

Salt and Light Papers provide important information and analysis to help Christians and Churches to engage with 21st century social issues

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TRENDS IN ABORTION STATISTICS: 1968 - 2005

Let me show you how Government statistics can be fascinating. Yes, I know this might be an uphill task, but bear with me – I shall try to inform and amaze you.

The Source

Most of the figures are taken from *Abortion Statistics, England and Wales*. These are published each year by the Department of Health and the current set was released in July 2006. They can be downloaded at www.dh.gov.uk/publichealthstatistics. Simply type 'abortion statistics 2005', or something similar, in the 'Search this site' box and there you are – the full 44 pages. Abortion figures for earlier years, starting in 1968, were published by the Office for National Statistics, as *Abortion Statistics Series AB*, nos. 1 to 28. Figures for Scotland may be found at www.isdscotland.org/abortions.

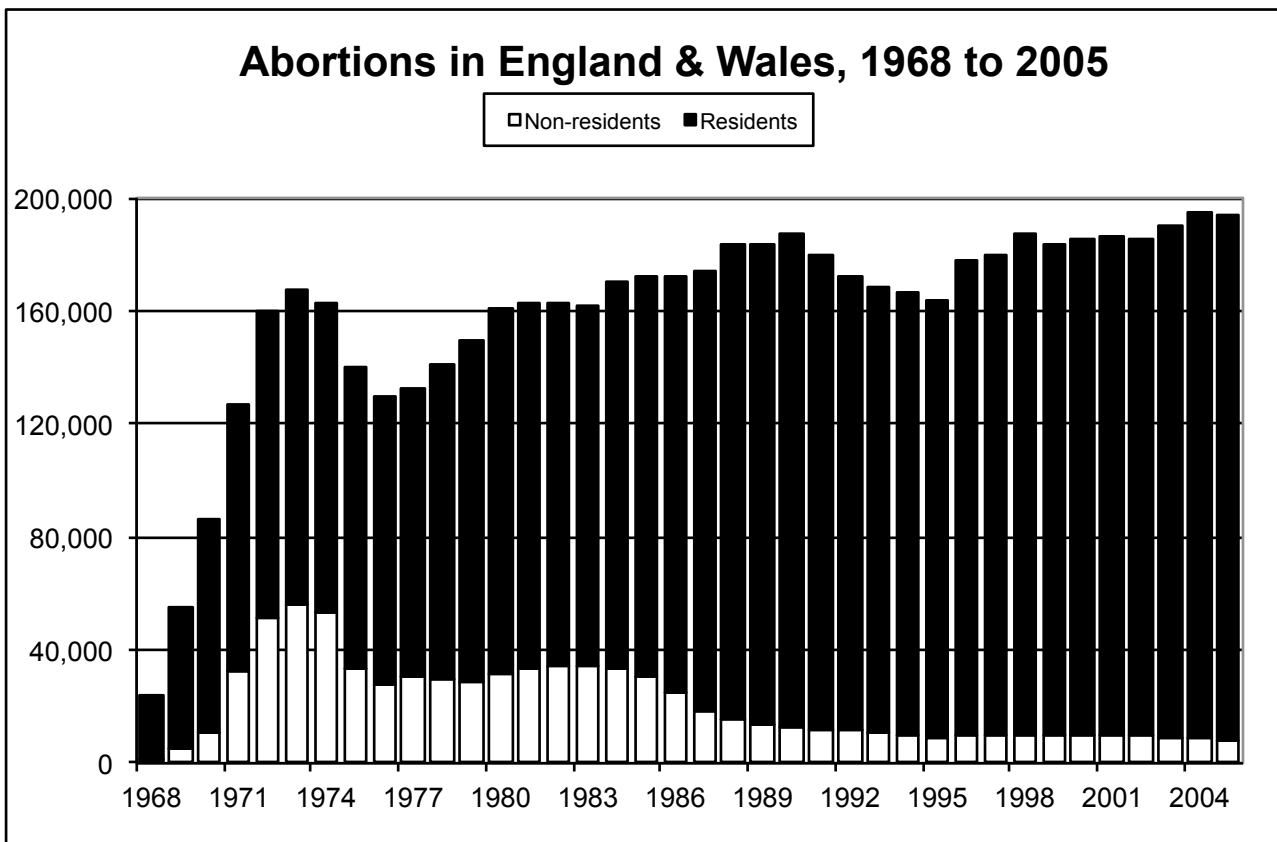
The Overview: 1968 to 2005

The 1967 Abortion Act came into force on 27 April 1968, six months after receiving the Royal Assent. The Figure below shows the annual *totals of abortion* for the last 37 years. The number for that first year (23,641) relates to just 8 months. Data for the first full year of abortions, namely 1969, show the wide-ranging effect of the Act as they shot up to 54,819. For the next four years they soared almost linearly, to reach a peak of 167,149 in 1973.

This rapid escalation was due partly to the transfer of illegal abortions to the legal sector, and partly to the influx of non-resident pregnant women – the latter rose quickly from just 1,309 in 1968 to a high point of 56,581 by 1973, accounting for almost 34% of the total. Furthermore, newly-legalised abortion produced its own 'new clientele'. These were women who would never have previously considered illegal abortion – 'what's legal must be OK,' became the thinking of many.

