



Adolescents' political and personal responses to recent policies restricting abortion and gender-affirming care

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Restrictive policies on abortion and gender-affirming care have increased in recent years, particularly in some Midwest states. Such policies can have outsized effects on adolescents, yet there is limited research exploring their perspectives.

We interviewed 39 adolescents aged 16-19 residing in the Midwest between April and June 2023 about their reactions to recent shifts in state policies on abortion and gender-affirming care.

KEY FINDINGS

Largely negative response

- Most participants opposed restrictions on abortion or gender-affirming care, feeling angry, unsafe, sad in response. Many participants were concerned about laws that control personal choices and described a sense that the country was “regressing.”

Concerns about the politicization of medical care

- Most participants expressed fatigue or frustration with the politicization of abortion and gender-affirming care; many desired a distinction between medical and political framing of these issues.

Restrictive policies influence residency preferences

- Most participants indicated that a states' policies on abortion and/or gender-affirming care would affect where they would want to live in the future, citing concerns for themselves, their families and friends.

NOTABLE QUOTES

“It frustrates me a lot because I feel like a lot of the legislators who pass these bans ... don’t actually have any scientific basis on what they’re talking about ... I feel like there’s just so many facts around abortion that just not considered facts by the people who are passing the laws...So when I think about it, ... a lot of these people should not be in the position to be making these rulings.”

“It is no secret that a lot of girls who go to college are sexually assaulted. So, I feel like being able to, at minimum, rely on the fact that if something were to happen, I would be able to access an abortion is something that I’ve definitely taken into account. So, any states that are planning or have already planned a lot of abortion practices and are very restrictive on it, I would immediately cancel it out of my choice.”

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