

The Australian Abortion Stigma Study

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ABORTION feeling uncomfortable...

(so) what?

1 in 3 women will have at least 1 abortion in their lifetimes¹.
How many have told you about theirs?

Abortion stigma is a process of

- labelling, stereotyping,
- discrediting and discriminating

against people who seek, have and provide abortions.

Research shows having an abortion *doesn't* lead to poorer long-term mental health outcomes².
Abortion stigma might though³.

Stigma also results in:

- social isolation⁴;
- healthcare avoidance, leading to avoidable complications and unsafe abortion⁵; and
- a lack of abortion services, as health professionals choose not to provide abortion services for fear of social and professional consequences⁶ (especially in small towns).

Despite it's consequences, abortion stigma remains greatly under-researched, **particularly in Australia.**

Therefore, this research **aims to:**

- Build a baseline understanding of the extent of stigmatising attitudes and **perceived** abortion stigma in Australia.
- Identify the population groups most likely to perceive higher levels of abortion stigma and the implications for their wellbeing.

how?

The **Australian Abortion Stigma Survey (TAASS)** was developed to measure

- abortion acceptability and judgments,
- abortion-related knowledge, and
- perceived abortion stigma.

The **first of its kind**, the 63-item survey tool was tested extensively using a global expert panel, cognitive interviews and a test re-test sample.

Facebook ads were then used to recruit a sample of the Australian public (aged 16+ years) for data collection.

The survey caught the attention of a number of influential organisations and individuals online and voila...

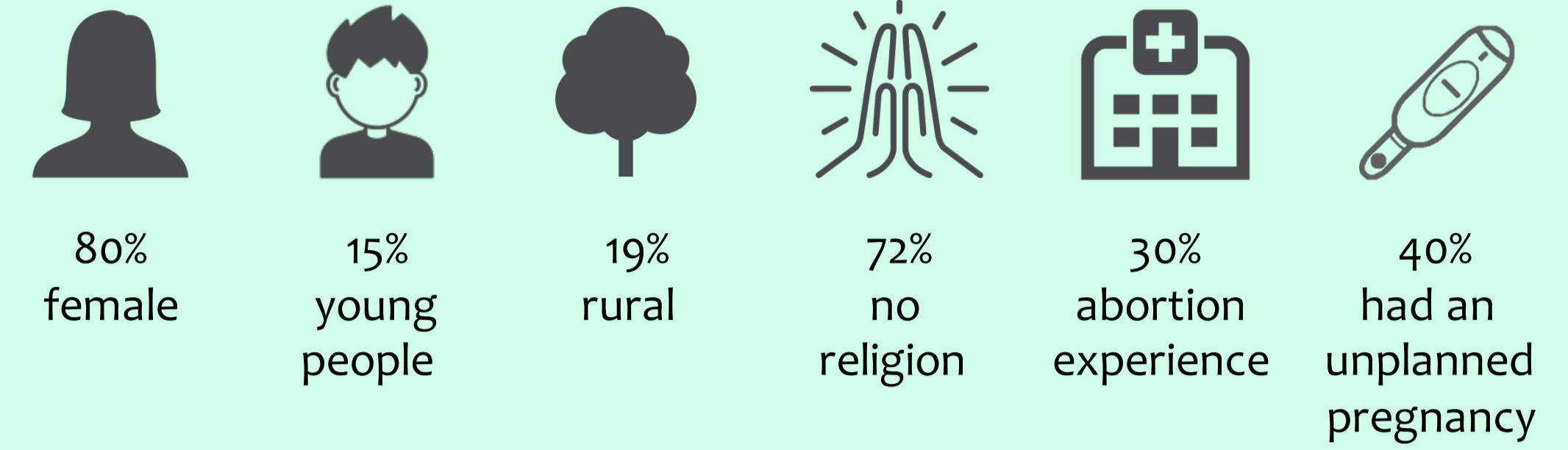
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3000+ 2000 comments 2800 shares

TAASS went viral on social media.

70,051 responses were received in <3 weeks.

who?



results (the good bit)

attitudes



9 in 10 participants believe abortion should be legal (always or mostly).

1 in 4 believe most people in Australia think **negatively** about abortion.

