

FORMATION OF ABORTION ATTITUDES

PI: ANNA ALTSHULER, MD, MPH

While abortion attitudes influence important health decisions such as those faced by individuals confronted with an unwanted pregnancy or by policymakers determining direction of legislation for family planning, we know little about how abortion attitudes are formed. Negative attitudes about abortion have significant repercussions. Stigma surrounding women who have abortions and abortion providers prevails in the U.S. and many parts of the world, limiting access to abortion.

Some studies suggest that abortion attitudes can be influenced and that the beliefs that shape these attitudes are not well-formed and may be contradictory. Abortion and abortion attitudes in particular are difficult to study. Abortion is a sensitive and polarizing topic and most people neither remember nor are fully aware of why they believe what they believe. We confronted these challenges by using internet-based social media for recruitment and surveying younger people who are more likely to remember how they learned about abortion. The purpose of this study was to describe how adolescents learn about abortion compared to sex, categorize abortion views among young people, and determine how abortion views are associated with pregnancy-related experiences.

This study is cross sectional in design using an anonymous internet survey. The survey was promoted as a study looking at the process of becoming sexual and its implications. Individuals were recruited through YouTube video, daily Twitter feeds, and Facebook Ads, targeting males and females aged 13-29 living in the United States. Those who clicked on the ad were directed to the study website and invited to participate in the survey. Descriptive statistics and logistic regression were utilized to analyze responses.

We analyzed the responses of about 1000 individuals and found that adolescents learn about sex and abortion from numerous sources and depend more heavily on the media than parents or professionals. Yet, individuals do not appear to learn about sex and abortion from the same resources, except when learning about these topics from parents. The majority of adolescents and young adults felt that abortion should be allowed to some degree. Distribution of abortion views among adolescents was more varied compared to young adults, particularly in the direction of disallowing abortion for themselves or their partners. We also found that adolescents who have the most supportive abortion attitudes are more likely to know someone who has had an abortion compared to those with the least supportive abortion attitudes. On the other hand, adolescents with the most supportive view were less likely to know teen parents or someone who adopted out. Among young adults, there was a trend for an association between a more supportive abortion attitude and knowing someone who has had an abortion.

The findings of this study suggest that effective ways to influence young people's abortion attitudes are through media and encouraging parents to incorporate discussions about abortion into conversations they have with their children about sex. A media campaign aimed at generating more abortion-supportive attitudes could utilize this information by creating television/movie/internet personalities who have abortions, suggesting that it is part of "normal" people's lives, as is the reality.