

Abortion Background: What the evidence shows

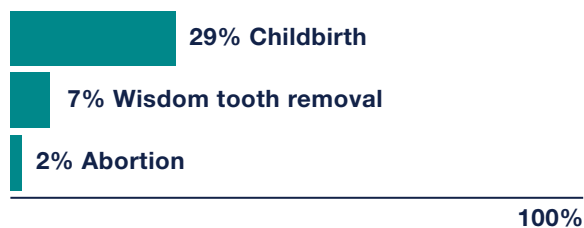
Prevalence and Characteristics

- About one in four women in the U.S. will have an abortion at some point in her life.¹
- The majority (89%) of abortions occur in the first trimester of pregnancy.²
- Most people seeking abortion are poor or low-income (75%), are women of color (61%), are in their 20s (72%), report a religious affiliation (62%), and have at least one child (59%).^{3, 4}

Safety

- Over four decades of research indicate that abortion is a very safe outpatient procedure.^{4, 5}
- Abortion is far safer than childbirth, with mortality fourteen times lower than carrying to term.⁵
- The overall abortion complication rate is lower than that of wisdom tooth removal.⁶ A fraction of one percent of abortions result in a major complication, defined as a complication requiring blood transfusion, surgery, or hospital admission.^{4, 7}
- Having an abortion is not associated with long-term health concerns;⁴ instead, being denied a wanted abortion may lead to poor health outcomes.⁸⁻¹⁰

Complication rates (major and minor)*



*In all cases, these are primarily minor complications

A fraction of one percent of abortions result in a major complication,⁶ a complication rate lower than that of wisdom tooth removal (another common outpatient procedure²²) or childbirth.²²⁻²³

Methods

- The most common method of abortion is aspiration, a minimally invasive, 10-minute procedure that is also used for miscarriage management.⁴
- Another common method of abortion is medication abortion, an FDA-approved regimen of mifepristone and misoprostol pills, which is 95–98% effective and approved for use up to 10 weeks of pregnancy.^{11, 12} Medication abortion comprises about one third of all non-hospital abortions in the US.¹
- For the 11% of abortions that occur after the first trimester, the most common abortion method is dilation and evacuation, where medical tools are used to empty the contents of the uterus.^{13, 14}

Long-Term Effects

- **Having an abortion is not associated with any significant negative physical, emotional, or mental health effects.**^{8, 15-17}
- Being able to obtain a wanted abortion is associated with positive outcomes, including increasing self-esteem and life satisfaction and the ability to achieve aspirational life plans^{18, 19}
- Being denied a wanted abortion is associated with negative outcomes, including:
 - » Reduced financial security for women and their children⁹
 - » Increased likelihood of staying tethered to violent partners¹⁰
 - » Poorer bonding with children born as the result of abortion denial²⁰
 - » Serious health problems related to carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term²¹
 - » Worse physical health five years later, compared to those who were able to obtain a wanted abortion⁸

Evidence-Based Bottom Line

Abortion is a common, safe, and simple outpatient procedure. Obtaining an abortion does not lead to any physical or mental health problems, and confers benefits over being denied a wanted abortion.

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