

Barriers in access to abortion services in the United States

Research focused on women in supportive and middle ground states



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Women on Web -

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Summary

In 1973 abortion was legalized in the United States (US). Nevertheless, the number of legal restrictions increased with 34% since 2011. Based on the legal restrictions, states can be divided into hostile, middle-ground and supportive states. On the other hand, legal restrictions are only some of the many barriers that women can face during their search for abortion information and services. The aim of this study is to fill in the research gap on the barriers that women, who cannot find a clinic themselves, experience. Many of these women approach Women on Web (WoW), which is a non-profit online abortion platform that provides medical abortion pills and corresponding information to women in need of an abortion. This leads to the following research question: *“What are the reasons women in supportive and middle-ground states in the US search for a medication-induced abortion at home through Women on Web?”*

This study can be considered as a mixed-methods study. First of all, analysis was performed on the content of consultation forms received by WoW. 715 women living in supportive or middle-ground states filled in a WoW online consultation form between December 2017 and April 2018. The forms contained information about their age, parity, and the reasons for seeking abortion via WoW. Secondly, 7 semi-structured interviews were held via Skype with people working at abortion funds (charities that provide financial help to women seeking abortion). Abortion funds were chosen, because they are not regularly used in research on abortion barriers, and because employees have close contact with women searching for abortion.

The reasons named most often in the quantitative analysis were: because of costs (434); prefer to take care of my own abortion (306); I would be more comfortable at home (311); and prefer to keep my abortion private (342). Furthermore, 25 women did not know that abortion pills were available in the US, and 93 women experienced difficulties while searching for abortion because of the legal restrictions. In addition, the different concepts named as a barrier most frequently in the interviews were: the ability to access financial resources, knowledge and beliefs about abortion, the knowledge environment, the structural and institutional environment, and the socio-cultural context.

In both quantitative and qualitative analysis, the importance of the ability to access financial resources could be seen. There was no difference in access to abortion care between states with Medicaid funding in restricted cases and with Medicaid funding in all of most necessary cases. This could mean that people eligible for abortion funding by Medicaid also experience difficulties with finding money for logistical issues, as transportation and childcare. Additionally, the knowledge environment was named as an important barrier for women when searching for abortion in the interviews. This is confirmed in the interviews that showed that women were often not aware of several possibilities that could help them, such as funds, and health insurances. In addition, a significant part of the research population indicated that they preferred to terminate their pregnancy in a familiar environment. Therefore, the possibilities of improving abortion access by make an abortion at home possible should be determined.

Women could experience multiple barriers when searching for abortion. The cost is most often experienced as a barrier. Part of this problem could be solved, if the accessibility to insurance would be clearer and if more people would know about available abortion funds. Therefore, sharing knowledge is very important. In addition, if there is more general knowledge regarding abortion, stigma could be decreased. Furthermore, a big part of the research population prefers an abortion at home. Hence, increased possibilities for medication-induced abortion at home would remove several barriers, as it decreases the amount of financial resources required and removes logistical issues.