

Incidence and Recent Trends in Legal Abortion Worldwide

Gilda Sedgh
Susheela Singh
Akinrinola Bankole
Joanna Drescher

Abortion incidence is an important demographic and public health indicator, yet the quality of data on abortion can be problematic even in countries where the procedure is legal. Using data from government statistics, nationally-representative surveys and other data collection systems, we present the most recent available estimates of induced abortion incidence in 60 countries and territories where abortion is broadly legal. Data are relatively complete (i.e., are deemed to fall within 20% of the true number) for 30 of these countries. We analyze trends from 1996 to 2003 and find that dramatic declines in incidence occurred in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, but these countries still have some of the highest rates in the world. The abortion rate in the United States declined modestly but remains higher than in many Western European countries. Rates are variable in developing countries where the procedure is legal. Possible explanations for trends are discussed.