

Abortion in Context

Abortion has been practised since the earliest of times. No criminal sanction or constitutional provision has ever or will ever stop women seeking abortions. In countries where there are criminal sanctions for seeking a termination and where there is no possibility of recourse to safe abortion, women have sought the procedure for themselves, often with catastrophic consequences. Unsafe abortions cause the death of about 78,000¹ women every year worldwide. In other countries criminal sanctions result in women going abroad, as in Ireland.

Abortion is legal under some circumstances in nearly all countries of the world:

- More than 61% of the world's people live in countries where induced abortion is permitted either for a wide range of reasons or without restriction as to reason, while 26% reside in countries where abortion is generally prohibited (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2005).
- Globally, 46 million abortions take place every year; 19 million are unsafe (WHO, 2003).
- 95% of unsafe abortions occur in developing countries (WHO, 2003)
- Globally, one in five women has been physically or sexually abused in her lifetime. Sexual violence can lead to forced pregnancies, and reproductive morbidity and mortality (Krug et al., 2002).

Crisis Pregnancy Indices – Ireland

The Irish Contraception and Crisis Pregnancy Study (ICCP)² found that some 12% of all pregnancies experienced by women were defined as crises. It noted that 28% of female and 23% of male respondents defined at least one pregnancy experience as a crisis. The study also found that younger women were more likely to have experienced a crisis pregnancy than older women. A statistical report of the Crisis Pregnancy Agency in 2005 pointed to additional analysis which aimed to estimate the extent of crisis pregnancy in the Irish population. Using data from the ICCP survey and the CSO population statistics, the analysis suggests that 11% of 18-25 year old women, 19% of 26-35 year old women and 18% of women aged 36-45 have experienced a crisis pregnancy.³

¹ *Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide*, New York: Alan Guttmacher Institute 1999.

² Rundle, Leigh, McGee and Layte. *Irish Contraception and Crisis Pregnancy Study*. Crisis Pregnancy Agency. 2004.

³ McGrath, O'Keefe, and Smith. *Crisis Pregnancy Agency Statistical Report 2005: Fertility and Crisis Pregnancy Indices*. Crisis Pregnancy Agency, 2005.