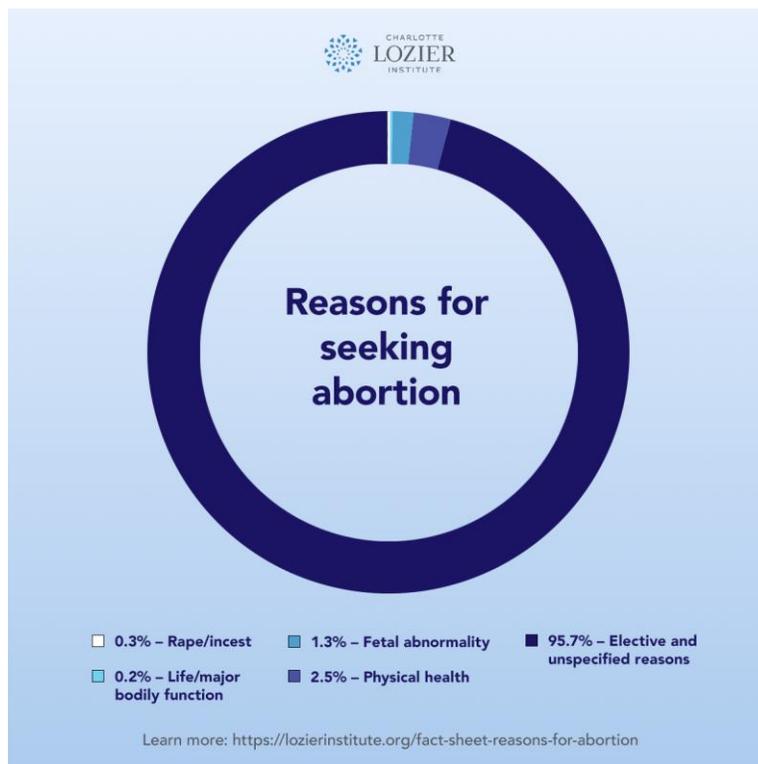




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Fact Sheet: Reasons for Abortion August 2022



After the Supreme Court ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, states across the country are considering and enacting laws that limit or prohibit abortion. Frequently, these state laws make exceptions for abortions for certain reasons, such as rape and incest, risk to the mother's life or health, or a fetal abnormality. Assessing the number of abortions performed for various reasons can be challenging due to the poor quality of U.S. abortion data because of inconsistent reporting requirements. Periodic surveys by pro-abortion organizations have been done of women visiting abortion centers, but none have been published for several years with the most frequently referenced papers being published in 2005 and 2013.^{1,2} However, these surveys do not provide a detailed look at abortions performed for common exceptions.

The most recent available data is from eight states that collect and report women's reasons for choosing abortion. These eight states account for approximately 122,000 abortions each year, 13% of the U.S.

total.^{3,4} Some of these states allow women to report multiple reasons for an abortion or to write in a particular reason, while other states ask women to select the top reason or choose from a predetermined list. Additionally, definitions vary from state to state, with some states providing more precise reasons than others. To develop an estimate of the percent of abortions performed for a given reason, data was combined from each state reporting that particular reason.

Overall, common exceptions to abortion restrictions are estimated to account for less than 5% of all abortions.

- Rape and incest: 0.3%⁵
- Risk to the woman's life or a major bodily function: 0.2%⁶
- Other physical health concerns: 2.5%⁷
- Abnormality in the unborn baby: 1.3%⁸
- Elective and unspecified reasons: 95.7%⁹

Of the eight states that reported reasons for abortion, two (Florida and Utah) reported reasons by week of gestation. In these two states, abortions for common exceptions to abortion restrictions made up approximately 12 percent of second trimester abortions.

This could underestimate the number of abortions performed for each of these reasons because in some states a significant percentage of women declined to share a reason. Conversely, abortions for these reasons could be overestimated, since in states that permit multiple reasons to be reported, a single abortion could have been performed for more than one of these reasons. However, in Florida, which allows only one reason for each abortion and requires an abortion provider to list a reason before the abortion report form can be submitted, abortions for reasons commonly given as exceptions accounted for less than 3% of the total in 2021.

Due to the voluntary nature of state abortion reporting, the total number of abortions estimated by the Guttmacher Institute is 45% higher than the official U.S. total for 2019 (the most recent year of data available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which monitors U.S. abortion trends).¹⁰ CDC does not request information on reasons for abortion from the states, and so this data is not included in the national reports. As the *Dobbs* decision results in a shift in where and why abortions are performed and the complications that are associated with them, CDC should strengthen reporting requirements and request additional data from the states.¹¹

¹ Finer LB, Frohwirth LF, Dauphinee LA, Singh S, Moore AM. Reasons U.S. women have abortions: quantitative and qualitative perspectives. *Perspect Sex Reprod Health*. 2005;37(3):110-118. doi:10.1363/psrh.37.110.05.

² Biggs MA, Gould H, Foster DG. Understanding why women seek abortions in the US. *BMC Womens Health*. 2013;13:29. doi:10.1186/1472-6874-13-29.

³ Arizona (2021), Florida (2021), Louisiana (2020), Minnesota (2021), Nebraska (2020), Oklahoma (2021), South Dakota (2019), Utah (2019).

⁴ According to the Guttmacher Institute, there were an estimated 930,160 abortions in the United States in 2020. See: Jones RK, Philbin J, Kirstein M, Nash E, Lufkin K. Long-term decline in US abortions reverses, showing rising need for abortion as Supreme Court is poised to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Guttmacher Institute. June 15, 2022.

Accessed August 11, 2022. <https://www.guttmacher.org/article/2022/06/long-term-decline-us-abortion-reverses-showing-rising-need-abortion-supreme-court>.

⁵ Data from 8 states with 122,130 total abortions (AZ, FL, LA, MN, NE, OK, SD, UT)

⁶ Data from 6 states with 101,471 total abortions (FL, MN, NE, OK, SD, UT)

⁷ Data from 6 states with 118,940 total abortions (AZ, FL, LA, MN, NE, OK)

⁸ Data from 8 states with 122,130 total abortions (AZ, FL, LA, MN, NE, OK, UT. SD does not include fetal abnormality as a reason, but separately reports the number of abortions performed on babies with abnormalities.)

⁹ Abortions for the reasons listed above subtracted from 100%

¹⁰ Guttmacher estimates 916,460 abortions in 2019, while CDC reports 629,898. See: Kortsmit K, Mandel MG, Reeves JA, et al. Abortion Surveillance — United States, 2019. *MMWR Surveill Summ* 2021;70(No. SS-9):1–29. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss7009a1>.

¹¹ For additional state-level information, please see: <https://lozierinstitute.org/state-abortion-reporting/>.

Available online at: <https://lozierinstitute.org/fact-sheet-reasons-for-abortion>