

# The Silent Enemy: Impact of Misinformation on Women's Health

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## INTRODUCTION

- Women spend 25% more of their lives in poor health than men, losing up to 75 million life-years annually due to gender disparities in care and information.
- In a digital age, health information is more accessible but also more dangerous.
- Misinformation and disinformation act as psychological violence, eroding women's autonomy and trust in medical systems.
- Algorithms curate emotionally charged misinformation, and influencers without medical expertise often promote unregulated health products.
- This misinformation affects reproductive decisions to chronic health management, with social media serving as both a source of empowerment and harm.
- Pregnant individuals, menopausal women, and those with chronic conditions are disproportionately impacted.

## OBJECTIVE

- To critically examine how misinformation and disinformation affect the physical, mental, and social well-being of women and girls in relation to sexual and reproductive health, and to propose strategic interventions for healthcare professionals and policymakers.

## METHODS

- A literature review of recent publications from National and International organizations, as well as academic literature, was conducted.
- Case studies were compiled on TikTok, Reddit, and influencer-driven online platforms.
- A thematic review was performed to identify key themes.
- Global trends and demographics related to digital literacy were also examined.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Distrust in healthcare is rising, fueled by negative social media.
- Misinformation threatens public health, equity, and economic productivity.
- Menstruation and menopause myths drive stigma and reduce care-seeking.
- Online groups can provide peer support but often lack expert moderation.
- Social media influencers—often unqualified—exploit trust and spread false claims.
- Generative AI and deepfakes enhance credibility of false narratives.
- TikTok and similar platforms have amplified harmful health narratives.
- Algorithms promote sensational content, reinforcing confirmation bias and emotional reactivity.

