

Consequences for women of receiving or being denied a wanted abortion

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Professor

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Abortion in the US in context

	U.S.	Western Europe
Abortion rate (per 1000 women, aged 15-44, 2008) ¹	16.9	12
Government funding for abortion	Minimal	Widespread
Children living in poverty (2008) ²	21.9%	10.6%
Government paid parental leave	None	Widespread

¹ Guttmacher.org

² http://inequality.stanford.edu/_media/pdf/pathways/winter_2008/Smeeding.pdf

Does abortion hurt women?

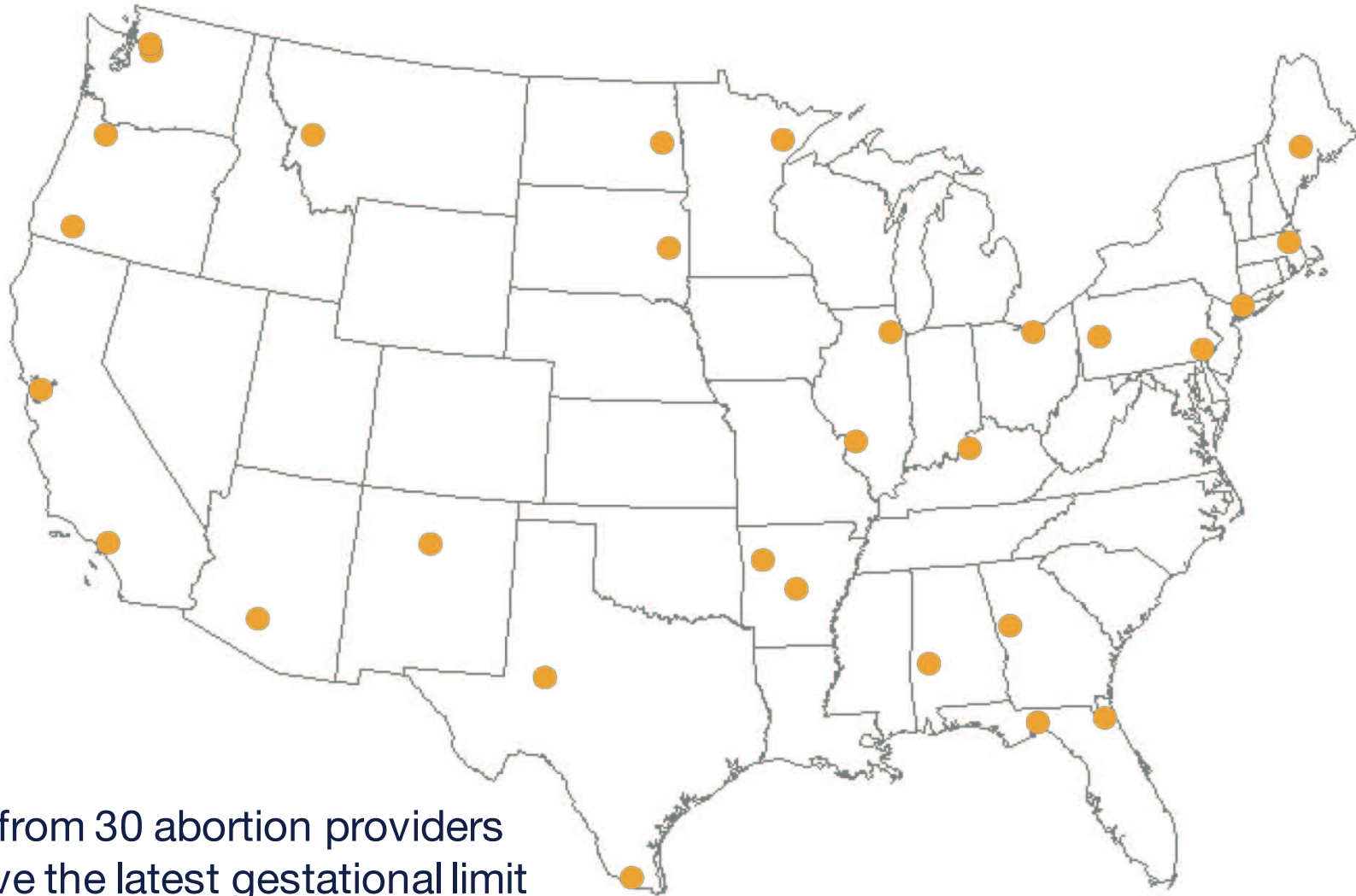
Justice Anthony Kennedy majority decision *Gonzales v. Carhart* (2007)

“While we find **no reliable data** to measure the phenomenon, it seems unexceptionable to conclude some women come to regret their choice to abort the infant life they once created and sustained. Severe depression and loss of esteem can follow.”

Turnaway Study aim

To describe the mental health, physical health and socioeconomic consequences of receiving an abortion compared to carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term.

Turnaway Study Recruitment Sites



Recruit from 30 abortion providers
who have the latest gestational limit
within 150 miles

Turnaway Study design

→ Recruit three types of eligible women

→ **Turnaways**

→ Up to 3 weeks above gestational limit

→ Do NOT receive abortion

→ **Near Limit Abortion Group**

→ Within 2 weeks of limit

→ Receive procedure

→ **First Trimester Patients**

→ Receive procedure under 14 weeks gestation

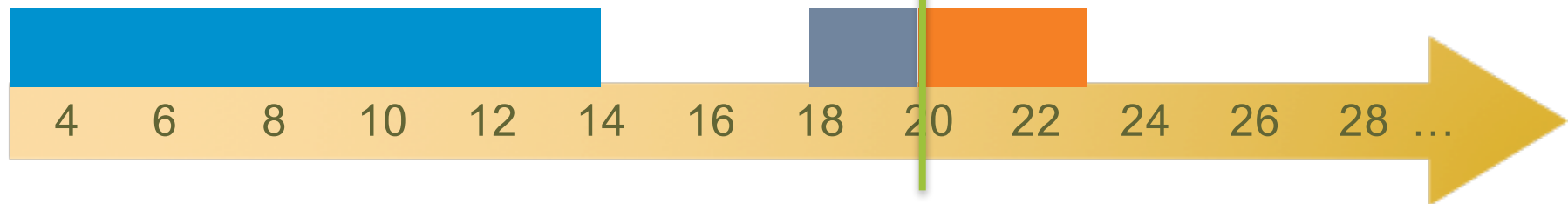
→ Excludes women seeking abortion for fetal anomalies

