

Research Briefing

Client perspectives on choice of abortion method in England and Wales

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Background

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), and the World Health Organization (WHO) recommend that patients are offered a choice between medical and surgical methods of abortion. We examined patient perspectives on abortion method choice.

Methods

We conducted interviews with 24 clients who had an abortion at British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) clinics between December 2018 and July 2019. We performed thematic analysis of data relating to choice of abortion method, refined the analysis, interpreted the findings, and organised the data into themes.

Key Findings

Participants' preferences for abortion method were shaped by:

- prior experience of abortion
- accessibility and privacy
- perceptions of risk and experiences of abortion method
- information gathering and counselling.

“I spoke to a couple of friends who'd had abortions, and heard the different procedures that are available”

Participants' ability to obtain their preferred method was impacted by intersecting constraints such as appointment availability, service location, and gestational age.

“Just whatever procedure you can access quickly, that's the priority for me”

Conclusions

Our findings show that many factors shape participants' preferences for abortion method. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, some abortion services have constrained abortion method choices, with an emphasis on medical abortion and 'no-touch' care. Providers in the UK and beyond should aim to restore and expand more treatment options when the situation allows.

Read the paper

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