Figure 1: Common Areas of Misinformation

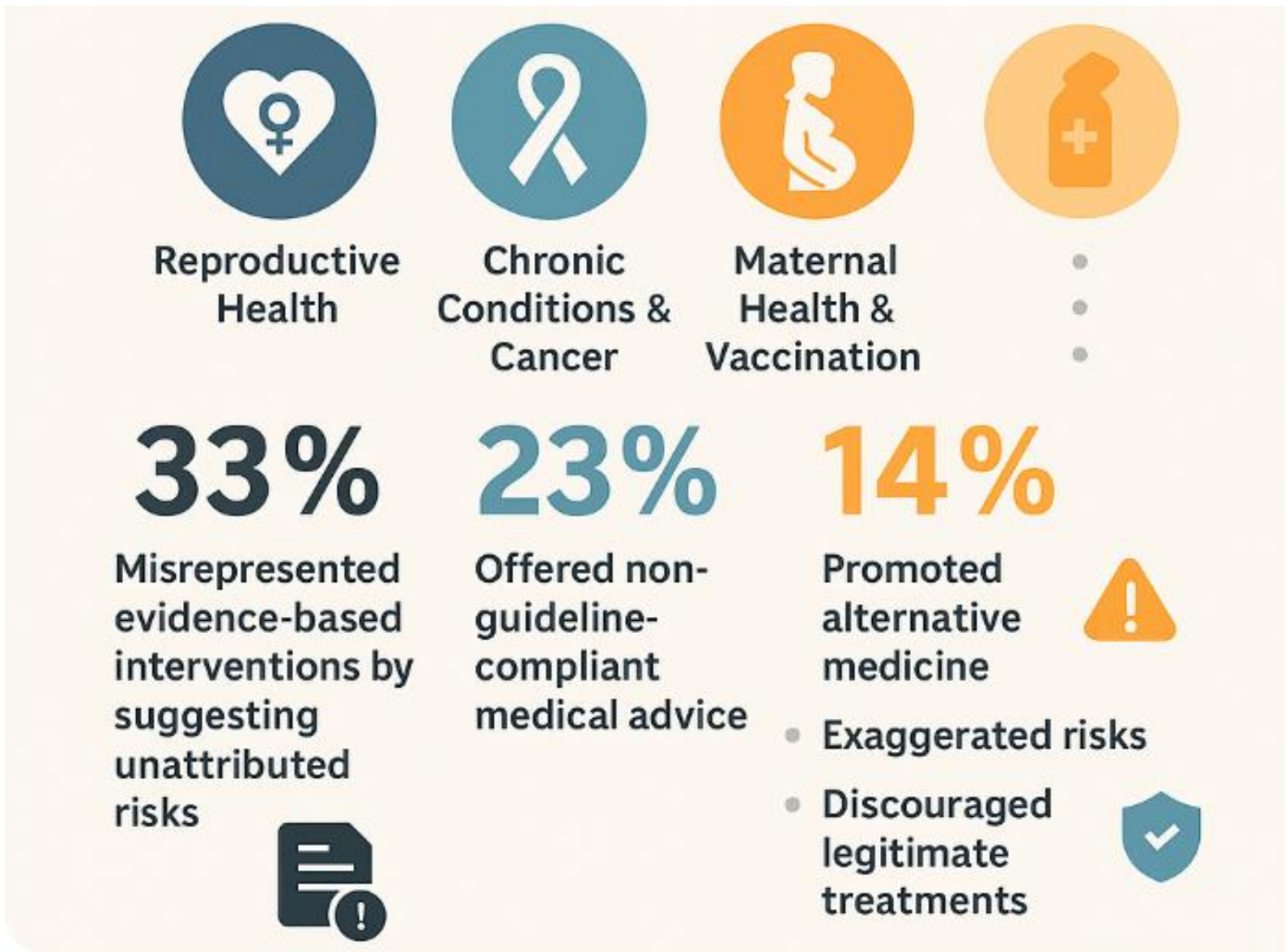


Figure 2: Impact of Misinformation on Health

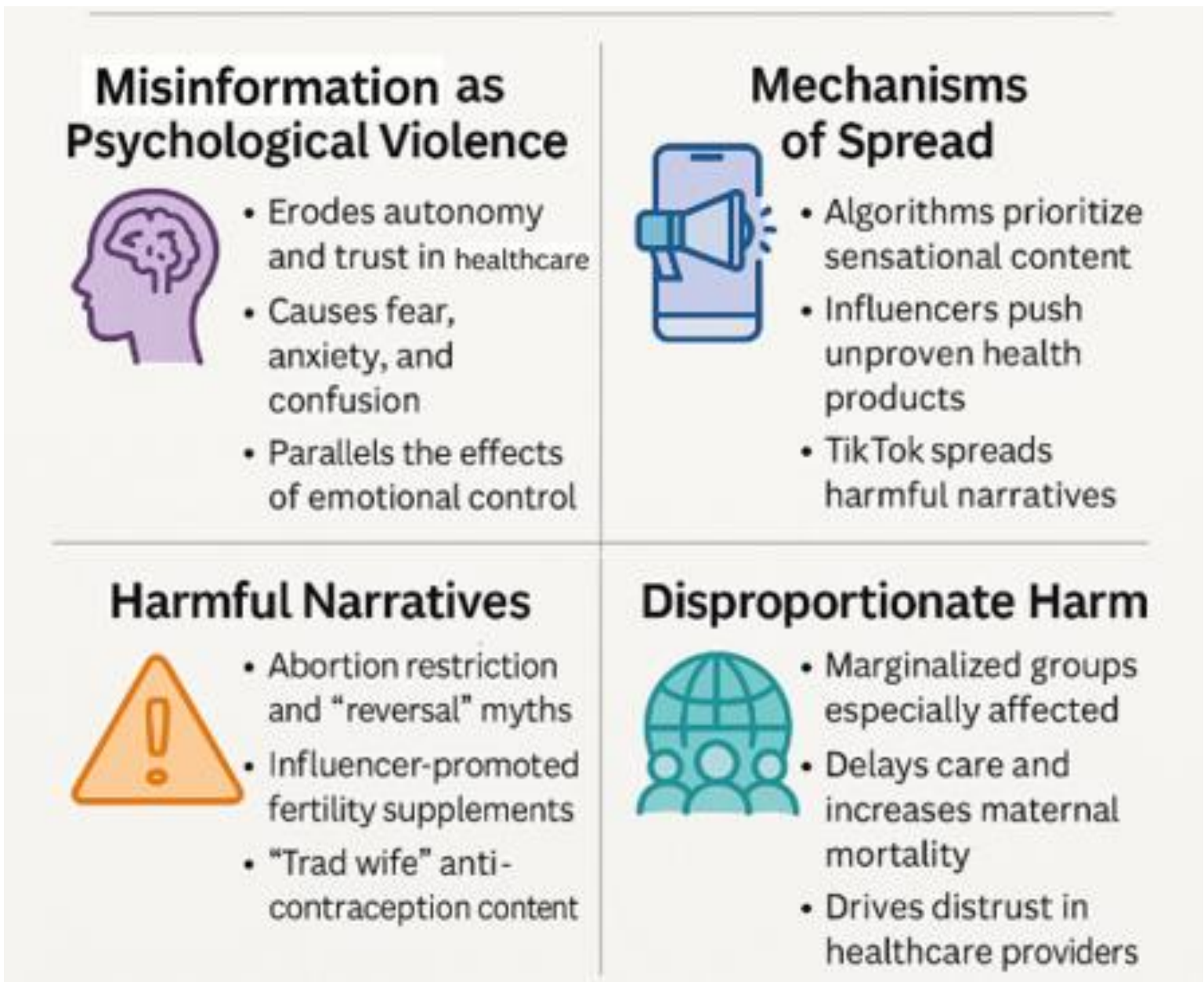


Table 1. Thematic Analysis of Misinformation in Women’s Health

| Theme                                         | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Impact                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Psychological and Emotional Distress          | Misinformation is consistently linked to emotional tolls.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Anxiety, fear, and confusion regarding reproductive decisions. Emotional manipulation akin to psychological abuse. Undermining trust in medical professionals, leading to disengagement from healthcare. |
| Disrupted Decision-Making and Health Autonomy | False narratives impair women’s ability to make informed decisions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | IUD myths, abortion “reversal” misinformation, and fertility treatment misconceptions. Social media influencers often promote unapproved treatments or anti-science narratives.                          |
| Health Disparities and Social Inequities      | Vulnerable groups—especially women of color, low-income populations, and adolescents—are most affected.                                                                                                                                                                                          | Less access to credible information sources. Greater exposure to culturally targeted disinformation (e.g., anti-vax, anti-contraceptive ideologies).                                                     |
| Reproductive Health Misinformation            | Myths about fertility products ("Baby Mama" supplements), IVF alternatives, cycle-tracking apps. Viral content falsely describing contraception side effects and miscarriage treatments. Medically inaccurate information in 30% of tweets about gynaecological cancer prevention and treatment. | Unplanned pregnancies, significant spending on ineffective “treatments”, poor outcomes, increased abortions.                                                                                             |
