

Signposts in Reproductive Rights: Economic Intersections

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Discussion Questions

1. How will limiting access to reproductive care economically impact women, families, communities, and organizations?
2. How will the labor market be impacted by this decision?
3. How will women's wages and earning potential be affected by this decision?
4. How will low-income women and women of color be affected by this decision?
5. How is the financial wellbeing of children affected by restrictions to reproductive healthcare?
6. How does this decision affect racial and gender equality in work environments?
7. Several companies have pledged to support employees who need full reproductive care, but if a company's policy violates the laws of the state in which the employee resides, what are the legal consequences?

Economic Outcomes: Relevant Research

- The UCSF Turnaway Study demonstrated that “receiving an abortion does not harm the health and wellbeing of women, but in fact, being denied an abortion results in worse financial, health and family outcomes.”¹
- One study indicated that the majority of women seeking to terminate a pregnancy near the gestational limits had incomes below the poverty line; women who were denied an abortion had higher rates of poverty, higher unemployment, and greater need for government assistance.² This, in turn, affects the economic well-being and prospects of their children.
- According to economics professor David Sulsky, "When distance to the nearest clinic increases, rates of preventative care go down," which can lead to worse health outcomes.³ Sulsky continued: "If a woman of childbearing age dies, it has enormous economic consequences. It's someone who society has invested in and who has many productive economic years ahead of them."⁴
- According to the Harvard Kennedy School's Women and Public Policy Program, “mothers in the workforce experience additional disadvantages compared to women who are not mothers, including a per child wage penalty.”⁵ The notion of a “motherhood penalty” could develop between states and within states in the form of a wage inequality that puts mothers at an economic disadvantage.
- One study observed that abortion reform significantly increased the employment rate, high school graduation rate, and college enrollment of young Black women.⁶



- Another study observed an increase of around 2% in the probability of a woman being employed in states that legalized abortion prior to Roe v. Wade. These results show a particularly strong effect among Black women.^{7, 8}
- Journalist Holly Corbett explained that the reversal of Roe v. Wade will disproportionately impact women living in the South, as well as lower income women and individuals and families of color; further, it will decrease women's workforce participation and earning potential and will negatively impact racial and gender equality.⁹
- According to UCSF professor Dr. Diana Greene Foster, "For people who are denied abortions, we see an immediate drop in full-time employment. Yes, public assistance goes up, but it's not enough to mitigate the loss of employment income, because public assistance isn't enough to support a family."¹⁰
- Dr. Foster also explained that "The research on women unable to get an abortion shows that existing kids are more likely to be living in poverty, more likely to be living in a home without enough money for basic living needs and are also less likely to achieve developmental gross motor, fine motor, language and social emotional milestones."¹¹
- The Institute for Women's Policy Research "estimates that annually employed women aged 15–44 would earn \$101.8 billion more if all state-level abortion restrictions were eliminated."¹² In 2020, the total economic losses due to state-level abortion restrictions in women aged 15–44 were nearly \$14.5 billion in Texas, \$5.4 billion in California, and \$5.3 billion in Missouri, to name only a few.¹³
- Many companies, including Starbucks, Tesla, Yelp, Airbnb, Microsoft, Netflix, Patagonia, DoorDash, JPMorgan Chase, Levi Strauss, PayPal, Amazon, Reddit, Walt Disney Company, and Meta, have "reaffirmed their commitment to helping employees gain health care services they may not be able to obtain in their state."¹⁴
- Regarding the legal liability of providing abortion assistance for employees in abortion restricted states, Robert Ellerbrock, a specialist in benefits law, explained: "Under the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA), fully insured group health plans, where an employer buys health insurance for its employees through a commercial insurer, are subject to state laws. But for self-insured ERISA health plans, where the employer covers the cost of providing health-care benefits to its employees directly, ERISA preempts state law."¹⁵ This issue is ongoing: "Ellerbrock and other legal experts anticipate much litigation over this and related employment issues in the months and years ahead."¹⁶

Notes

1. Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (ANSIRH) research group in collaboration with the University of California, San Francisco.
<https://www.ansirh.org/research/ongoing/turnaway-study>



2. Sarah Miller, Laura R. Wherry, and Diana Greene Foster, “Economic Consequences of Being Denied an Abortion” (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2022) https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w26662/w26662.pdf
3. WRAL News, “Limiting Abortion Access is bad for the economy,” *WRAL – NBC News* (May 14, 2022), <https://www.wral.com/limiting-abortion-access-is-bad-for-the-economy/20281779/>
4. See also Yao Lu and David J. G. Slusky, “The Impact of Women’s Health Clinic Closures on Fertility,” *American Journal of Health Economics*, 2019, 5:3, 334–359.
5. Shelley J. Correl, Stephen Benard, and In Paik. "Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty? 1." *American Journal of Sociology*, 2007, 112:5, 1297–1339. <https://gap.hks.harvard.edu/getting-job-there-motherhood-penalty>
6. Josuha D. Angrist and William N. Evans, “Schooling and Labor Market Consequences of the 1970 State Abortion Reforms,” *National Bureau of Economic Research*, January 1996, <https://www.nber.org/papers/w5406>
7. David E. Kalist, “Abortion and female labor force participation: Evidence prior to *Roe v. Wade*,” *Journal of Labor Research*, 2004, 25, 503–514. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12122-004-1028-3>
8. For additional research, see also Alicja Kobayashi and Madeline Thomas, “How will the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* affect American women?,” *Economics Observatory*, July 12 2022, <https://www.economicsobservatory.com/how-will-the-reversal-of-roe-v-wade-affect-american-women>
9. Holly Corbett, “How Overturning *Roe. V. Wade* Can Impact The Economy,” *Forbes*, June 7, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hollycorbett/2022/06/07/how-overturning-roe-v-wade-can-impact-the-economy/?sh=5681d18c632f>
10. Corbett.
11. Corbett.
12. Institute for Women’s Policy Research, “The Costs of Reproductive Health Restrictions: An Economic Case for Ending Harmful State Policies,” *IWPR*, May 2021, 4. https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Costs-of-Reproductive-Health-Restrictions_Research-Summary.pdf
13. Institute for Women’s Policy Research, “The Cost of Reproductive Health Restrictions: An Economic Case for Ending Harmful State Policies” *IWPR*, <https://iwpr.org/costs-of-reproductive-health-restrictions/>
14. Emma Goldberg, “These Companies Will Cover Travel Expenses for Employee Abortions,” *The New York Times*, August 19 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/abortion-companies-travel-expenses.html>
15. Karla L. Miller, “Post-Roe, can states ban employer abortion aid? It’s not that simple,” *The Washington Post*, June 30 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/06/30/post-roe-can-states-ban-employer-abortion-related-aid-its-not-that-simple/>
16. Miller, “Post-Roe, can states ban . . .”