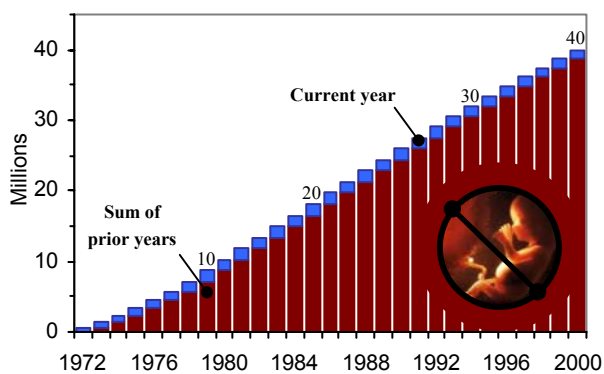


Abortion: America's Staggering Hidden Loss

by
Janice Shaw Crouse

As we arrive at the 32nd anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* decision, which imposed abortion in the United States, we should pause and reflect on the consequences. From 1972 to 2000, abortion in the United States eliminated over 40 million babies -- the equivalent of the combined population of **nine countries**: Sweden (8.9 million), Bulgaria (8.2 million), Denmark (5.4 million), Finland (5.2 million), Norway (4.4 million), Lithuania (3.6 million), Latvia (2.3 million) and Bahrain (0.6 million). Another way of looking at it: The total number is the equivalent of **the entire population of Spain** (40.2 million).

Figure 1. – Cumulative Number of Abortions: 1972–2000



Source: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, "Abortion incidence and services in the United States in 2000," Vol. 35, No. 1, Jan.-Feb. 2003 and earlier reports.

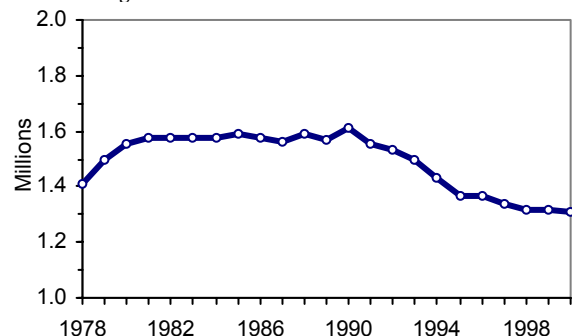
In the wake of the terrible tsunami that struck Southeast Asia, killing over 150,000 people at this writing, authorities note that at least one-third of the dead are children. We should all weep with those who weep for the victims' too-short lives. And should we not also then note with deep sorrow the death toll of over 1 million children lost to abortion *every year* – in our country alone?

There is some hopeful news: The total number of abortions is declining, a decrease that is particularly dramatic among teenagers. However, the number of women having repeat abortions is increasing, as well as the number of women choosing abortion who already have living children.

I. The total number of abortions is declining. After the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*, the number of abortions increased dramatically, and then remained consistently high throughout the 1980s at over 1.55 million abortions annually. Finally, in 1990 the number of annual

abortions reached a high of 1.6 million. The trend then reversed and a significant decline followed throughout the

Figure 2. – Number of Abortions: 1978–2000

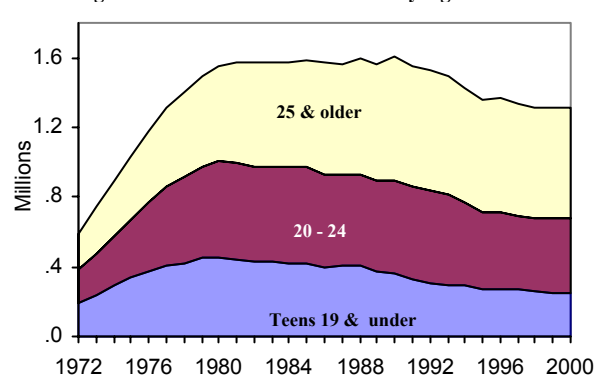


Source: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, "Abortion incidence and services in the United States in 2000," Vol. 35, No. 1, Jan.-Feb. 2003 and earlier reports.

1990s. The total number of abortions declined by nearly 300,000 during that decade (a 19 percent decrease), reaching a new low of 1.31 million in 2000.

II. Teen abortions are declining dramatically; the largest share is accounted for in women 25 and older. People tend to think of abortion as a phenomenon largely related to teenage pregnancy. In fact, young women age 19 and under make up the smallest percentage of abortions. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3. – Number of Abortions by Age: 1972–2000



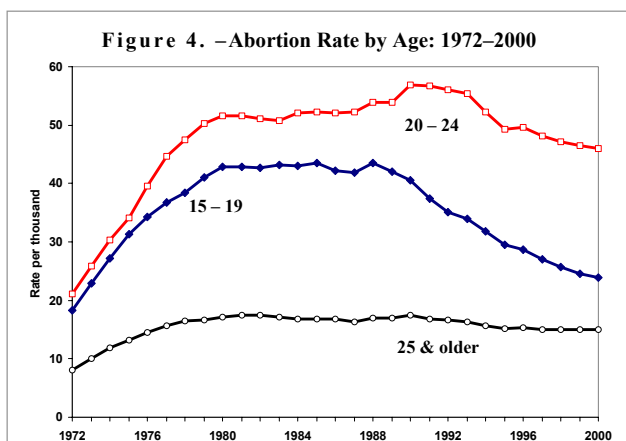
Source: See Figure 2.

Teenage abortions now are less than one-fifth, 19 percent, of the total number. Women over age 20 get 80 percent of all abortions with nearly half (48 percent) going to women age 25 and older.