| Crisis Pregnancy and Abortion Narratives      | “Abortion pill reversal” and misinformation around abortion legality and safety have surged post-Roe. Disinformation is often politically or ideologically driven.                                                                                                                               | Post-op care, tubal ligation access.                                                                                                                                                                     |

## SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

- Delayed care for ectopic pregnancies and miscarriage due to online misinformation.
- TikTok-driven IUD skepticism (471M+ views), mostly negative and inaccurate.
- False abortion "reversal" information post-Roe v. Wade linked to care delays and increased maternal mortality.
- COVID-19 vaccine myths during pregnancy contributed to preventable maternal deaths.
- Influencer-endorsed fertility products (e.g., "Baby Mama" gummies) lack regulation and evidence.
- Menopause misinformation encourages unproven supplements over evidence-based therapies like HRT.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Misinformation is not just a digital nuisance—it's a public health threat. Combating it requires:

- 1. Public and Policy-Level Action**
  - Integrate digital and media literacy training as a core life skill.
  - Teach girls and women how algorithms influence online exposure.
  - Enforce regulation of AI generated content and mandatory transparency in influencer marketing.
  - Pass evidence-based legislation that counteracts misinformation.
  - Flag or restrict unverified content, especially targeting youth.
- 2. Clinical and Professional Engagement**
  - Clinicians must engage on social media to share culturally sensitive, science-based content.
  - Provide empathetic, evidence-based communication to rebuild trust.
  - Create accessible educational content using modern channels (e.g., podcasts, Q&As, videos).

## CONCLUSIONS

- Misinformation and disinformation mimic psychological abuse, using emotional manipulation to control narratives.
- Misinformation distorts facts and erodes trust in medicine and disproportionately affects women’s decision-making autonomy.
- Trends such as “Trad wife” and “natural wellness” narratives promote curated but harmful health ideals.
- Digital literacy education and algorithm transparency are critical public health needs.
- Healthcare providers must address information gaps by staying informed and sharing evidence-based, culturally safe content.
- The future of women’s health depends on equitable access to scientific, culturally safe, and timely information.