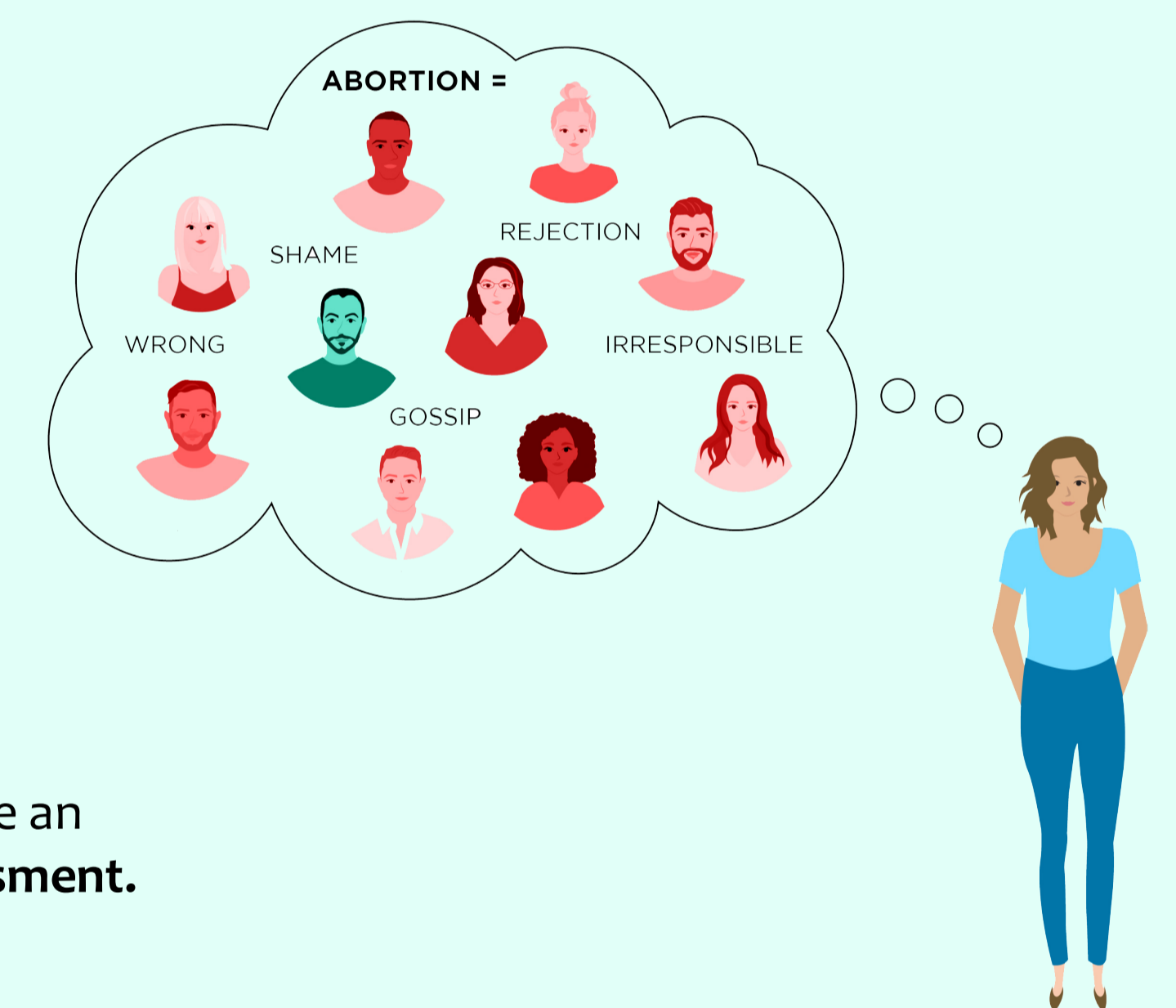
knowledge

Only 3% agreed with the **myth** that abortion causes breast cancer (a further 17% were 'unsure'). Frequent religious attendance was strongly associated with endorsing the myth.

Younger participants were most likely to agree that **medication abortion** is physically safe.

perceived stigma

49% believe most women who have an abortion are likely to be **gossiped** about.



63% think most women who have an abortion are at risk of **harassment**.

81% expect most abortion providers in Australia would have experienced harassment or violence due to their work.

69% agree most people think more negatively about abortion providers than other health professionals.

Higher levels of perceived abortion stigma were observed among participants who:

- were <24 years and >65 years of age.
- attended religious services once or more per week.
- didn't complete high school.

which means...

Preliminary analyses show

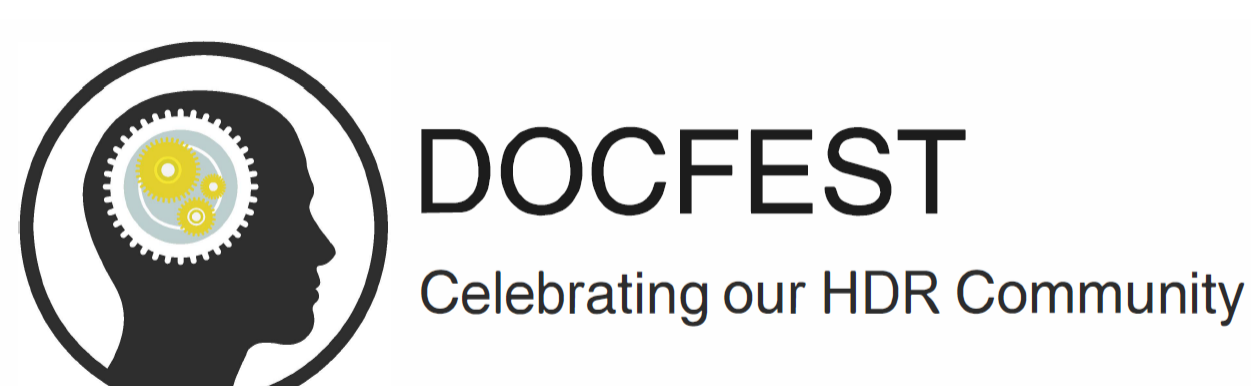
- generally low levels of stigmatising attitudes and myth-endorsement, but
- relatively high levels of perceived abortion stigma.

This suggests many people **perceive** the Australian community to be **less** supportive of legal abortion and **more judgmental** of women who have abortions than it really is.

next...

Through further statistical analysis and qualitative in-depth interviews, I'll explore:

- the associations between knowledge, attitudes, personal characteristics and perceived stigma.
- The impacts of higher levels of perceived stigma on the wellbeing of particular population groups.



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2. ANSIRH 2019, *Introduction to the Turnaway Study*, Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health, California.
3. Major, B a& Gramzow, R 1999, 'Abortion as stigma: cognitive and emotional implications of concealment', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol.77, pp.735-745.
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5. Harris, L 2012, 'Stigma and abortion complications in the United States', *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, vol.120, pp.1472-1474
6. Shellenberg, K, Moore, A, Bankole, A et al. 2011, 'Social stigma and disclosure about induced abortion: Results from an exploratory study', *Global Public Health*, vol.6, Suppl.1:S111-25.

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INSPIRING ACHIEVEMENT