

ADOLESCENT ACCESS AND EXPERIENCE OF ABORTION CARE IN NSW – ADOLESCENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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Background:

There is a lack of adolescent focused evidence concerning the experience and trajectories of adolescents seeking access to abortion care. This is the second and third stages of a multi-stage mixed method study to determine the care trajectories and experiences of adolescents, aged 16- to 19-years-old, seeking an early induced abortion in New South Wales.

Methods:

Stage 2 was a quantitative cross-sectional online survey of adolescents aged 16-to 19-years-old in NSW. Stage 3 was case studies with adolescents aged 16- to 25-years-old who had accessed an abortion in NSW when aged 16 to 19 years.

Results:

In the online survey of 576 respondents, 14 adolescents identified accessing an abortion. These respondents reported they were provided with comprehensive information, space and time to ask the questions that they needed and were likely to recommend the service to others. Treatment by the staff working in abortion services was also highly rated. Four case study interviews took place. The overarching theme was *the abortion trajectory was a profound personal crisis for adolescents*.

Participants found the experience of an unplanned pregnancy and the decision to have an abortion brought their fertility into acute focus and led to reflection on their sense of identity. A sense of agency and resourcefulness emerged as participants navigated their trajectory to resolve their personal crisis and access an abortion. Some participants became empowered by navigating the system.

Conclusion:

Though barriers and experiences that emerged are similar to findings around adult abortion experience, adolescents' age exacerbates these barriers and creates greater emotional and physical burden. The unique needs of adolescent's need to be acknowledged. Empathetic person-centred care, comprehensive information and support through health services, school-based sexuality and healthy literacy education needs to be provided to improve adolescents' accessibility and overall experience of care.

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