

Nearly 65,000 pregnancies from rape have happened in states with abortion bans: Study

January 25 2024, by Robin Foster



In the 14 states with abortion bans, there have been nearly 65,000

pregnancies resulting from rape during the time since those bans went into place, a new study estimates.

To arrive at that troubling number, researchers turned to data from federal surveys on crime and sexual violence. Their findings were [published](#) Jan. 24 in the journal *JAMA Internal Medicine*.

"Restricting abortion access to survivors of [rape](#) can have particularly devastating consequences," the journal's editors wrote in a [note](#) accompanying the new research. "Whether these survivors of rape had illegal abortions, received medication abortion through the mail, traveled to other states or carried the child to birth is unknown."

But other [research](#) has found there have been fewer than 10 abortions each month in states with bans. That suggests most [rape victims](#) were not able to get abortions in the [states](#) where they live, even those where the law allows exceptions for rape.

Nearly 70% of adults say abortion should be legal if the pregnancy resulted from rape, according to a 2022 [survey](#) from Pew Research Center.

But the new study suggests the challenges of putting those exceptions into practice are daunting.

"Like many exceptions written into abortion bans, an exception for rape victims may appear to be a reasonable solution but in practice can create more trauma and danger for patients who have already experienced a traumatic event," Dr. Sami Heywood, an ob/gyn in Illinois and a fellow with the advocacy group Physicians for Reproductive Health, told CNN.

"No other [health care](#) is reserved only for people who can prove a crime took place," said Heywood, who was not involved in the research.

"That's not an ethical way to practice medicine. It is cruel to force people who have already been victimized to jump through legal and logistical barriers that cause further harm."

Rape victims may also face unique challenges when navigating their pregnancy, experts say.

"Those who become pregnant after rape may take longer to recognize a pregnancy than other pregnant people, and there may be factors related to the trauma response that accounts for this," Dr. Rachel Perry, an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of California, Irvine, told CNN.

That may mean medication abortion—which can only be used up to 10 weeks—is not an option, and victims may have to travel particularly long distances to find a provider, Perry explained.

Even more challenging is the fact that often rape victims know their attacker, and may even live with them.

"It may be especially impossible for them to travel out of state to get abortion care. It may be especially dangerous for them to try to order pills online the way that some people are doing," lead study author Dr. Samuel Dickman, medical director of Planned Parenthood of Montana, told CNN. "It's an added burden in so many ways."

The estimates are "illustrating something that we see every day when working in [reproductive health](#) and [abortion](#) care but that may be underappreciated by the broader public," Dickman added.

More information: Samuel L. Dickman et al, Rape-Related Pregnancies in the 14 US States With Total Abortion Bans, *JAMA Internal Medicine* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2024.0014](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2024.0014)

The KFF has more on [abortion laws](#).

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