Turnaway Study design

■ First trimester abortion ■ Near Limit Abortion ■ Turnaway

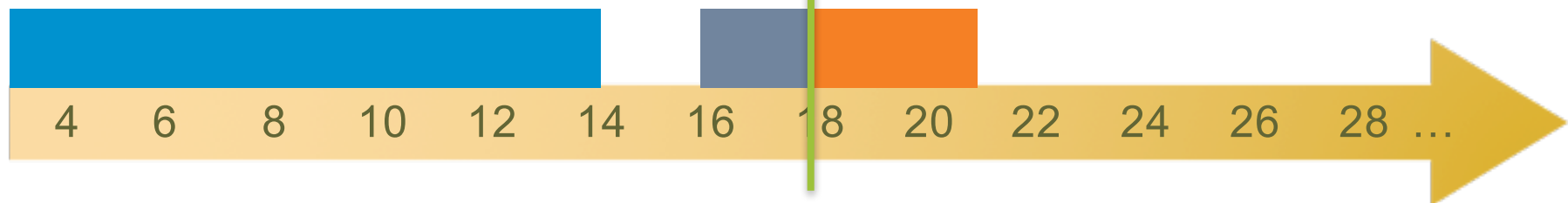
Site A

Gestational limit = 20



Site B

Gestational limit = 18



Study methods

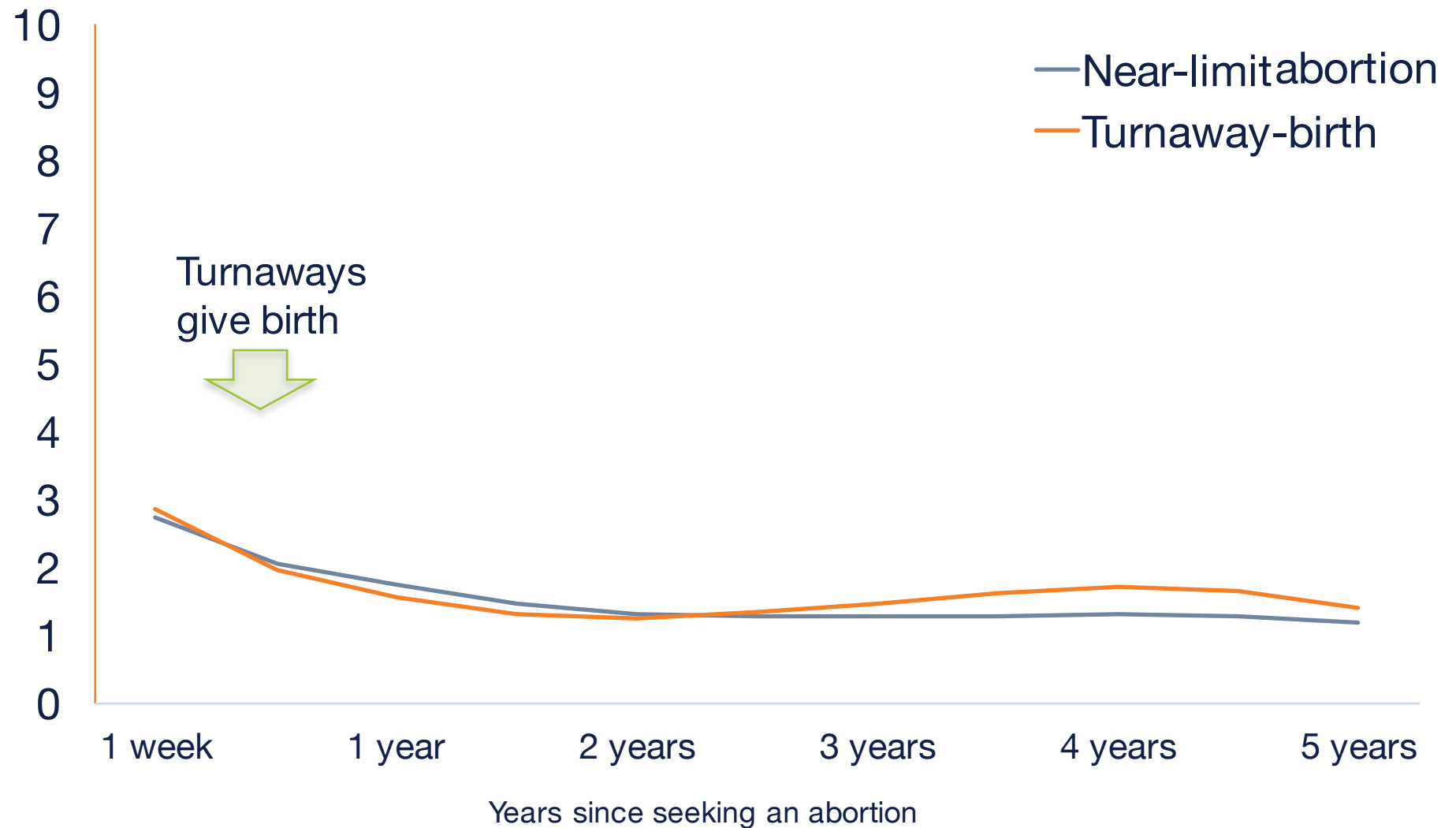
- 956 women seeking abortion between 2008 and 2010 including
 - 156 women denied abortions who carried to term
 - 405 women just under limit who receive the abortion
- Follow all women for 5 years with semi-annual telephone interviews
 - Interviews conducted in English and Spanish

What are the mental health consequences of receiving or being denied a wanted abortion?

