

Induced Abortion Worldwide

SEX AND FERTILITY

- An estimated 1.38 billion women in the world are of child-bearing age (15–44). During most of their childbearing years, women are sexually active but do not want to have a child.
- Initiation of sexual intercourse—as part of or apart from marriage—by age 20 is common. 77% of women in developed countries have had intercourse by age 20, compared with 83% in Sub-Saharan Africa and 56% in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- In many countries, couples have more children than they desire—or have a child at a time that they do not want one. For example, in Kenya, the average woman has 6 children, and the desired family size is 4; Bangladeshi women desire 3 children but have, on average, 4.

UNPLANNED PREGNANCIES

- Worldwide, more than a quarter of women who become pregnant have either an abortion or an unwanted birth.
- In developed countries (where average desired family size is small), of the 28 million pregnancies occurring every year, an estimated 49% are unplanned,

and 36% end in abortion.

- In developing countries (where average desired family size is larger), of the 182 million pregnancies occurring every year, an estimated 36% are unplanned, and 20% end in abortion.

ABORTION INCIDENCE

- The reasons women give for choosing to have an abortion include that they have had all the children they want, they want to delay their next birth, they are too young or too poor to raise a child, they are estranged from or on uneasy terms with their sexual partner, and they do not want a child while they are in school or working.
- 46 million women around the world have abortions each year. Of these women, 78% live in developing countries and 22% in developed countries.
- About 11% of all women having abortions live in Africa, 58% in Asia and 9% in Latin America and the Caribbean. The remainder live in Europe (17%) and elsewhere in the developed world (5%).
- For every 1,000 women of childbearing age, 35 are estimated to have an induced abortion each year.

• Overall, women in developed and developing regions have strikingly similar abortion levels—39 procedures per 1,000 women and 34 per 1,000, respectively.

• Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland have abortion rates below 10 per 1,000 women of reproductive age; in all other countries of Western Europe and in the United States and Canada, rates are 10–23 per 1,000.

• Romania, Cuba and Vietnam have the highest reported abortion rates in the world (78–83 abortions per 1,000 women). Rates are also above 50 per 1,000 in Chile and Peru.

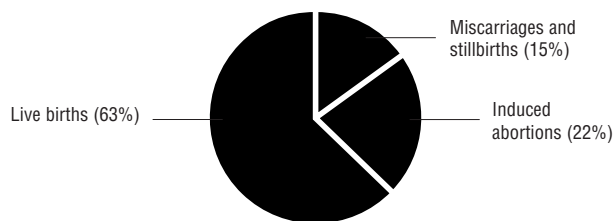
• Worldwide, the lifetime average is about 1 abortion per woman.

ABORTION LAW

- About 26 million women have legal abortions each year, and 20 million have abortions in countries where abortion is restricted or prohibited by law.
- In much of the world, liberalization of abortion laws occurred rapidly between 1950 and 1985. By early 1986, 36 countries had liberal abortion laws, permitting women to obtain the procedure for social or medical reasons or without regard to reason.
- Between 1985 and 1997, 10 developed and 9 developing countries with populations of more than 1 million eased restrictions on abortion.
- 39% of the world's women live under restrictive abortion laws: 25% in parts of the world where abortion is permitted only to save a woman's life or is prohib-

Worldwide Pregnancies

More than a third of pregnancies do not end in the birth of a baby.

