

Study: US Abortion Rate Hits Lowest Level Since 1973

The abortion rate in the United States dipped to its lowest since 1973, coinciding with a steep decline in overall pregnancy and birth rates, a study from a nonprofit sexual health organization showed on Sunday.

The rate declined to 16.9 abortions per 1,000 women between the ages of 15 and 44 in 2011, the latest year studied, which was well below the 1981 peak of 29.3 per 1,000 and the lowest since 1973 when the rate was 16.3 per 1,000, the study from Guttmacher Institute showed.

"With abortion rates falling in almost all states, our study did not find evidence that the national decline in abortions during this period was the result of new state abortion restrictions. We also found no evidence that the decline was linked to a drop in the number of abortion providers during this period," says Rachel Jones, lead author of the study.

The decline in abortions coincided with a drop in overall pregnancy and birth rates, and contraceptive use and methods improved during the period, Jones said. The recent recession also led many women and couples to want to avoid or delay pregnancy and childbearing.

The study also found that the total number of abortion providers declined by only 4 percent between 2008 and 2011, and the number of clinics, which provide the large majority of abortion services, declined by just 1 percent.

While the overall abortion rate declined, the proportion of abortions that were early medication procedures continued to increase, according to the study.

An estimated 239,400 early medication abortions were performed

in 2011, representing 23 percent of all nonhospital abortions, an increase from 17 percent in 2008. The study estimated that 59 percent of all known abortion providers offer this service.

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