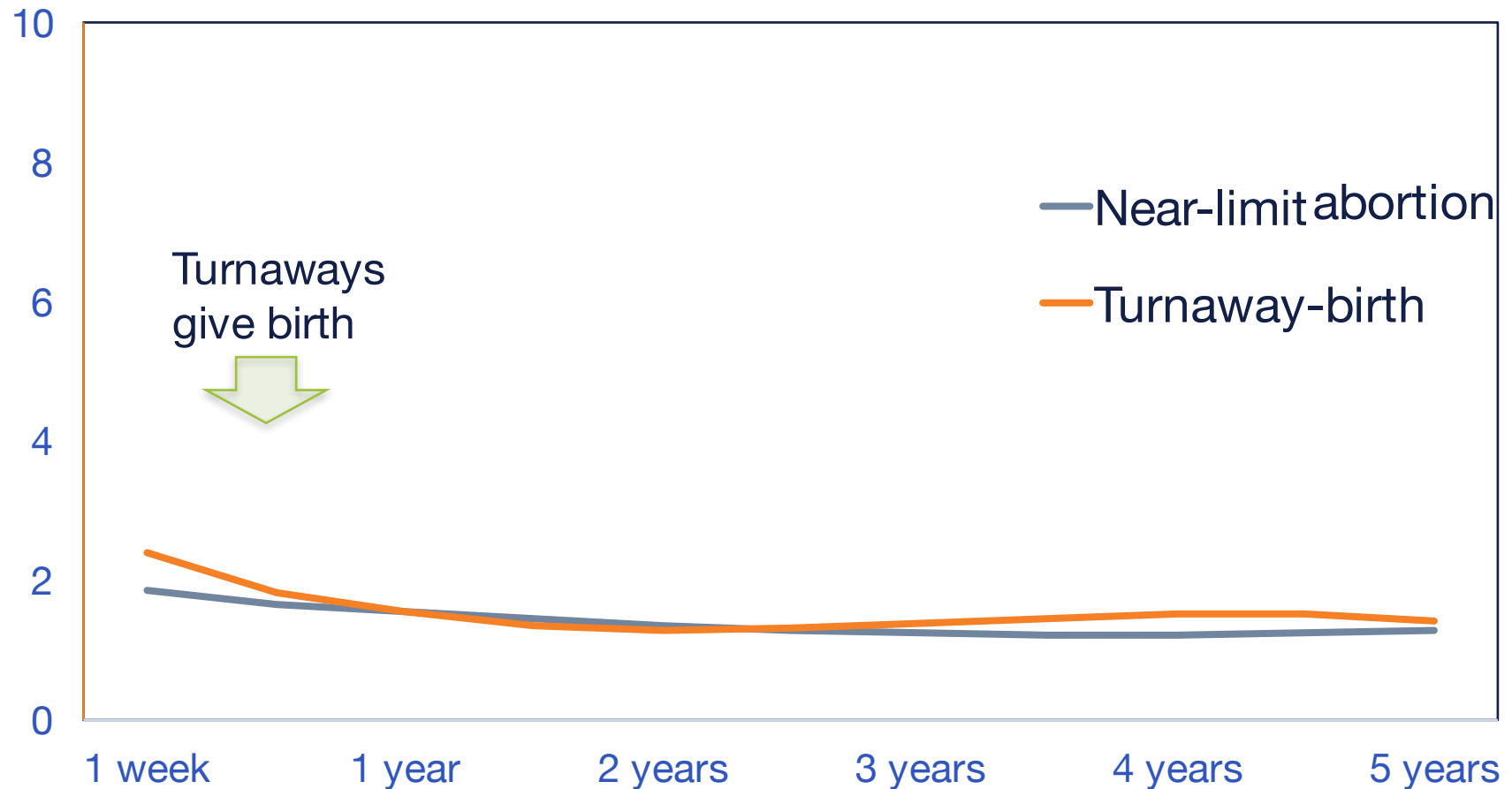


- A comparison of depression and anxiety symptom trajectories between women who had an abortion and women denied one. Foster DG, Steinberg JR, Roberts SCM, Neuhaus J, Biggs MA. Psychological Medicine 2015 Jan 28;1-10.
- Mental Health Diagnoses 3 Years After Receiving or Being Denied an Abortion in the United States. Biggs MA, Neuhaus JM, Foster DG. Am J Public Health. 2015 Dec; 105(12):2557-63. PMID: 26469674.
- Biggs MA, Rowland B, McCulloch CE, Foster DG. Does abortion increase women's risk for post-traumatic stress? Findings from a prospective longitudinal cohort study. BMJ Open. 2016

