

# How Texas Abortion Bans Affect Mental and Emotional Well-Being

Two of our recent studies examined how the implementation of Texas Senate Bill 8 (SB 8) affected emotional and mental wellbeing among reproductive-aged Texans. The findings suggest that abortion restrictions are associated with greater emotional distress. These studies provide evidence that negative mental health outcomes are associated with abortion bans—both for people actively seeking abortion care and the reproductive-aged population most likely to be affected by the bans.

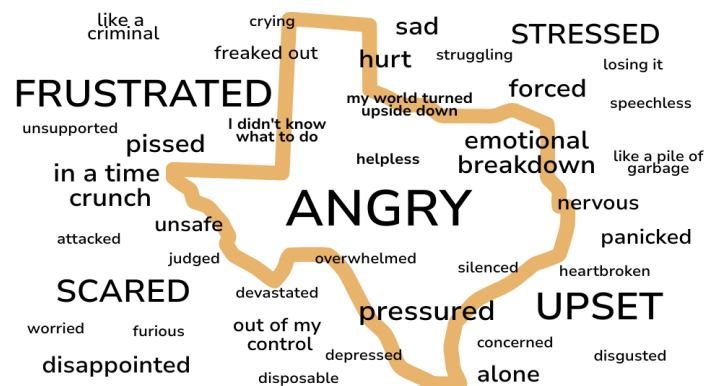
Senate Bill 8 (SB 8) prohibits abortion after detection of embryonic cardiac activity, which occurs approximately 5 to 6 weeks from a person’s last menstrual period. The law applies to health care providers, and anyone “aiding and abetting” an abortion in Texas after embryonic cardiac activity is detected. SB 8 relies on private citizens, not state agencies, to enforce the law. A person found to have violated the law faces a civil penalty of \$10,000 and the cost of legal fees. SB 8 went into effect on September 1, 2021, nearly one year before the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* decision. Although SB 8 remains in effect, Texas has also implemented a total abortion ban that includes more severe criminal penalties.

## Reactions to SB 8 Among Texans Who Received Out-of-State Abortion Care (2022)

In interviews with 65 Texas residents who obtained an abortion in another state after SB 8, participants frequently noted that the law disrupted their ability to access abortion care in a timely and supported way.

They reported being angry and upset that they were forced to travel to another state. Many stated that they felt frustrated, overwhelmed, and stressed by the process of identifying a facility and making logistical and financial arrangements to get to and pay for care.

### How Participants Felt About Not Being Able to Get an Abortion in Texas

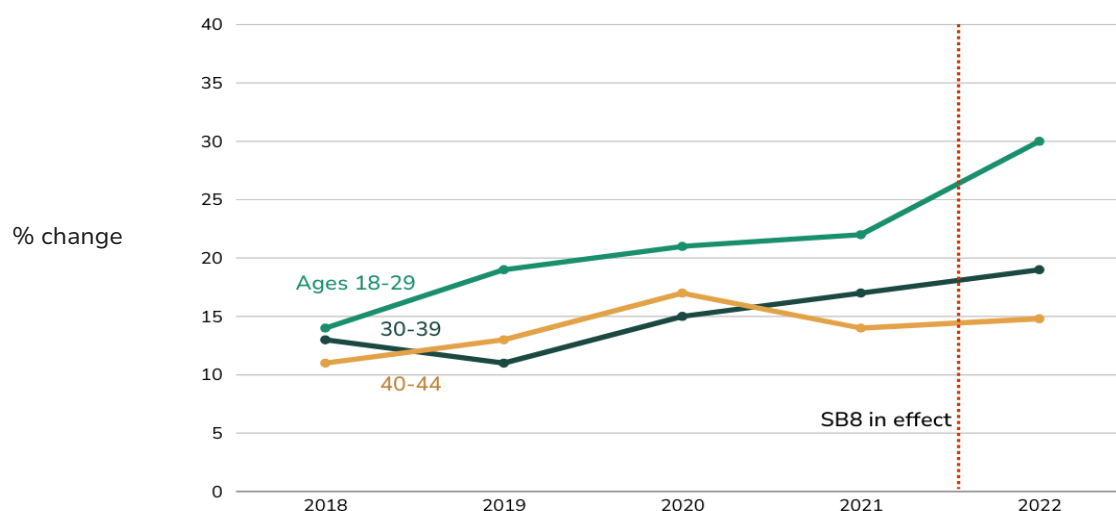


# Mental Distress Among Females Following 2021 Abortion Restrictions in Texas (2025)

Using statewide data from 15,614 female Texas residents aged 18-49, we found that the implementation of SB 8 was associated with increases in frequent mental distress among reproductive age females in Texas, compared to male Texans and females in other states that did not have similar laws in place.

Increases in frequent mental distress—defined as 14 days or more of poor mental health (including stress, depression, and problems with emotions) during the preceding 30 days—were greatest among female Texans 18 to 29 years of age, who may be less able to overcome barriers to abortion care. Additionally, following SB 8, there were disproportionately higher increases in frequent mental distress among females compared with males.

## Young Women in Texas Report the Largest Increase in Mental Distress\*, 2018-2022



\*Frequent mental distress is defined as 14+ days of poor mental health in the last 30 days.

## Conclusions

SB 8 was the most restrictive abortion ban in the US at the time and preceded subsequent state-level abortion bans that followed the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision in June 2022. To date, four states have implemented six-week bans and 12 states have adopted total abortion bans, collectively restricting reproductive autonomy for tens of millions of reproductive-aged individuals. These studies indicate that abortion restrictions cause emotional distress and contribute to poor mental health, not only among those currently seeking abortion care but also among the population most likely to be directly affected by the bans.

## Methods

For “Reactions to SB 8 among Texans Who Received Out-of-State Abortion Care,” we used in-depth interview transcripts from 65 Texas residents who traveled out of state for abortion care between October 2021 and February 2022. To create the word cloud, we identified the 1000 most common words in their responses about how they felt about not being able to get abortion care in Texas, organized these reactions into categories, and weighted the size of words in proportion to the frequency of responses.

Research for “Mental Distress Among Females Following 2021 Abortion Restrictions” relied on ten years (2012-2022) of data collected as part of the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), a population based representative survey. The study included 79,609 survey respondents who answered the question, “Now thinking about your mental health, which includes stress, depression, and problems with emotions, for how many days during the past 30 days was your mental health not good.” We used difference-in-differences analysis to compare changes in self-reported mental distress following SB 8 among female and male Texas respondents, as well as changes among female respondents in 6 control states.

## References

1. Arey W, Dixon L, Vizcarra E, White K. Reactions to Senate Bill 8 among Texans who Obtained Out-of-State Abortion Care. Published online June 2022. <https://resoundrh.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/txpep-2022-reactions-sb8-brief.pdf>
2. Lee J, White K, Dalton VK. Mental Distress Among Females Following 2021 Abortion Restrictions in Texas. JAMA Netw Open. 2025;8(5):e259576. [doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2025.9576](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2025.9576)

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