



# Fast Facts on Abortion and Reproductive Health

## Around the world...

- The number of induced abortions declined worldwide between 1995 and 2003, from nearly 46 million to approximately 42 million. About one in five pregnancies worldwide end in abortion.
- For every 1,000 women of childbearing age (15-44) worldwide, 29 were estimated to have had an induced abortion in 2003, compared with 35 in 1995.
- The decline in abortion incidence was greater in developed countries, where nearly all abortions are safe and legal (from 39 to 26 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44), than in developing countries, where more than half are unsafe and illegal (from 34 to 29).
- Most abortions occur in developing countries — 35 million annually, compared with 7 million in developed countries — a disparity that largely reflects the relative population distribution.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) defines unsafe abortion as a procedure for terminating an unintended pregnancy carried out either by persons lacking the necessary skills, or in an environment that does not conform to minimal medical standards, or both.
- Worldwide, 48 percent of all induced abortions are unsafe. However, in developed regions, nearly all abortions (92 percent) are safe, whereas in developing countries, more than half (55 percent) are unsafe.
- The worldwide unsafe abortion rate was essentially unchanged between 1995 and 2003 (15 and 14 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44, respectively). Because the overall abortion rate declined during this period, the proportion of all abortions that are unsafe increased from 44 percent to 47 percent.
- Worldwide, an estimated 5 million women are hospitalized each year for treatment of abortion-related complications, such as hemorrhage and sepsis.
- Complications due to unsafe abortion procedures account for an estimated 13 percent of maternal deaths worldwide, or 67,000 per year.

- Almost all abortion-related deaths occur in developing countries. They are highest in Africa, where there were an estimated 650 deaths per 100,000 unsafe abortions in 2003, compared with 10 per 100,000 in developed regions.
- Additional consequences of unsafe abortion include loss of productivity, economic burden on public health systems, stigma and long-term health problems, such as infertility.

Reference: Guttmacher Institute. 2007. In brief: Facts on induced abortion worldwide. Geneva, World Health Organization. Available online at [http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/unsafe\\_abortion/induced\\_abortion\\_worldwide.pdf](http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/unsafe_abortion/induced_abortion_worldwide.pdf).

## Young people

- Two-thirds of unsafe abortions occur among women aged between 15 and 30 years.
- 14 percent (2.5 million) of all unsafe abortions in developing countries occur among women under 20 years of age.
- In Africa: 60 percent of unsafe abortions are among women under 25 years of age.
- In Asia: 30 percent of unsafe abortions are among women under 25 years of age.
- In Latin America and the Caribbean: 70 percent of all abortions are among women under 30 years of age.
- Approximately 220,000 children worldwide lose their mothers every year from abortion-related deaths.

Reference: World Health Organization. 2007. Unsafe abortion: Global and regional estimates of incidence of unsafe abortion and associated mortality in 2003. Geneva, World Health Organization. Available online at [http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/publications/unsafeabortion\\_2003/ua\\_estimates03.pdf](http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/publications/unsafeabortion_2003/ua_estimates03.pdf)

## HIV/AIDS

- Young people are disproportionately affected by the HIV pandemic: more than one-half of new infections worldwide are among youth aged 15 to 24. Every 15 seconds another young person is infected, with young women being especially vulnerable.
- Of the 1.5 billion young people worldwide, 11.8 million are estimated to be living with HIV at the end of 2003. Every day, between 5,000 and 6,000 young people (between the ages of 15 and 24) contract HIV. Altogether, about 40 per cent of new HIV infections are among young people. This age group also has the highest rates (over 500,000 infections daily) of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), not including HIV.

Reference: United Nations Population Fund. 2008. Young people: The greatest hope for turning the tide. New York, United Nations Population Fund. Available online at <http://www.unfpa.org/hiv/people.htm>.

## Violence

- Younger women and adolescent girls are especially vulnerable to gender-based violence.
- Nearly 50 percent of all sexual assaults worldwide are against girls 15 years of age or younger.
- High numbers of young women report that their first sexual experience was coerced.
- In the Caribbean, an estimated 48 percent of young women report a coerced first sexual experience. Studies in Jamaica, Mali, Tanzania and Zimbabwe found that between 20 and 30 percent of adolescent girls had experienced sexual violence.
- Forced sexual relations are especially likely within the context of child marriage.
- In Burundi, the UNFPA-supported nongovernmental organization (NGO) centers that offer support to victims of sexual violence found that 88 percent of the women seeking care in 2004 were young women.
- In Thailand, intimate partner violence is a leading cause of death for women and girls between the ages of 15 and 24.
- Sexual coercion is now considered a significant factor in the continuing rise of HIV among young women.

Reference: United Nations Population Fund. 2005. Adolescents fact sheet. New York, United Nations Population Fund. Available online at [http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts\\_adolescents.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2005/presskit/factsheets/facts_adolescents.htm).

## Regionally

- More than 95 percent of abortions in Africa and Latin America are performed under unsafe circumstances, as are about 60 percent of abortions in Asia (excluding Eastern Asia).
- The most dramatic decline in abortion incidence occurred in Eastern Europe, a region where, for the most part, abortion is legal and safe: the rate (number of abortions per 1,000 women between 15-44 years of age) fell from 90 to 44. The decrease coincided with substantial increases in contraceptive use in the region.

- Although abortion rates and ratios (the number of abortions for every 100 births) in Eastern Europe have fallen significantly in recent years, they remain higher than in any other region. In 2003, there were more abortions than births in that region (105 abortions for every 100 births).
- The estimated number of induced abortions in Africa has increased since 1995; however, the region's abortion rate has declined because of an increase in the number of women of reproductive age.
- Induced abortion rates and numbers in Asia and Latin America show modest declines since 1995.
- The lowest abortion rate (number of abortions per 1,000 women between 15-44 years of age) in the world is in Western Europe (12 per 1,000 women aged 15-44). The rate is 17 in Northern Europe and 21 in North America (Canada and the U.S.).
- Because the world's population is concentrated in Asia, most abortions occur there (26 million yearly); 9 million of these take place in China.

Reference: Guttmacher Institute. 2007. In brief: Facts on induced abortion worldwide. Geneva, World Health Organization. Available online at [http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/unsafe\\_abortion/induced\\_abortion\\_worldwide.pdf](http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/unsafe_abortion/induced_abortion_worldwide.pdf).

## In the United States

- Nearly one half of all pregnancies in the U.S. are unintended; four in 10 of these end in abortion.
- About one-half of American women have experienced an unintended pregnancy, and at current rates more than one-third (35 percent) will have had an abortion by age 45.
- Overall unintended pregnancy rates have stagnated over the past decade, yet unintended pregnancy increased by 29 percent among poor women while decreasing 20 percent among higher-income women.
- In 2005, 1.21 million abortions were performed, down from 1.31 million abortions in 2000.
- Nine in 10 abortions occur in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.
- A broad cross section of U.S. women have abortions:
  - 56 percent of women having abortions are in their 20s
  - 61 percent have one or more children
  - 67 percent have never been married
  - 57 percent are economically disadvantaged
  - 88 percent live in a metropolitan area
  - 78 percent report a religious affiliation

Reference: Guttmacher Institute. 2008. An overview of abortion in the United States. New York, Guttmacher Institute. Available online at <http://www.guttmacher.org/media/presskits/2005/06/28/abortionoverview.html>.