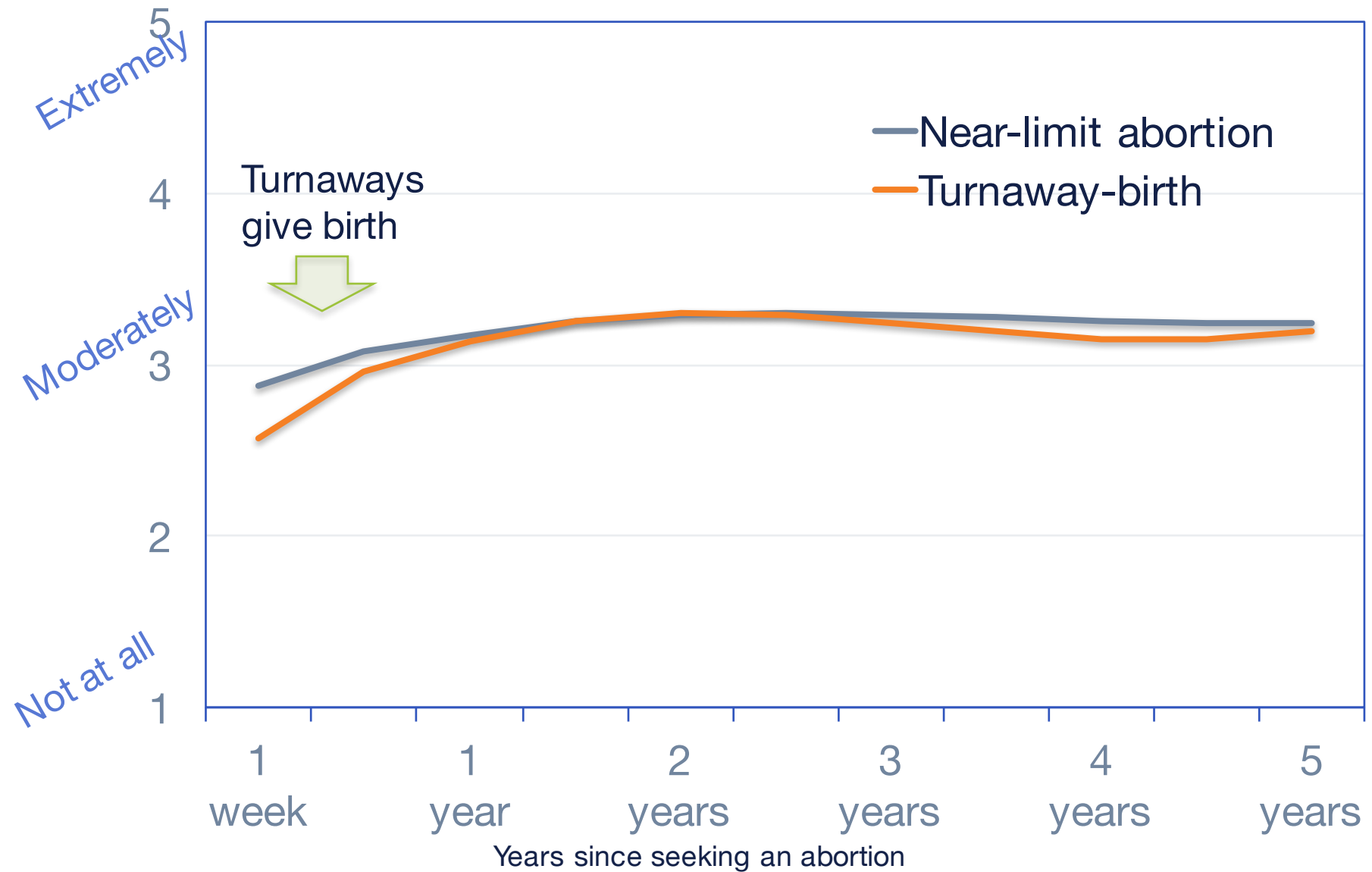
Depressive symptoms past week



Anxiety symptoms past week



Felt high self-esteem past week



Mental Health Summary

- There is no evidence of negative effects of abortion on mental health within five years of having an abortion.
- There is a short term elevated risk of anxiety and low self-esteem among women denied wanted abortions.
- In terms of mental health, women are resilient to unwanted pregnancy, regardless of the outcome of the pregnancy.

But what about the emotional responses to having an abortion?

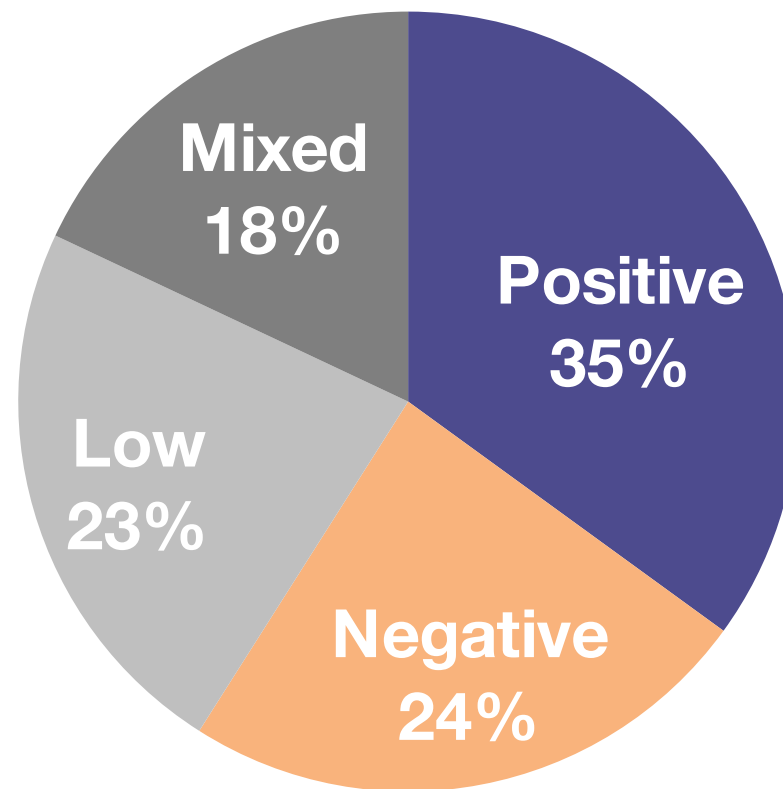


Rocca CH, Kimport K, Roberts SCM, Gould H, Neuhaus J, Foster DG. Decision rightness and emotional responses to pregnancy termination in the United States: a longitudinal study. Plos One 2015; 10(7):e0128832.

