

WEBVTT

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<v ->My name is Daniel Grossman

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and I'm a Professor in the Department of Obstetrics,

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Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences

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at the University of California San Francisco

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and welcome to Explained: Abortion Research and Policy.

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I'm gonna be talking about abortion safety

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in the United States.

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Hundreds of laws have been passed in various states

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in recent years that restrict access to abortion,

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and many of them purport to make abortion safer.

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These laws may resonate with the voting public

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not so much because they're against abortion

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but because many people commonly think

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that abortion is a dangerous procedure,

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so anything that could be done to make it safer

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or that might make it safer sounds like a good idea.

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This concern about the safety abortion isn't so surprising

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given that we often hear about the dangers of unsafe

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or illegal abortion and that's true.

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It's estimated that about 40,000 women

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die each year due to unsafe abortion,

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almost exclusively in low and middle income countries

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where abortion is legally restricted

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or difficult to access for other reasons,

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but here in the U.S., abortion is very safe.

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In fact, it's as safe or safer than most

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other medical procedures performed outside of a hospital.

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About 90% of abortions are performed early in pregnancy,

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in the first trimester, and at this point in pregnancy,

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the procedure is very simple.

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Many women choose to have a medical abortion

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which involves taking pills to end the pregnancy

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and their experience is very similar

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to a natural miscarriage.

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The other option is to have a suction abortion or aspiration

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which involves placing a small tube into the uterus

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to remove the pregnancy with a vacuum,

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usually with mild sedation or using oral pain medication

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and this procedure is really quite similar

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to what clinicians may do in their offices

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to treat a woman with a miscarriage.

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There are no sharp instruments and there's no cutting.

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Thankfully, here in the U.S.,

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severe complications from abortion are exceedingly rare

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and I think it may be useful to compare the risk of death

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from abortion to the risk associated with childbirth.

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In the U.S., the pregnancy associated mortality rate

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among women who delivered live babies

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is about 8.8 deaths per 100,000 live births

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and it's even higher for certain groups of women

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including women of color.

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Meanwhile, the mortality rate related to abortion

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is about 0.7 deaths per 100,000 abortions.

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So that means that the risk of death

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associated with childbirth is approximately

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12 to 13 times higher than that associated with abortion.

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The safety profile of abortion is similar to

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or even better than other procedures

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such as dental surgery requiring anesthesia

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or outpatient plastic surgery.

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But you know, we really don't see legislators

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working tirelessly to regulate these other areas of medicine

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in the same way that abortion is regulated.

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It shouldn't be politicians who determine

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how medicine is practiced.

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This is the job of the medical community

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which develops evidence-based guidelines

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to inform the standard of care.

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Abortion, as currently practiced in America,

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largely in freestanding clinics, is very, very safe.

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Rather than improving the safety of abortion,

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the kinds of laws that many states are passing

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are simply restricting access to care and making it harder

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for a woman to obtain a safe abortion early in pregnancy.

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These restrictive laws are very unlikely

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to make abortion care any safer than it already is.

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If you'd like more information on this topic,

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please visit these websites.