



"Decision-Making Processes in the Personal and Moral Domains: Abortion Choices Among Adolescent and Young Adult Women"

Baby Rosangzuali

3rd Semester, MSW ,23MSWA14

ABSTRACT :

This study examined how adolescent and young adult women reason and make decisions about abortion, aiming to determine whether their reasoning aligns with moral, social-conventional, and personal concepts. Additionally, it explored the connection between these reasoning domains and the actions they ultimately choose.

INTRODUCTION :

Abortion remains a deeply complex and often polarizing issue, impacting the lives of countless women globally. For adolescent and young adult women, the decision to seek an abortion is particularly challenging as they navigate conflicting personal values, moral beliefs, and societal expectations. While significant research has examined the factors influencing abortion decisions, there is limited understanding of the cognitive and moral reasoning behind these choices. This study seeks to investigate how young women approach abortion within personal and moral contexts, focusing on the intricate decision-making processes they undergo. By exploring the interaction between individual experiences, ethical considerations, and societal pressures, this research aims to offer deeper insights into the multifaceted factors shaping reproductive decisions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ABORTION

1. Legal Framework

Abortion is legal under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act of 1971, with amendments made in 2021 to expand access. The 2021 amendments allow abortions up to 24 weeks in specific cases, such as rape survivors, minors, and cases of fetal abnormalities, while for other cases, it remains up to 20 weeks. Consent from one medical practitioner is required for abortions up to 20 weeks and two for abortions between 20 and 24 weeks.

2. Access and Accessibility

Many abortions still occur outside formal healthcare settings due to barriers like lack of access, stigma, or lack of awareness. There is a significant rural-urban divide, with rural areas having fewer trained providers and facilities. Misoprostol and mifepristone pills are widely used for medical abortions, but their misuse or unsupervised use is common, especially in informal settings.

3. Social Stigma and Cultural Attitudes

Despite legal provisions, there is significant stigma around abortion, particularly in conservative areas. Family or societal pressure can make it difficult for unmarried women to access safe abortion services. Gender-based discrimination, such as sex-selective abortions, remains an issue, despite the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act aimed at preventing it.

4. Health and Safety Concerns

Unsafe abortions are a considerable health risk and contribute significantly to maternal mortality in India. Poor-quality healthcare, lack of trained providers, and inadequate information about safe abortion practices compound these risks.

5. Demographics and Trends

A large percentage of women seeking abortions are in their 20s, often married and already have children. Data shows an increase in medical abortions (via pills) due to their non-invasive nature and the privacy they offer. Adolescent and unmarried women face the highest challenges in accessing safe abortions due to age, social stigma, and lack of support.

6. Legal Rights and Awareness

The law allows abortion, but awareness of legal rights is low, particularly in rural and lower socioeconomic groups. There is a growing need for public health campaigns and sex education to improve awareness and access to safe abortion services.

LITERATURE REVIEW :

While the deadliest waves of the COVID-19 pandemic may be behind us (McMahan et al., 2022), the emergence of new variants and the potential for future pandemics remain significant concerns (Carlson et al., 2021). Understanding how individuals across all age groups make decisions about protective measures is essential for mitigating the spread of future COVID variants and other zoonotic diseases. Although there is ongoing debate about the extent to which youth contribute to the transmission of COVID-19 (Danis et al., 2020; Gaythorpe et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020), it is critical to explore how adolescents perceive and respond to public health measures designed to protect older, more vulnerable populations, even when their own risk is relatively low.

Adolescence is a developmental stage marked by an increasing emphasis on personal autonomy (Smetana, 2010), which may influence adolescents' attitudes toward following public health guidelines (Andrews, Foulkes, & Blakemore, 2020). While prior research has investigated the role of social norms in shaping adolescent health and risk-related behaviors, this study builds on that foundation by examining how moral reasoning influences their decisions. Specifically, we aim to explore whether late adolescents view noncompliance with COVID-19 guidelines as a matter of personal choice or as behaviors shaped by moral principles and conventional public health standards.

METHODOLOGY :

This study will utilize a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research designs to gain a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive and moral reasoning processes involved in abortion decision-making among adolescent and young adult women.

The participant pool will include women aged 16 to 24 who have either experienced or are considering an abortion. A purposive sampling strategy will ensure a diverse representation, with approximately 100 participants for the quantitative survey and a subset of 20 to 30 for in-depth qualitative interviews. The quantitative phase will involve an online survey to gather data on demographics, attitudes toward abortion, and perceived barriers to accessing services. Following this, qualitative semi-structured interviews will explore personal experiences, moral reasoning, and the impact of societal influences in greater depth.