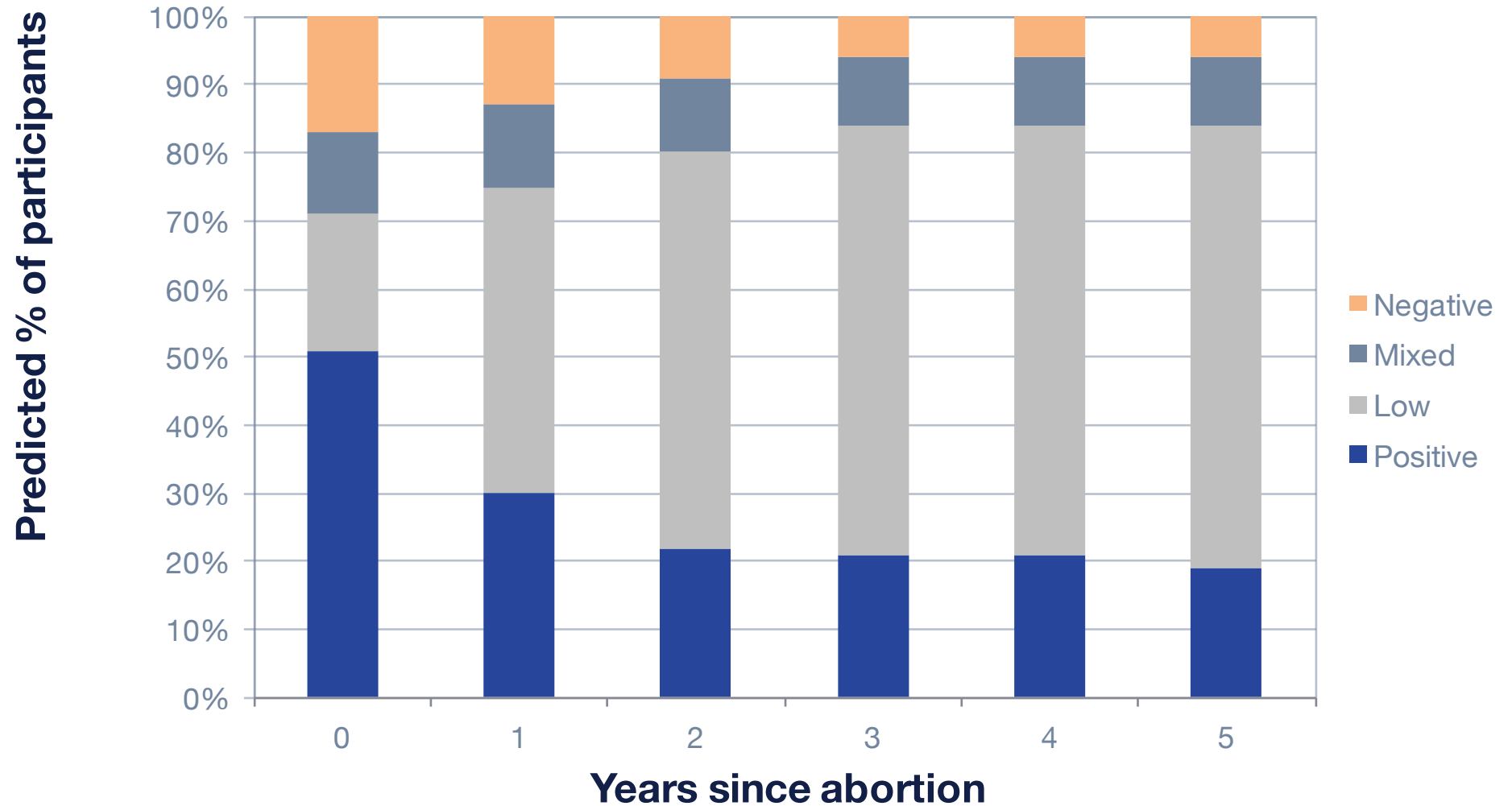
Emotions after the abortion, 1 week

Emotional Response Groups

All participants obtaining an abortion



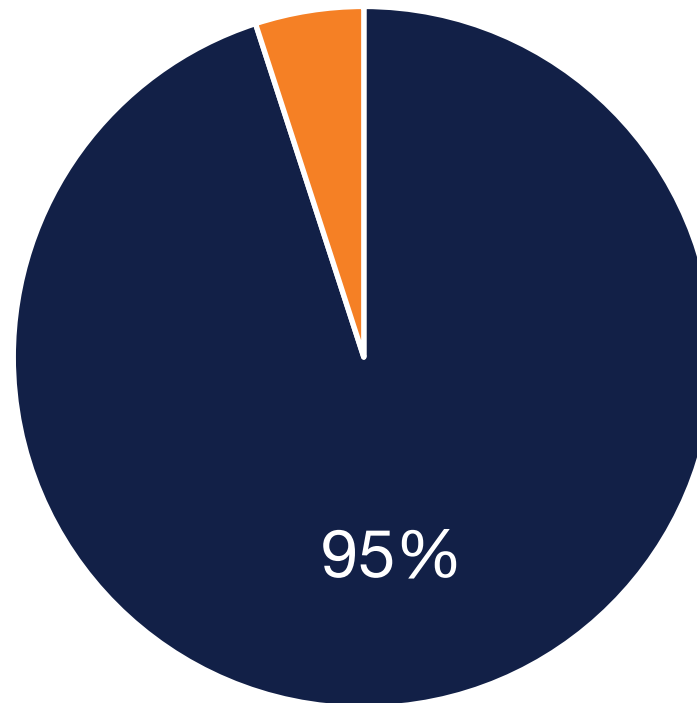
Emotions among abortion patients over 5 years



Abortion was right decision, 1 week

Abortion was the right decision

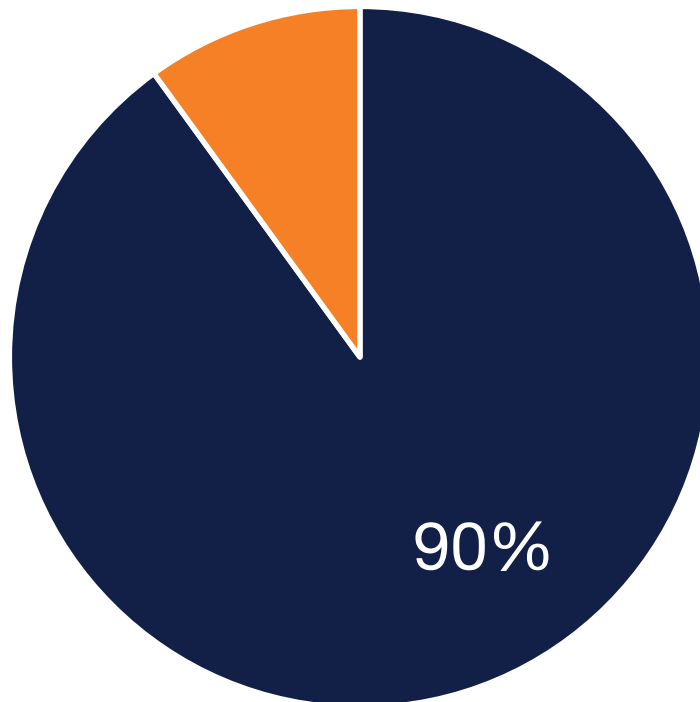
Among all participants obtaining an abortion