Looking at the total decrease in abortions over the last decade, 38 percent of the 300,000 decrease in abortions was accounted for by teens (114,000). By comparison, abortions to women 20 to 24 declined by almost 20 percent in the same decade, from 1990 to 2000, but abortions to women 25 and older decreased by only 11 percent.

While the share of abortions accounted for by teens has declined during the last decade, the share of women 20 to 24 has remained fairly stable at about one-third of the total. Abortions to women over 25, however, have risen from 35 percent of the total to more than 48 percent in 2000.

Figure Four illustrates the dramatic decline in the rate of abortions among teenagers. It also clarifies that despite the high numbers of abortions among the over-25 group, the age



Source: Centers for Disease Control, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, "Abortion Surveillance," November 28, 2003, Vol. 52, No. SS-12 and The Alan Guttmacher Institute, *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, "Abortion incidence and services in the United States in 2000," Vol. 35, No. 1, Jan.-Feb. 2003 and earlier reports.

group with the highest rate, by a large margin, is women between the ages of 20 and 24.

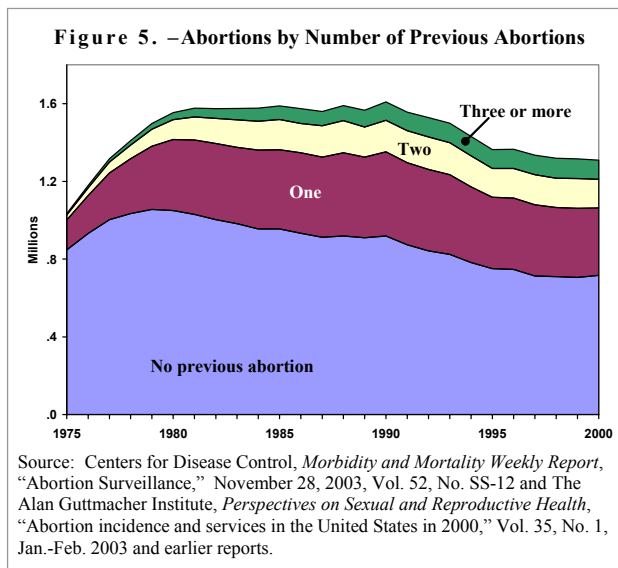
Beginning in 1988, the teen rate and the 20-24 year-old rates diverged abruptly. Teens began seeking fewer abortions while the rate among the older women veered upward. The 20-24 year-old rate trend did eventually reverse itself, but much less rapidly, so that a huge gap has developed between the rates of the two groups.

The teen abortion rate (women 15 to 19) decreased by 43 percent between 1988 and 2000 from 43.5 to 24 per thousand.

The abortion rate for women 20 to 24 remained relatively stable in the '80s. From a peak of 57 per thousand in 1990, their rate declined slowly to 55 per thousand in 1993. Then a sharper rate of decline set in and the 20-to-24-year-old rate dropped to 46 per thousand by 2000.

III. The number of women having repeat abortions is increasing. As time has passed from the imposition of abortion, two related but countervailing trends have emerged. The number of women who choose abortion for the first time has decreased very steadily. However, the number of repeat abortions has been increasing.

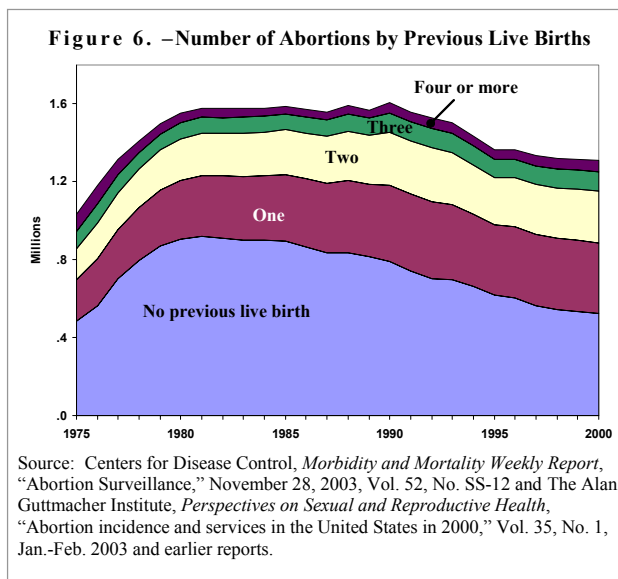
In the early 1980s, about one-third of abortions were performed on women who had previously had an abortion. By the late '90s, more than 45 percent of abortions were being performed



Source: Centers for Disease Control, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, "Abortion Surveillance," November 28, 2003, Vol. 52, No. SS-12 and The Alan Guttmacher Institute, *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, "Abortion incidence and services in the United States in 2000," Vol. 35, No. 1, Jan.-Feb. 2003 and earlier reports.

on women who had had previous ones. More than two-thirds of the decrease in the number of abortions from 1990 to 2000 was accounted for by those women who had not previously had an abortion.

IV. Abortions being performed on women who have previously had a live birth are increasing. From less than 42 percent in 1980, the share of abortions accounted for by women with children increased to 60 percent of the total by 2000. Women who had not previously had a live birth accounted for 90 percent of the decline in the number of abortions from



Source: Centers for Disease Control, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, "Abortion Surveillance," November 28, 2003, Vol. 52, No. SS-12 and The Alan Guttmacher Institute, *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, "Abortion incidence and services in the United States in 2000," Vol. 35, No. 1, Jan.-Feb. 2003 and earlier reports.

1990 to 2000, even though this category accounted for less than half of all abortions in 1990. To put it another way: Women aborting their first pregnancy now account for only 40 percent of all abortions.

Four times as many unmarried women choose to have an abortion as do married women. A final encouraging note: The abortion rates of both groups declined by more than 25 percent during the decade of the 1990s.