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Keith Hamm

Abortion access linked to future economic and educational success

Debates on abortion have long been linked to moral, religious, medical and political issues. But abortion policy also has considerable influence on a driving force across all walks of life in the U.S — the economy.

“Policies around abortion have a lot of economic impact,” said Cate Taylor, an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at UC Santa Barbara. “And taking away access to abortion causes serious financial problems for women and families."

Taylor, with Bethany Everett of the University of Utah, is the coauthor of newly published research that studied women who grew up in areas with fewer restrictions on abortions and women who had had abortions in adolescence. The women were more likely to have graduated from high school and college, earn higher incomes and experience more financial stability as compared to very similar women who did not have access to abortion or who did not have an abortion.

“We found that access to abortion as an adolescent is related to higher income, higher rates of college graduation, and lower likelihood of being late paying bills, being evicted or being in debt later in adulthood, as well as lower levels of other measures of economic instability,” Taylor said.

The researchers deployed new approaches to data analysis to fill in gaps in previous studies and examine relationships between abortion, abortion access and

socioeconomic outcomes. Their paper, “Abortion And Women’s Future Socioeconomic Attainment,” appears in the latest issue of American Sociological Review.

“Abortion is very common in the U.S.,” Taylor added. “About one in four women have an abortion. In addition, about 60% of women who have abortions already have children.”

The research suggests that widespread bans on abortion and related restrictions will likely negatively impact an adolescent woman’s education and her economic stability as an adult, Taylor said. “We are already seeing poor health outcomes in the states where abortion is most restricted, such as Louisiana, Texas and Idaho. We can also expect there to be poor economic outcomes in states where abortion is banned, based on the findings from our paper.”

The highly politicized debate over abortion nationwide reached a boiling point in June 2022, when the U.S. Supreme Court repealed Roe v. Wade, ending a constitutional right to abortion that had been upheld since 1973. Within the context of Taylor and Everett ’s study, the ruling may have far-reaching economic impacts.

“I haven't yet seen research linking the overturn of Roe directly to employment and educational outcomes,” Taylor said. “But our research would suggest that such restriction of access to abortion and other forms of reproductive autonomy will result in more economic struggles for American women and their families, including the children that they already have.”

“We live in a society that provides little to no support to mothers and parents, so much so that the U.S. Surgeon General recently issued a warning about the stressors of parenthood,” Everett added. “The results from this study not only imply that abortion access is critical for women’s economic futures, but that much more should be done to support mothers, especially teen moms. Women should not have to choose between motherhood or an education, or motherhood and not living in poverty. However, given how expensive childcare is and the lack of paid maternity leave, that is a sad choice many must make, especially young women.”

Tags
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Media Contact

Keith Hamm
Social Sciences, Humanities & Fine Arts Writer
(805) 893-2191
keithhamm@ucsb.edu

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