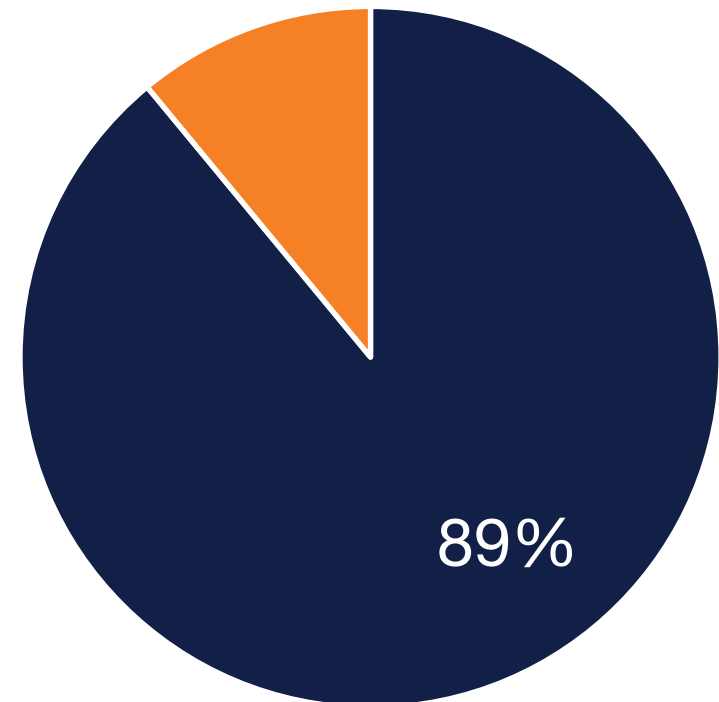
Abortion was right decision, 1 week

Abortion was the right decision

Among women with
a negative
emotional response



Among women
expressing any
regret



Why do women have abortions?



Biggs MA, Gould H, Foster DG.
Understanding why women seek abortions
in the US. BMC Women's Health. 2013;
13:29.

Reasons for wanting to terminate a pregnancy

1. Not financially prepared 40%
2. Not the right time for a baby 36%
3. Partner-related reasons 31%
4. Need to focus on other children 29%
5. Interferes with future opportunities 20%
6. Not emotionally prepared 19%
7. Health related reasons 12%
8. Want a better life for the baby than she could provide 12%
9. Not independent or mature enough for a baby 7%
10. Influences from family or friends 5%

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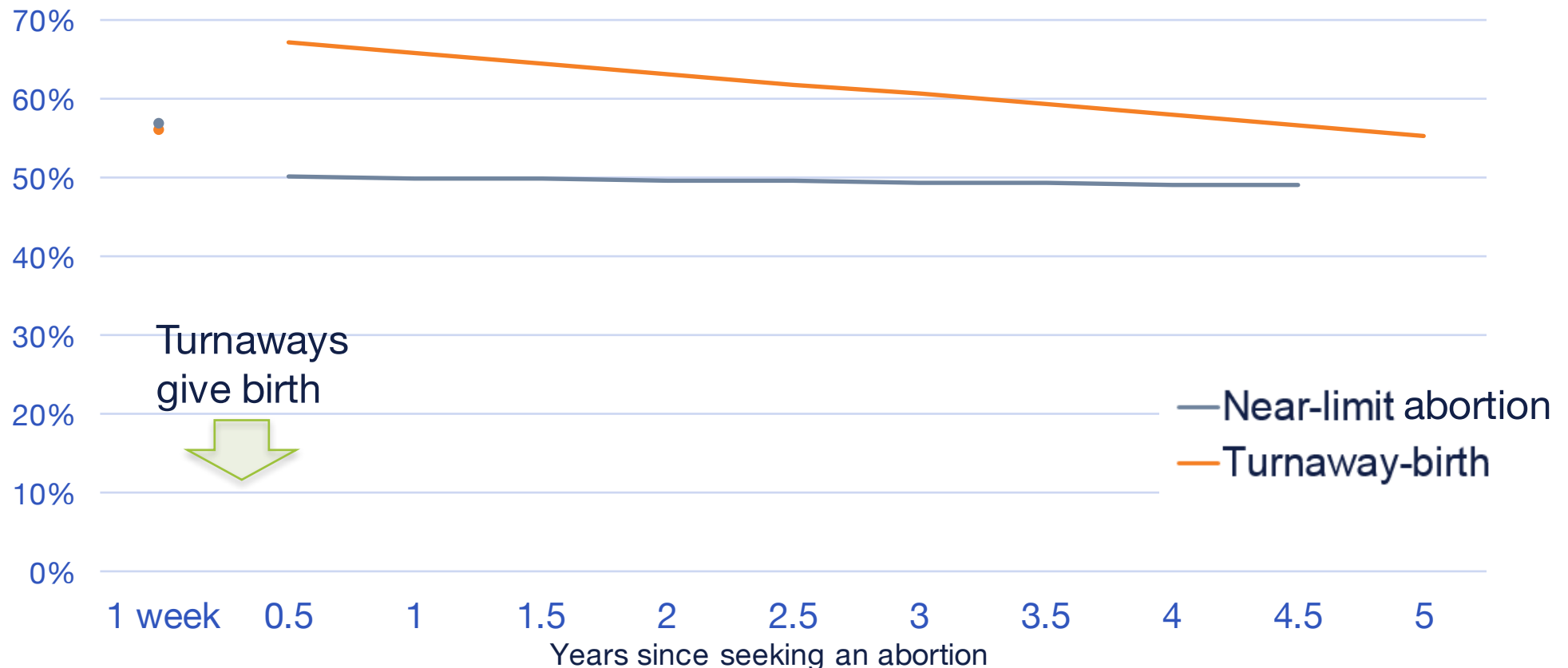
What are the socioeconomic consequences of receiving or being denied a wanted abortion?



