

Obstacles hinder access to legal abortion in Queensland

August 23 2022



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A University of Queensland study has found there are still barriers to terminating a pregnancy in Queensland, more than three years after the

practice was decriminalized.

Researcher Maryanne Cleetus from UQ's School of Public Health said access to safe, timely and compassionate abortions was being impeded by affordability, stigma, a lack of knowledge and [family violence](#).

The research team analyzed almost 2,000 de-identified client records collected by pregnancy counseling service Children by Choice between December 2018 and June 2020.

"Decriminalization removed a major legal barrier to [pregnancy termination](#) in 2018 but many other barriers remain, and in some cases were exacerbated during COVID-19 pandemic restrictions," Ms. Cleetus said.

"The effect of these barriers was extremely concerning—some clients said they had considered using unsafe termination methods or had undertaken [self-harm](#)."

Forty-three percent of clients reported exposure to family or [intimate partner violence](#), including reproductive coercion and abuse.

Study co-author Dr. Judith Dean said clients also frequently expressed distress about their capacity to pay for a pregnancy termination, along with feelings of shame and stigma.

"They spoke of isolation and the difficulty of making decisions with a lack of personal and health care support," Dr. Dean said.

"Our findings demonstrate the complexity of ensuring equitable access to termination of [pregnancy](#) care."

The study found clients commonly reported having seen unsupportive

health care practitioners who gave incorrect or misleading advice about terminations or refused to refer them.

Children by Choice CEO Daile Kelleher said other barriers included limited or confusing publicly funded pathways to abortion.

"This can result in distress and poor health outcomes," Ms. Kelleher said.

"Any models of care must consider these barriers and ensure appropriate and compassionate options for women and pregnant people."

The study is published in *Sexual Health*.

More information: Maryanne Cleetus et al, Termination of pregnancy in Queensland post-decriminalisation: a content analysis of client records from an all-options pregnancy counselling organisation, *Sexual Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1071/SH22059](https://doi.org/10.1071/SH22059)

Provided by University of Queensland

Citation: Obstacles hinder access to legal abortion in Queensland (2022, August 23) retrieved 17 January 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-08-obstacles-hinder-access-legal-abortion.html>

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