

Abortion

Background

On January 22, 1973, the United States Supreme Court legalized abortion “on demand” throughout the entire nine months of pregnancy. The *Roe v. Wade* decision struck down abortion restrictions in every state.

Later, the *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* decision discarded the strict trimester formula of *Roe v. Wade* in favor of the current “viability” standard. Justice O’Connor’s plurality opinion held that viability is the point where the “independent existence of a second life can ... be the object of state protection that ... overrides the rights of the woman [to have an abortion].”^{vi} Over the last four decades, the U.S. has become the worldwide leader in abortion.

Incidence of Abortion in Alabama

- In 2009, there were an estimated 85,313 pregnancies in Alabama; about 89.8 per 1,000 females age 15-44. Of these, 62,476 (73 percent) resulted in births; 13,445 (16 percent) died before birth; and 9,392 (11 percent) were aborted.ⁱⁱ
- In 2009, there was approximately one abortion for every 5.7 live births in Alabama. Of the 10,882 abortions performed, 17 percent (1,874) were for women ages 10-19; 59 percent (6,427) were for women ages 20-29; 22 percent (2,345) were for women ages 30-39; and 2 percent (236) were for women ages 40 and older.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Of the abortions performed in Alabama, 88.5 percent (9,664) were for unmarried women, which is higher than the national average (82.8 percent).^{iv}
- While the exact number of abortions performed in Alabama prior to their legalization in 1973 is unknown, more than 505,000 abortions have been performed since the *Roe v. Wade* decision.^v This total

ISSUE SNAPSHOT

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- Alabama’s abortion rate among women ages 15-44 was 11.5 per 1,000 population, the eighteenth lowest in the nation and well below the national average of 19.4. Alabama’s abortion rate was also lower than that of its neighboring states: Florida (24.7); Georgia (16.0); Mississippi (12.9); and Tennessee (12.4).^{vii}

Incidence of Abortion in the U.S.

- Nationwide, nearly 50 million legal abortions were performed from 1973 to 2008.^{viii}
- Twenty-two percent of all pregnancies in the U.S.—excluding miscarriages—end in abortion. In 2008—the most recent year for which national data are available—1.21 million abortions were performed, down from 1.31 million in 2000.^{ix} Put another way, abortion claimed about 3,315 babies per day, 138 children per hour, or about two children per minute.

GUIDE TO THE ISSUES

- Nearly half—49 percent—of all pregnancies in the United States are unplanned, and four in 10 of these unplanned pregnancies end in abortion.^x

Who Has Abortions?

- Each year, two percent of women aged 15-44 have an abortion^{xi}; half have had at least one previous abortion.^{xii} At least half of American women will experience an unintended pregnancy by age 45,^{xiii} and, at current rates, about one-third will have an abortion.^{xiv}
- Forty percent of pregnancies among white women, 69% among blacks and 54% among Hispanics are unintended.^{xv} Conversely, 30 percent of abortions occur to non-Hispanic black women, 36 percent to non-Hispanic white women, 25 percent to Hispanic women and nine percent to women of other races.^{xvi}
- Women in their twenties account for 59 percent of all abortions. By comparison, teenagers account for about 17 percent of all abortions.^{xvii}
- Thirty-seven percent of women who have had abortions identify themselves as Protestant, while 28 percent identify themselves as Catholic.^{xviii}
- Forty-five percent of all abortions are obtained by women who have never married and are not cohabiting.^{xix}
- Four in ten abortions—42 percent—are obtained by women who fall below the federal poverty level (\$10,830 for a single woman with no children), while 27 percent of women obtaining abortions have incomes between 100-199 percent of the federal poverty level.^{xx}

Why are Abortions Performed?

- On average, 75 percent say that having a baby would interfere with work, school or other responsibilities; three-fourths also say that they cannot afford a child; and half say they do not want to be a single parent or are having problems with their husband or partner.^{xxi}
- Fifty-four percent of women who have abortions had used a contraceptive method—usually the pill or a condom—during the month they became pregnant. Eight percent of women who have abortions have

never used a method of birth control; nonuse is greatest among those who are young, poor, black, Hispanic or less educated.^{xxii}

How Safe is Abortion?

- Women who have had abortions are more likely have an ectopic (tubal) pregnancy and twice the risk of sterility. These risks increase as the number of subsequent abortions increase.^{xxiii}
- Abortion may increase the risk of breast cancer. According to a report by the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, women who had had an abortion had a 50 percent greater risk of developing breast cancer before age 45.^{xxiv}
- Of course, death of the mother is the most serious of all complications. Over 200 women have died from legal abortions since 1973. The risk of death increases according to the duration of pregnancy and the complexity of the abortion technique employed.^{xxv}

ⁱ Planned Parenthood of Southeastern PA. v. Casey, 505 U.S. 833 (1992).