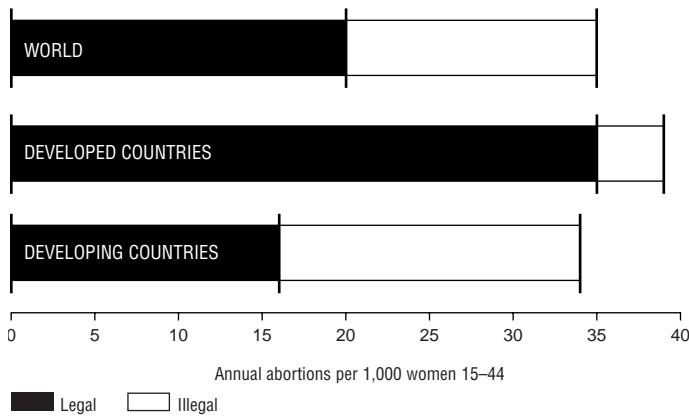


210 million pregnancies, 1999 (projected)



Abortion Rates

Whether a woman lives in a developed or a developing country, her likelihood of having an abortion is much the same.



ited altogether, 10% where abortion is allowed only when it is necessary to protect a woman's physical health or her life, and 4% in places where abortion is permitted only for these reasons or to protect a woman's mental health.

- 61% of the world's women live in parts of the world that permit abortion to protect a woman's life or her physical or mental health, for socioeconomic reasons or without regard as to reason (at least during the early months of pregnancy).

- In the 55 countries where abortion is permitted on broad grounds, the law usually stipulates some conditions, such as gestational limits, consent requirements, counseling and waiting periods, and restrictions on where and by whom abortions may be performed.

SAFE VS. UNSAFE CONDITIONS

- Abortion mortality is low in developed countries, where the procedure is usually legal (0.2–1.2 deaths per 100,000 abortions). But in developing regions (excluding China), where abortion is often illegal or highly restricted, abortion mortality is hundreds of times

higher than in developed countries (330 deaths per 100,000 abortions).

- Within the first 12 weeks of gestation, when most terminations are carried out, vacuum aspiration is the most commonly used method in the developed world. At later stages of pregnancy, dilation and evacuation and medical induction are commonly used.

- The World Health Organization defines "unsafe abortion" as a "procedure for terminating an unwanted pregnancy [carried out] either by a person lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking minimal medical standards, or both." It estimates that almost 20 million unsafe abortions occur each year—19 million in developing countries and the remainder mostly in Eastern Europe.

- In developing countries with restrictive laws, wealthier women seek abortions primarily from physicians, but millions of poor women attempt to end their pregnancies by unsafe means.

- Unsafe and often ineffective methods include taking various drugs or caustic substances by mouth; inserting objects into the vagina or

flushing the vagina with caustic liquids; and having the abdomen massaged vigorously by women who are trained in this procedure.

- About one-third of women undergoing unsafe abortions experience serious complications, but fewer than half of these women receive hospital treatment.

- Of the estimated 600,000 annual pregnancy-related deaths worldwide, about 13% (or 78,000) are related to complications of unsafe abortion.

- Mortality due to abortion is highest in Africa—an estimated 680 deaths per 100,000 procedures.

PREVENTING UNPLANNED PREGNANCIES

- The average woman must use some form of effective contraception for at least 20 years if she wants to limit her family size to 2 children, 16 years if she wants 4 children.

- Globally, 58% of married women are practicing contraception. About 65–80% use a method in developed regions, Latin America and the Caribbean, and East Asia; 42% in the rest of Asia; and only 20% in Africa.

- Nearly 230 million women worldwide—roughly 1 in 6 women of reproductive age—are in need of effective birth control methods.

- In 8 developing countries that have information on contraceptive behavior among sexually active, unmarried women, between one-third and two-thirds are not using any contraceptive method; a further 10–40% are using a traditional method with a high failure rate, predominantly periodic abstinence.

- U.S. data illustrate how contraception can reduce abor-

tion. Women using a method of contraception are only 15% as likely as women using no method to have an abortion.

SOURCES

The data in this fact sheet are the most current available. Most of the data are from research conducted by The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) and published in *Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide; Hopes and Realities: Closing the Gap Between Women's Aspirations and Their Reproductive Experiences; Into a New World: Young Women's Sexual and Reproductive Lives; Induced Abortion: A World Review, 1986*, sixth ed.; and the peer-reviewed journal *Family Planning Perspectives*. An additional source is the United Nations Population Division.



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