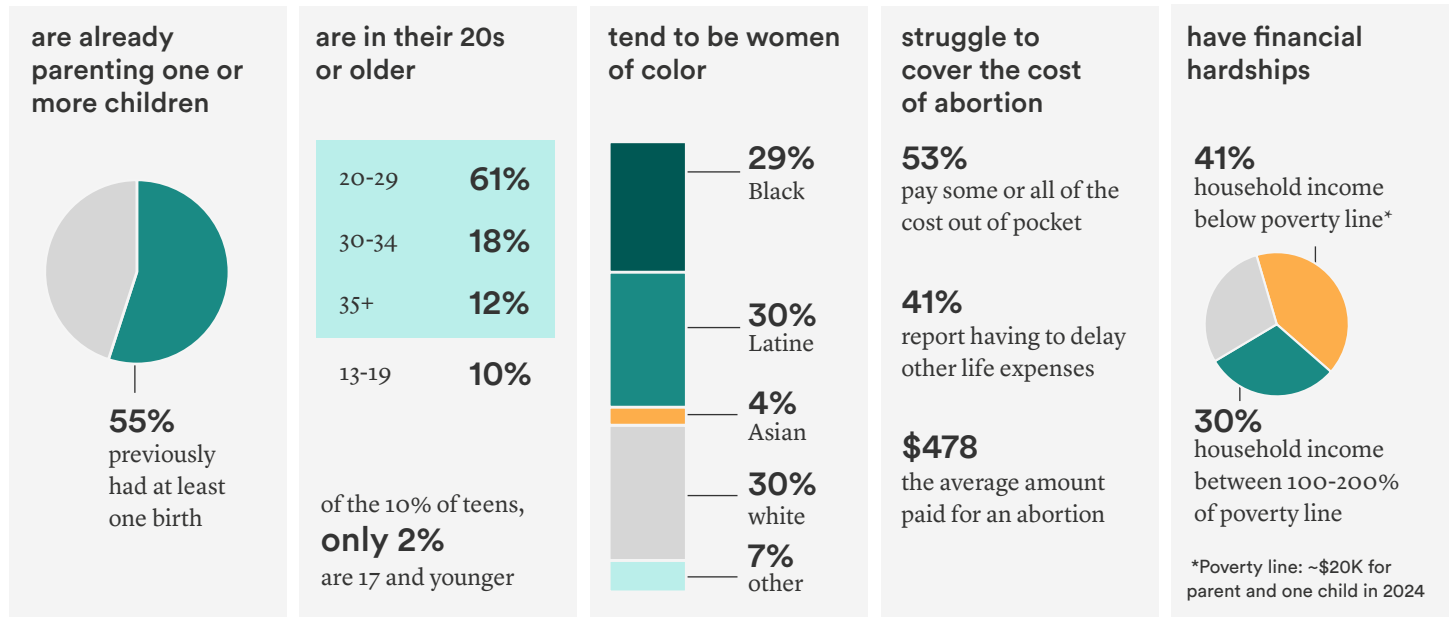


FAST FACTS AND TIPS FOR TV WRITERS

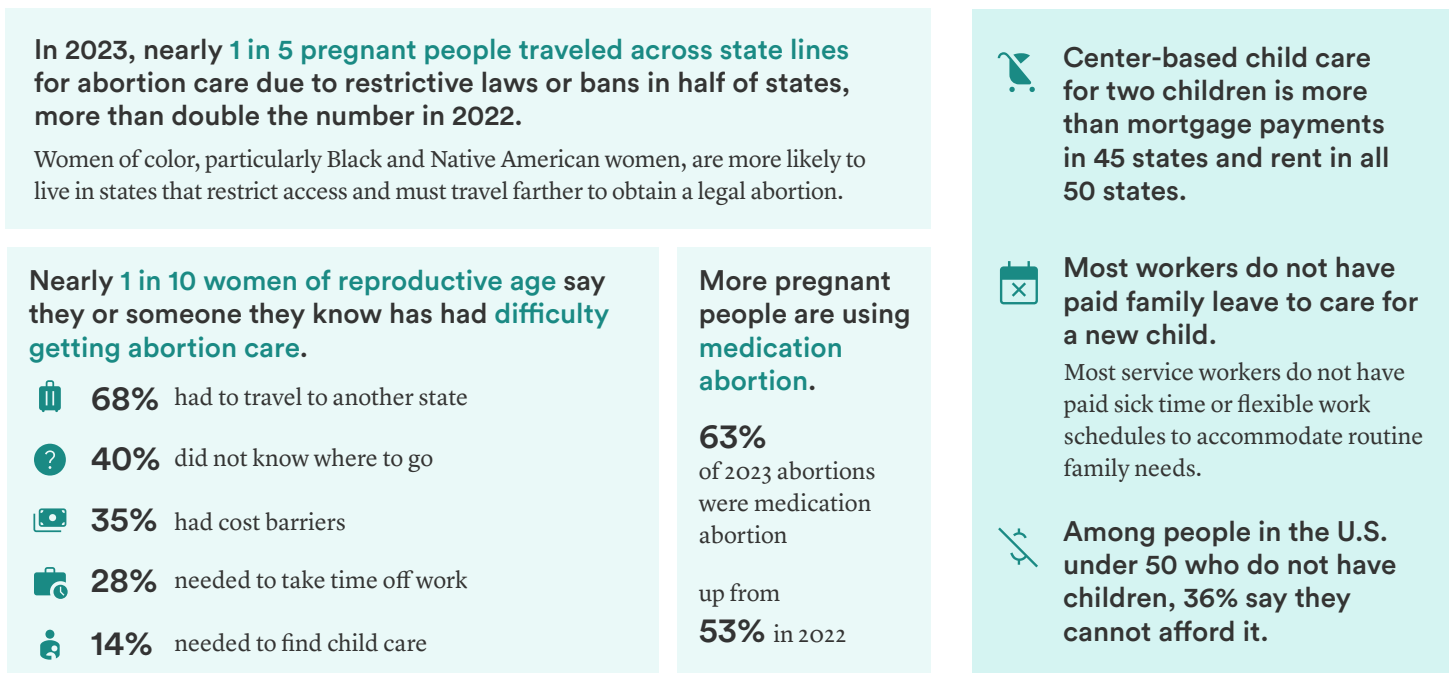
Writing Holistic Pregnancy and Abortion Stories

