and safety.

Additionally, the participants most frequently talked about money and life circumstances, including their future, age, education, maturity, and emotional stability, when weighing the pros and cons of abortion.

The role of social media

One of the biggest takeaways from the study was that the majority of adolescents and [young adults](#) cited the internet and social media as their primary sources of information about abortions—more than talking with their peers, parents, or physicians.

"We thought that that was a really interesting potential point of intervention in terms of how to elevate resources that are rooted in evidence and science," said Allison. "Relatedly, how can we leverage places that adolescents are already going, like the Internet and social media, for good?"

The results of this study may spark a whole new conversation about the use of websites and social media for abortion information. Allison hopes that more studies will be done to help [adolescents](#) and young adults find the most reliable, comprehensive, and current resources—while considering the best strategies for promoting such resources.

More information: Bianca A. Allison et al, Adolescent Awareness of the Changing Legal Landscape of Abortion in the United States and Its Implications, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2023.04.008](#)

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