

Privacy and Safety Experiences and Concerns of U.S. Women Using Generative AI for Seeking Sexual and Reproductive Health Information

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Privacy and Public Policy Conference 2026

Motivation & Context

- Generative AI (GenAI) chatbots are increasingly used for **health information seeking**
- Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information is highly **sensitive**, often **stigmatised** or **criminalised**
- After the overturning of **Roe v. Wade** in the US, access to reliable SRH information has become more politically charged

Gaps in Existing Research

Current Research

- Most GenAI research is **model-centred** and focused on accuracy, bias, or performance

Research Gaps

- Less attention to **user** experiences, privacy perceptions, and safety concerns in sensitive domains like SRH

Research Questions



RQ1. What factors facilitate or hinder the adoption of GenAI chatbots for SRH information seeking?

RQ2. What are users' beliefs about GenAI data practices?

RQ3. What privacy and safety risks do users perceive? How do these risk perceptions differ across states and SRH topics?

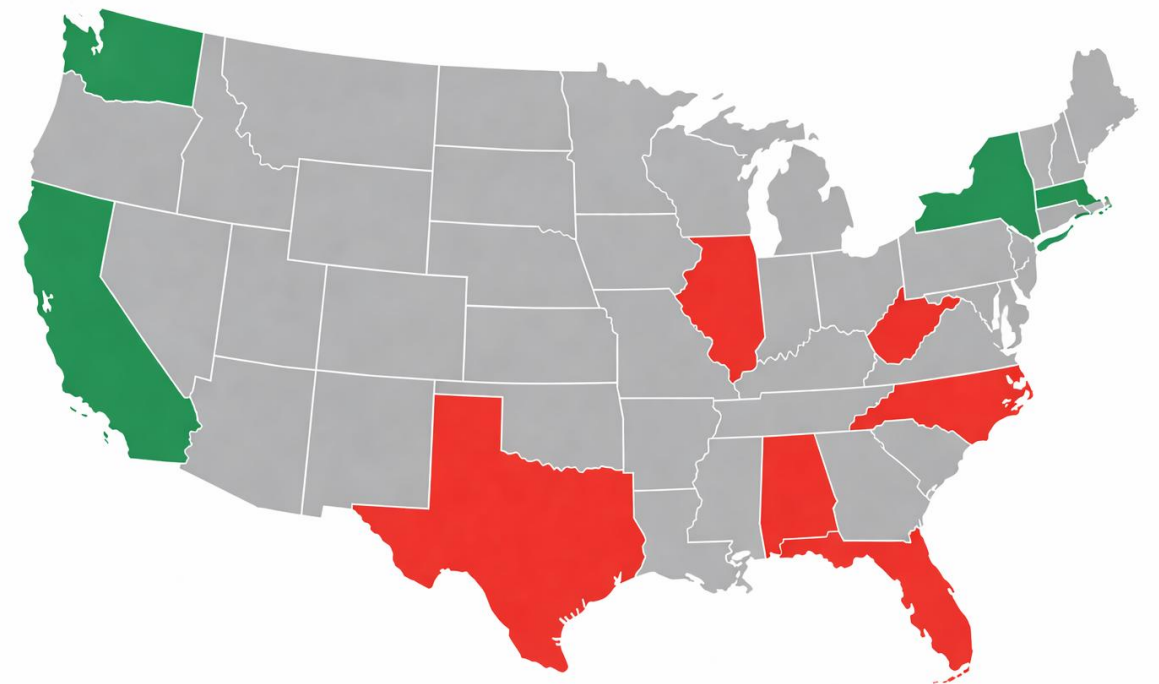
RQ4. What strategies do users employ (or would consider employing) to protect against these risks, and how can GenAI chatbots be improved to better safeguard users seeking SRH information?

