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].” 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.
- 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.
- 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).
- 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. This total is double that of Birmingham’s current municipal population of 229,800.

Incidence of Abortion in the U.S.
- Nationwide, nearly 50 million legal abortions were performed from 1973 to 2008.
- 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. This total is double that of Birmingham’s current municipal population of 229,800.
- 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).

Issue Snapshot
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- Nationwide, nearly 50 million legal abortions were performed from 1973 to 2008.
- 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. Put another way, abortion claimed about 3,315 babies per day, 138 children per hour, or about two children per minute.
Who Has Abortions?

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

- Forty-five percent of all abortions are obtained by 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 Catholic.xviii

- Forty-five percent of all abortions are obtained by women who have never married and are not cohabiting.xx

- 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.x

- 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.xiii

How Safe is Abortion?

- Eight percent of women who have had abortions are more likely to have an ectopic (tubal) pregnancy and twice the risk of sterility. These risks increase as the number of subsequent abortions increase.xviii

- 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.xiv

- 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 employedxv

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xix Ibid.


xxi Jones and Kosiner, "Abortion Incidence and Access to Services in the United States, 2008."


xxvii Ibid.

xxviii Ibid.

xxix Ibid.


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Alabama Policy Institute | 402 Office Park Drive, Suite 300, Birmingham, AL 35223 | 205.870.9900 | www.alabamapolicy.org