ⁱⁱ Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), Center for Health Statistics, "Vital Statistics at a Glance: 2009." October 2010. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/32m47kn>. Access verified May 10, 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ Alabama Center for Health Statistics, Division of Statistical Analysis, "Induced Terminations of Pregnancy Occurring in Alabama, 2009." Available at <http://tinyurl.com/336t129>. Access verified October 13, 2010.

^{iv} *Ibid.* "Abortions by Selected Characteristics: 1990 to 2005." In U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2010* (129th Edition) Washington, DC: 2009. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/ygh9p72>. Access verified May 10, 2011.

^v ADPH, *Alabama Vital Statistics 2008*, and earlier reports.

^{vi} U.S. Census Bureau, "Annual Estimates of the Population for Incorporated Places in Alabama." July 10, 2009. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/3x4daxb>. Access verified May 10, 2011.

^{vii} "Abortions—Number and Rate by State of Occurrence, 2000 and 2005, and Residence, 2005." In *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2010*. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/24tmbv6>. Access verified May 10, 2011.

^{viii} Rachel K. Jones and Kathryn Koistra, "Abortion Incidence and Access to Services in the United States, 2008." *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 2011, vol. 43.1, pp. 41-50. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/3oggn8>. Access verified May 9, 2011.

^{ix} *Ibid.*

^x Lawrence R. Finer and Stanley K. Henshaw, "Disparities in Rates of Unintended Pregnancy in the United States, 1994 and 2001." *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 2006, vol. 38.2, pp. 90-96. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/mlojcp>. Access verified May 9, 2011.

^{xi} Jones and Koistra, "Abortion Incidence and Access to Services in the United States, 2008."

^{xii} Rachel K. Jones, Lawrence B. Finer, and Susheela Singh, "Characteristics of U.S. Abortion Patients 2008." New York: Guttmacher Institute, May 2010. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/64ukbgb>. Access verified May 9, 2011.

^{xiii} Stanley K. Henshaw, "Unintended Pregnancy in the United States." *Family Planning Perspectives*, January/February 1998, vol. 30.1, pp. 24-29, 46. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/6epws7>. Access verified May 9, 2011.

^{xiv} Guttmacher Institute, "State Facts about Abortion: New York, 2011." 2011. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/ozmanc>. Access verified May 9, 2011.

^{xv} Finer and Henshaw, "Disparities in Rates of Unintended Pregnancy in the United States, 1994 and 2001."

^{xvi} Jones, Finer, and Singh, "Characteristics of U.S. Abortion Patients 2008."

^{xvii} *Ibid.*

^{xviii} *Ibid.*

^{xix} *Ibid.*

^{xx} Lawrence B. Finer et al., "Reasons U.S. Women Have Abortions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives." *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, September 2005, vol. 37.3, pp. 110-118. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/4usl95>. Access verified May 9, 2011.

^{xxi} Rachel K. Jones, Jacqueline E. Darroch, and Stanley K. Henshaw, "Contraceptive Use Among U.S. Women Having Abortions in 2000-2001." *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, November/December 2002, vol. 34.6, pp. 294-303. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/437aal3>. Access verified May 9, 2011.

^{xxii} Ann A. Levin et al., "Ectopic Pregnancy and Prior Induced Abortion." *American Journal of Public Health*, March 1982, vol. 72.3, pp. 253-256. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/6j6dd04>. Access verified May 9, 2011; Anastasia Tzonou et al., "Induced Abortions, Miscarriages, and Tobacco Smoking as Risk Factors for Secondary Infertility." *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 1993, vol. 47, p. 36. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/62l8eik>. Access verified May 9, 2011; and Ann A. Levin et al., "Association of Induced Abortion with Subsequent Pregnancy Loss." *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 243, No. 24 (June 27, 1980), pp. 2495-2496, 2498-2499. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/6dx73aj>. Access verified May 9, 2011.

^{xxiii} Janet Daling et al., "Risk of Breast Cancer among Young Women: Relationship to Induced Abortion." *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, November 1994, vol. 86.21, pp. 1584-1592. Available at <http://tinyurl.com/6lwek7s>. Access verified May 9, 2011.

^{xxiv} H. W. Lawson et al., "Abortion Mortality U.S., 1972-1987." *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, November 1994, vol. 171.5, pp. 1365-1352; L. M. Koonin, J. C. Smith, and H. W. Lawson, "Abortion Surveillance—United States, 1989." *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Centers for Disease Control, September 4, 1992, vol. 41.5, pp. 1-33; Jack Pritchard et al., *Williams Obstetrics*, 17th ed. (Norwalk, CT: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1985), p. 484; Warren M. Hern, M.D., *Abortion Practice* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1984), pp. 153-154. See also Centers for Disease Control, *Abortion Surveillance*, 1978, (November 1980); and Christopher Tietze et al., "Maternal mortality associated with legal abortion in New York State: July 1, 1970-June 30, 1972." *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, vol. 43, 1974, p. 315.