Methodology

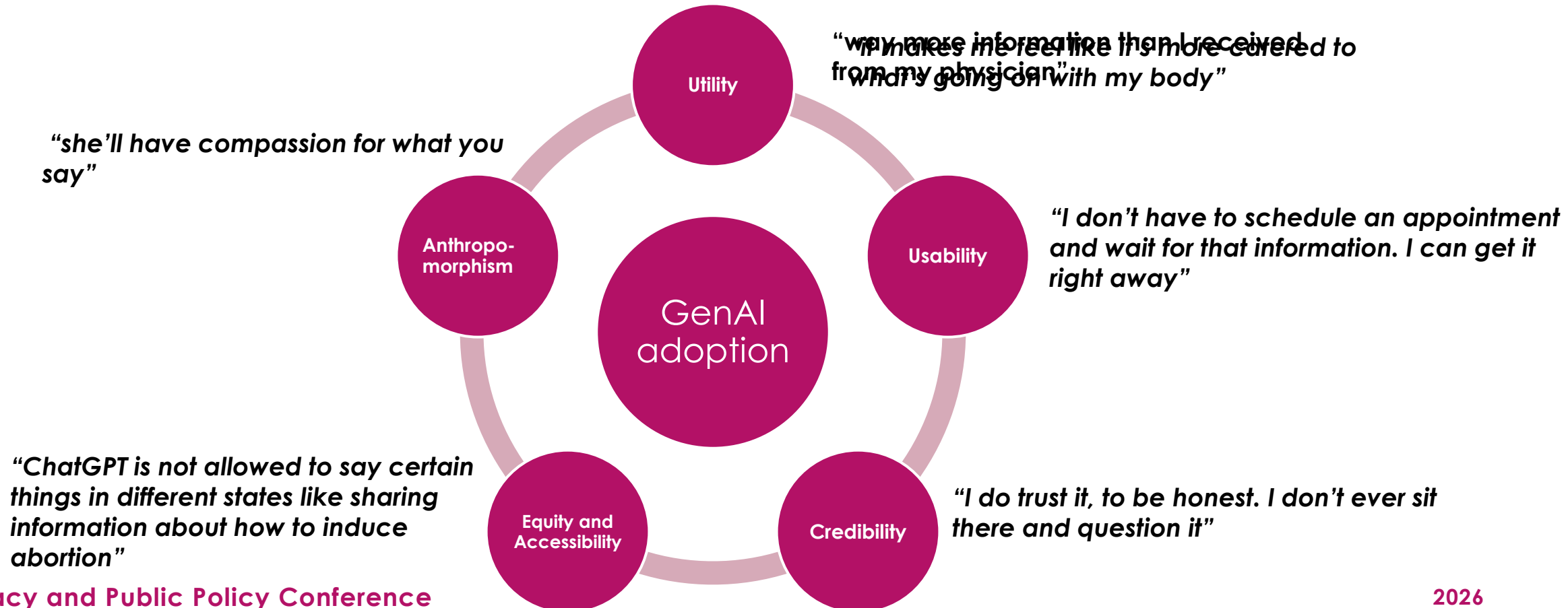


Methodology

- 9 participants were from abortion non-restrictive states (Washington, Virginia, New York, Ohio, Massachusetts, or California).
- 9 participants were from abortion restrictive (Alabama, Texas, West Virginia, Texas, Tennessee, or Indiana.).



Why Participants Used GenAI



Disclosure of Sensitive Information

Many participants shared personal SRH information related to:

Menstrual health and fertility

Perimenopause

Contraception

Pregnancy

Hormonal health

Breast health

Sexual health

Abortion

Disclosure of Sensitive Information

“ChatGPT is like a whole another level of that, where you can literally dump your sub-conscious (...) People really use it in a very intimate way”

Perceived Privacy Risks

Participants identified multiple privacy concerns:

Excessive data collection

Use of conversations for **model training**

Data selling to third parties

Profiling based on sensitive SRH information

Potential **access/surveillance** by government or law enforcement

Lack of **regulatory protections**

"I don't have a lot of personal conversations"

"I think that the data from Google Gemini is saved and used to generate other results."

and they show you an ad about getting STD tested, that's a little off-putting."

"If you're in a state in the US where abortions are effectively outlawed"

"ChatGPT is not bound to any HIPAA laws or any health privacy laws. So, you have to assume that those data are just now out for consumption."

Heightened Safety Concerns Around Abortion

- **Abortion**-related queries triggered significantly higher concern due to fear of government access, intimate surveillance, and criminalisation. Participants in restrictive states were especially cautious.
- Other sensitive topics included **sexually transmitted infections**, **endometriosis**, and **sexual orientation and gender identity**-related information due to fear of stigmatisation and criminalisation.

Protective Behaviours

Common strategies

- Data minimisation/avoidance
- Deleting chat histories

Rarely mentioned:

- External privacy-preserving tools (e.g., VPN)
- Separating accounts
- Incognito browsers
- Engaging with privacy settings

Key Takeaways

- GenAI chatbots are perceived as **riskier** than period-tracking apps, social media, search engines, and healthcare providers. Users often **disclose sensitive information** due to:
 - Anthropomorphism
 - Interactivity
 - Personalisation
- Privacy risks are recognised but frequently **tolerated due to the utility**
- **Abortion**-related topics remain uniquely **sensitive** and **concerning** for participants
- Protective measures are **insufficient**

Design & Policy Implications

Public awareness and involvement

- Educational/training programs for improving GenAI literacy targeting both users and clinicians
- Co-design workshops as part of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach

Privacy by design

- Conservative filtering
- Opt-outs of model training by default
- Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF);
- Advancing machine-unlearning techniques and auditing tools to ensure data deletion

Interactive privacy

- Explicit consents during sensitive conversations in real-time
- Gentle discouragement of oversharing personal information
- Safety warnings
- Reminders about available privacy settings
- Redirection to trusted resources

Improved transparency

- Explainable AI (XAI) approaches such as open-source models
- Data visualisations, alerts, and privacy nudges

GenAI regulations

- Dedicated “Health” models to comply with medical privacy laws
- Strict local data controls for healthcare providers
- Co-regulation between regulatory agencies and the industry

Thank you

Questions?