In the United States, most abortion seekers...

Source: [Guttmacher Institute](#)

Since the U.S. Supreme Court's 2022 decision in *Dobbs vs. Jackson Women's Health Organization* revoked federal protections for abortion, barriers to abortion care have increased substantially.

Economic factors affecting pregnancy and parenting decisions in the United States:

Sources: [KFF](#), [Guttmacher Institute](#), [Guttmacher Institute](#), [Center for American Progress](#)Sources: [Child Care Aware](#), [New America](#), [Shift Project at Harvard Kennedy School](#), [Pew Research Center](#)

Representation matters.

TV does not depict reality when it comes to the demographic and life circumstances of people facing abortion and pregnancy decisions.

Most abortion-seekers on screen are white, older, and middle-class or wealthy. Just 10% of abortion plotlines involve people who already have children. [[Herold & Sisson](#)]

Yet we know that television depictions shape how the American public thinks about and understands abortion and pregnancy decisions.

A recent study from the Norman Lear Center and Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (ANSIRH) shows that three recent medically accurate depictions of abortion informed viewers, and one even mobilized viewers to take public action. [[Giaccardi, Herold, and Sisson](#)]

Context matters.



Television depictions of abortion overall miss context: Work, family, caregiving, money, and health concerns were shown in less than 5% of abortion plotlines in a five-year period (January 2018–May 2023), even though this context is crucial in the real lives of abortion seekers.

[[Herold & Shabo](#)]



Depictions of on-screen mothers who have abortions are much more likely to provide needed context that makes characters more relatable and multi-dimensional.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of abortion stories with characters who are already mothers reference considerations about work, current parenting and caregiving responsibilities, the completeness of their families, health, and financial considerations, according to a forthcoming study from ANSIRH on ten years of motherhood and abortion plotlines (January 2013–December 2023).

ABOUT ANSIRH & ABORTION ONSCREEN

abortiononscreen.org

ABOUT BETTER LIFE LAB'S ENTERTAINMENT INITIATIVE

newamerica.org/entertainment

The information in this tip sheet is accurate as of September 2024 and may be updated periodically.

EXAMPLES WE LOVE



Grey's Anatomy

"Papa Don't Preach"

SEASON 16, EPISODE 7

Cassidy, 25, a white mother of one child, in the hospital after parsley tea she took in an attempt to end her pregnancy made her dizzy and caused her to fall down a flight of stairs: **"I already work at two restaurants. They try to give me a flexible schedule, but there's only so much they can do. And another kid—that's way more money and even more time away from Henry."**

Mrs. Pat Show

"Stormy Weather"

SEASON 2, EPISODE 10

Pat, 40s, a Black mother of four, supported in her abortion decision by her teenage daughters: **"You had a difficult pregnancy with Junebug [their brother], so you should do whatever is safe...be glad you still have the choice, that choice is in jeopardy every day."**

TIPS FOR STORYTELLERS

- ☐ **Script characters' demographic and life circumstances** to be more in line with U.S. realities, or **acknowledge disparities** that exist between more privileged characters and most people in the U.S. who are considering or seeking abortion care.
- ☐ **Show realistic challenges** people face when seeking abortion care, and characters navigating work, existing care and parenting responsibilities, and other work-family needs when receiving care, whether they travel to a clinic for a procedural abortion or have a medication abortion.
- ☐ **Provide context for characters' decisions** about pregnancy and abortion, whether they are already parents or not.
- ☐ Have characters and stories explore how individual challenges with money, time off, health, and child care could be addressed through **systems-level changes** in access to child care, paid leave, higher wages, control over work schedules, and other baseline supports.

For more information, please contact Vicki Shabo, Senior Fellow and Entertainment Project Founder, Better Life Lab at New America (shabo@newamerica.org) or Steph Herold, Researcher at Abortion Onscreen, ANSIRH at UCSF (stephanie.herold@ucsf.edu).