

More women are ending pregnancies on their own, a new study suggests. Some resort to unsafe methods

July 30 2024, by Laura Ungar



Mifepristone tablets are seen in a Planned Parenthood clinic Thursday, July 18, 2024, in Ames, Iowa. Some women took medications — including emergency contraception and the abortion pills misoprostol and mifepristone obtained outside the medical system and without a prescription. Credit: AP Photo/Charlie Neibergall, File

A growing number of women said they've tried to end their pregnancies on their own by doing things like taking herbs, drinking alcohol or even hitting themselves in the belly, a new study suggests.

Researchers surveyed reproductive-age [women](#) in the U.S. before and after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022. The proportion who reported trying to end pregnancies by themselves rose from 2.4% to 3.3%.

"A lot of people are taking things into their own hands," said Dr. Grace Ferguson, a Pittsburgh OB-GYN and [abortion](#) provider who wasn't involved in the research, which was published Tuesday in the journal *JAMA Network Open*.

Study authors acknowledged that the increase is small. But the [data](#) suggests that it could number in the hundreds of thousands of women.

Researchers surveyed about 7,000 women six months before the Supreme Court decision, and then another group of 7,100 a year after the decision. They asked whether participants had ever taken or done something on their own to end a [pregnancy](#). Those who said yes were asked follow-up questions about their experiences.

"Our data show that making abortion more difficult to access is not going to mean that people want or need an abortion less frequently," said Lauren Ralph, an epidemiologist at the University of California, San Francisco, and one of the study's authors.

Women gave various reasons for handling their own abortions, such as wanting an extra measure of privacy, being concerned about the cost of clinic procedures and preferring to try to end their pregnancies by themselves first.

They reported using a range of methods. Some took medications—including emergency contraception and the abortion pills misoprostol and mifepristone obtained outside the medical system and without a prescription. Others drank alcohol or used drugs. Some resorted to potentially harmful physical methods such as hitting themselves in the abdomen, lifting heavy things or inserting objects into their bodies.

Some [respondents](#) said they suffered complications like bleeding and pain and had to seek medical care afterward. Some said they later had an abortion at a clinic. Some said their pregnancies ended after their attempts or from a later miscarriage, while others said they wound up continuing their pregnancies when the method didn't work.

Ralph pointed to some caveats and limits to the research. Respondents may be under-reporting their abortions, she said, because researchers are asking them about "a sensitive and potentially criminalized behavior."

She also cautioned that some women may have understood the question differently after the Dobbs decision, such as believing that getting medication abortion through telehealth is outside the formal health care system when it's not. But Ralph said she and her colleagues tested how people were interpreting the question before each survey was conducted.

The bottom line, Ferguson said, is that the study's findings "confirm the statement we've been saying forever: If you make it hard to get (an abortion) in a formal setting, people will just do it informally."

The research was funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and a third foundation that was listed as anonymous.

More information: Lauren Ralph et al, Self-Managed Abortion

Attempts Before vs After Changes in Federal Abortion Protections in the US, *JAMA Network Open* (2024). DOI: [10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.24310](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.24310)

© 2024 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.

Citation: More women are ending pregnancies on their own, a new study suggests. Some resort to unsafe methods (2024, July 30) retrieved 30 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-07-women-pregnancies-resort-unsafe-methods.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.