Data analysis will include statistical evaluation of survey results alongside thematic analysis of interview transcripts, allowing for a rich integration of findings. Ethical considerations will be paramount, with appropriate approvals sought and participant confidentiality ensured.

Ultimately, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors shaping abortion decisions, contributing valuable insights to inform policies and improve access to reproductive health services.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION :

Results

1. *Perceptions of Risk:* Adolescents generally perceive themselves as being at minimal risk for severe COVID-19 outcomes. This perception significantly influences their willingness to adhere to public health guidelines aimed at protecting more vulnerable populations (Danis et al., 2020; Gaythorpe et al., 2021).
2. *Influence of Personal Autonomy:* The desire for personal autonomy during adolescence plays a crucial role in how young individuals respond to public health measures. Many adolescents view compliance with guidelines as an infringement on their personal freedom, leading to potential disregard for these recommendations (Smetana, 2010; Andrews, Foulkes, & Blakemore, 2020).
3. *Moral Reasoning vs. Personal Choice:* The literature indicates that adolescents hold nuanced perspectives regarding breaches of health guidelines. Some view these actions purely as personal choices, while others acknowledge the moral implications of such decisions, especially concerning community health (Andrews et al., 2020).
4. *Social Norms and Peer Influence:* Social norms significantly shape adolescent behavior. The desire to fit in with peers can either encourage or discourage adherence to public health measures, depending on the prevailing attitudes within their social circles (Zhang et al., 2020).
5. *Understanding of Public Health Principles:* Many adolescents may lack a comprehensive understanding of the rationale behind public health practices, which can hinder their ability to appreciate the importance of their participation in protecting vulnerable populations (Carlson et al., 2021).

Discussion

The results underscore the complexity of adolescent reasoning during public health crises. The interplay between personal autonomy, perceived risk, and moral reasoning is critical in shaping their responses to health guidelines.

Understanding that adolescents may prioritize personal choice over communal responsibility offers valuable insights for public health messaging. By framing communication to emphasize not just individual risk but also the moral implications of their actions on community health, we may foster greater compliance. Engaging adolescents in discussions about the significance of public health measures and their impact on others could enhance their sense of responsibility.

Moreover, the influence of social norms suggests that peer-led initiatives could effectively promote adherence to health guidelines. Leveraging the power of social networks in public health campaigns can create environments that support positive behaviors.

Conclusion :

Adolescent and young adult women's decision-making regarding abortion in the personal and moral domains is a complex and multifaceted process. Through reasoning and reflection, these individuals navigate ethical, emotional, and relational considerations, weighing autonomy, responsibility, and the potential consequences of their choices. This decision-making process is influenced by various factors, including personal values, beliefs, and experiences, as well as societal norms and cultural context.

Ultimately, these women demonstrate resilience, agency, and moral maturity as they grapple with one of the most significant decisions of their lives. By examining the personal and moral domains of decision-making, we can gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which young women negotiate this critical issue and work to create meaningful, values-aligned choices that respect their own well-being and that of others.

This research highlights the importance of supportive, non-judgmental environments and accessible resources for women as they navigate these decisions, ensuring that their choices are truly informed and empowering. By prioritizing reproductive autonomy, dignity, and care, we can foster a society that values and trusts women to make decisions that align with their own unique circumstances, values, and aspirations."

REFERENCES :

1. Andrews, R., Foulkes, L., & Blakemore, S. J. (2020). Adolescent risk-taking and decision-making: the role of social influence. *Journal of Adolescence*, 79, 82-92.
2. Carlson, C. J., et al. (2021). Future pandemics: Lessons learned from COVID-19. *Global Health*, 17(1), 25-30.
3. Danis, K., et al. (2020). Youth and COVID-19: A review of the literature on the impact of the pandemic on adolescents and young adults. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 14(1), 1-12.
4. Gaythorpe, K. A. M., et al. (2021). The role of youth in the transmission of COVID-19: An analysis of available evidence. *The Lancet Public Health*, 6(5), e294-e295.
5. Smetana, J. G. (2010). Adolescents, families, and social development: How teens construct their worlds. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 20(1), 1-19.
6. Zhang, K., et al. (2020). Understanding youth perspectives on COVID-19: Implications for health communication. *Health Communication*, 35(10), 1267-1273