Socioeconomic outcomes of women who receive and women who are denied wanted abortions

Foster, Biggs, Ralph, Gerdtz, Roberts, Korenman, Glymour

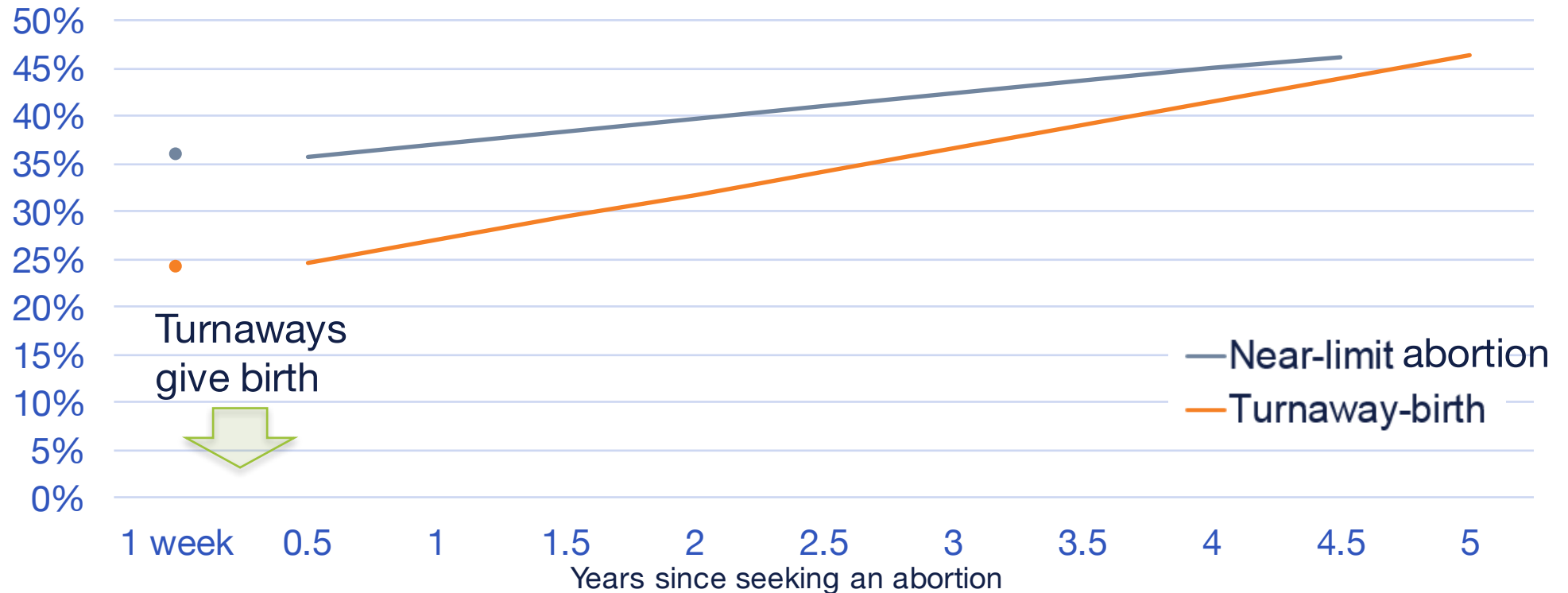
Household income below the poverty level



“[It was] all financial, me not having a job, living off death benefits, dealing with my 14 year old son. I didn't have money to buy a baby spoon.”

-42 year old from the Dakotas

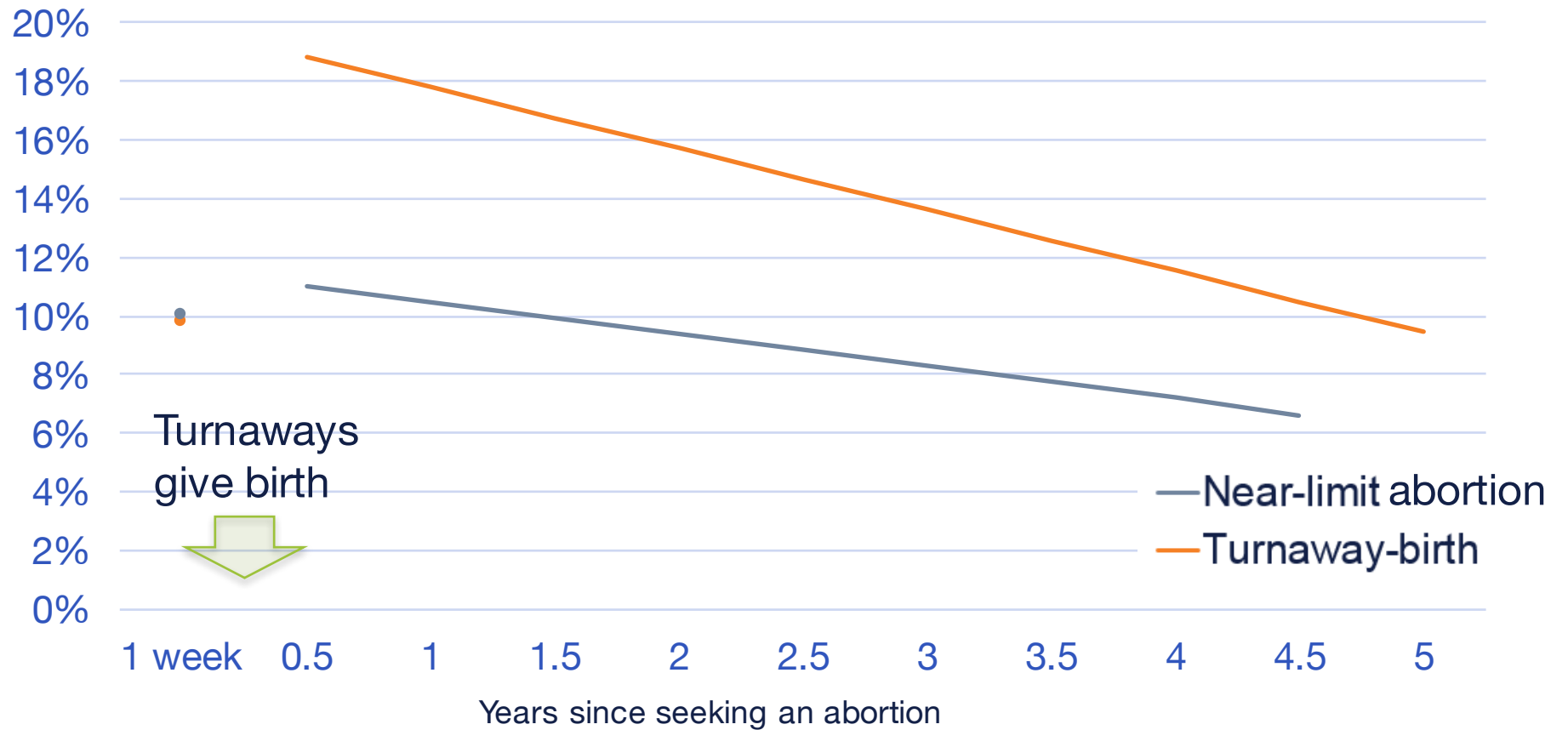
Full time employment



“[My husband and I] haven't had jobs in awhile and I don't want to go back to living with other people. If we had another child it would be undue burden on our financial situation.”

-28 year old from California

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)



“I don't have enough money to support a child and I don't want to have to get support from the government.”
-19 year old from Washington

Conclusions

- Large and significant differences in the economic trajectories; women denied abortions faced more hardships than women receiving abortions.
- Public assistance programs mitigate the loss of full-time employment for women denied an abortion who then parent the child.
- Households of parenting women were more likely to drop below the poverty level.
- Being denied a wanted abortion is associated with a large increase in the chance that the woman will be raising her children alone, not with family or a male partner.

Violence and women's access to abortion



Roberts SCM, Biggs MA, Chibber KS, Gould H, Rocca CH, Foster DG. Risk of Violence from the Man Involved in the Pregnancy after Receiving or Being Denied an Abortion. BMC Medicine September 2014.

Prevalence of violence among women seeking abortion

- One in twenty women seeking abortion reported physical violence from the man involved in the pregnancy in the six months prior to seeking an abortion.
- One in thirty women reported psychological violence in the previous six months.

Findings on violence from the man involved

- Women who have abortions experience a decrease in physical violence from the man involved in the pregnancy.
- Women who carry to term experience no decrease in physical violence.

Violence and pregnancy

“It is very, very difficult to find a job when you're pregnant, to keep a job when you're pregnant, and to find or maintain a job with a baby especially if your partner ...doesn't want to help. So ... domestic violence skyrockets because you're ... financially dependent on your partner because you have to be home with the kid ... **Pregnancy is an incredibly scary thing especially if you cannot trust the person you're with.**”

What happens to women's children when women receive or are denied a wanted abortion?



Foster , Biggs, Ralph, Roberts, Glymour.
In progress.

Existing children as a reason for abortion

- The majority of women in the U.S. who have abortions are already mothers.
- 45% of mothers give their desire to care for existing children as a reason for terminating a pregnancy.
- N=186 existing children to Near Limit participants;
N=55 to Turnaway Parenting participants

Findings on existing children

- The existing children of women who were denied an abortion compared to children of women who received an abortion
 - Much more likely to be in poverty
 - Lower scores across all six domains of child development ($p < 0.05$).
 - No differences in injuries, caregiving, asthma, residency

Health consequences of receiving or being denied a wanted abortion

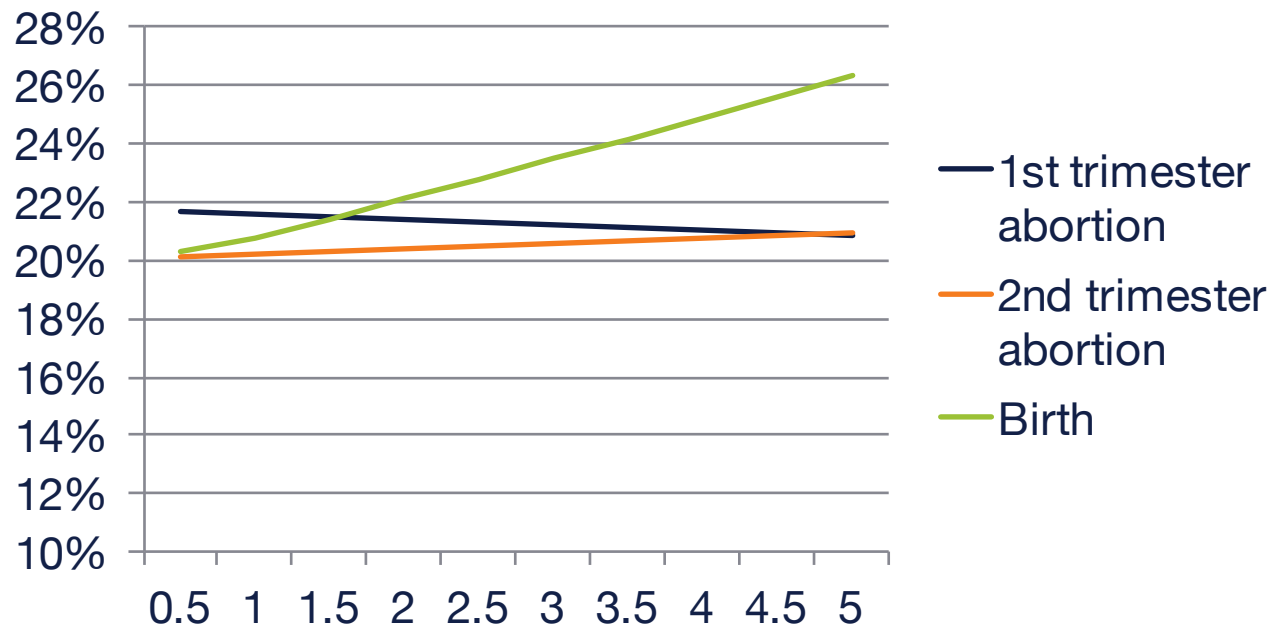


Gerdtz C, Dobkin L, Foster DG, Schwarz EB. Side Effects, Physical Health Consequences, and Mortality Associated with Abortion and Birth after an Unwanted Pregnancy. *Womens Health Issues*. 2016 Jan-Feb; 26(1):55-9.

Ralph, L et al. Long term physical health consequences of receiving or being denied a wanted abortion. In progress

Short and long term health consequences

- One maternal death within days of childbirth from an infection.
- More likely to report fair or poor health if denied an abortion compared to receiving one over five years.



Implications of the Turnaway Study

- Abortion does not hurt women.
- Carrying an unwanted pregnancy to term is associated with multiple hardships and risk.
- There are measurable benefits to children when their mothers have access to abortion.
- Women can make decisions that are right for themselves and their families.

Acknowledgements

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Questions or Comments?

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Children born following an unwanted pregnancy

- Comparing 146 children born to Turnaway women to 186 children born to Near Limit women's subsequent pregnancy
 - No differences in birth outcomes.
 - Lower maternal bonding scores.
 - Less likely to have a male partner involved in raising the child.