Overall, the Figure represents almost forty years of inexorable increase. There have been just two episodes of significant decline, from 1974-76 and from 1990-96. The first was due to fewer non-

resident women coming from predominantly France and Germany (accounting for falls of some 20,000 and 9,000 respectively in 1975).



These reductions reflected the passing of liberal abortion laws in France (1975), Germany (1978) and other European countries. The second dip, during the early 1990s, was less well defined and attributed mainly to a reduction in the rate of abortion and the greater availability of morning-after pills – the early abortions they cause are not included in the official figures.

So far during the 21st century, the pattern has become fairly stable. The annual totals have hovered around 190,000, though there is still a discernable upward trend. If this rate continues, the dreaded 200,000 milestone will be reached around 2008.

The grand total of abortions over this 37-year period is an almost unbelievable 6,082,416 from England and Wales plus 422,648 from Scotland – over 6.5 million, or just over 10% of the current UK population. By any measure, that is a huge mass of people who are now ‘missing’.

The second set of key figures produced by the Department of Health relate to the *rates of abortion*. These are expressed as the number of abortions per 1,000 women residents aged 15 to 44. These rates therefore provide measures of abortion irrespective of fluctuations in the female population, and they are therefore useful for between-country comparisons. The chosen age range (15 to 44) encompasses the majority of women who are of childbearing age. The England and Wales’ rate started out in 1969 at just 5.2 and gradually increased to 12.5 by 1985. In 2005, it

reached an all-time high of 17.8. By contrast, the equivalent datum for the USA is about 21 and for the Netherlands about 7.

The Current Figures: 2005

Compared with the previous year, the 2005 abortion figures for England and Wales reveal that the total for resident women (the figure usually quoted in the media) increased by 703 to 186,416 – the highest ever, and equivalent to over 700 abortions carried out each weekday. While the majority (67%) occurred at under 10 weeks gestation, 137 were performed in excess of 24 weeks. The non-resident total continued to decline, by 848 to 7,937. Of the latter, over 70% (5,585) now come from the Irish Republic and 15% (1,164) from Northern Ireland.

Abortions among teenagers resident in England and Wales went down, but only by a smidgeon – the 2005 total was 39,099 compared with 39,142 the previous year. However, there was a worrying 4.7% rise of abortions among girls under 15 to 1,083, including 137 girls under 14.

Figures for Scotland show that in 2005, 12,543 abortions were performed there on residents, up by 194 on the previous year. Just 60 were carried out on non-residents. Though the rate of abortion was only 11.9, it is still increasing year-on-year. A small number of abortions are carried out in Northern Ireland, but official figures are never reported.

There are seven 'statutory grounds' for abortion. The vast majority in England and Wales (178,341 or 96%) were performed on residents under ground C, the so-called 'social clause', loosely defined as 'injury to the physical or mental health of the woman (pregnancy has not exceeded its 24th week)'. Only 1,916 (or 1%) were carried out under ground E ('substantial risk of the child being born seriously handicapped'). The use of ground F ('in emergency – to save the life of the woman') now occurs so rarely that such statistics are no longer published.

Some 40% of abortions took place in NHS hospitals with another 44% in independent sector clinics under NHS contract, the so-called NHS Agency abortions. The remaining 16% of abortions were privately funded.

The majority (76%) were performed by surgical methods, with vacuum aspiration being the commonest means (71%). The principal medical method uses the abortifacient drug Mifegyne (also known as RU486). The proportion of medical abortions has almost doubled within the last five years to account for 24% of the total in 2005.

And what does the pro-abortion industry think of all these disturbing figures? Somewhat predictably, Anne Weyman of the Family Planning Association commented, 'These latest abortion figures highlight the urgent need to improve NHS contraceptive services...' Presumably, it has never crossed her mind that her continual promotion of the pill-and-condom culture might be a cause, rather than a cure, of the dilemma.

Abortion is bad enough, but that's not all. Promiscuous, casual, multi-partner sexual intercourse inevitably leads not just to abortions, but also to sexually-transmitted diseases. The two invariably rise together. Just look at the latest annual figures. Syphilis up 23% to 2,807 new cases, chlamydia up 5% to 109,832 new cases. Surprisingly, gonorrhoea was down by 13% – some small comfort that is.

The Typical Abortion

Of course, there is no such thing as a 'typical abortion', but to illustrate something of what is happening behind the closed doors of our hospitals and clinics, it is instructive to outline some of the pertinent features that characterise the majority of abortions.

The 'typical' woman who goes for an abortion is white British, aged between 20 and 24, single with no partner, and no other children. This is her first abortion. She is about 8 weeks of gestation and she has a surgical abortion carried out by vacuum aspiration, performed at an NHS agency clinic, under statutory ground C. Those who framed the 1967 Act claimed it was needed for overstressed, sick mothers with large families, poor housing, and little financial support. Today, abortion is mainly for young, single, childless, healthy women.

The Localised Abortion

It is also informative to localise abortion – after all, something sinister is happening on all of our doorsteps. As an example I will focus on Reading, which is often considered by professional pollsters to be representative of the whole of the UK.

In Reading, during 2005, there were 1,001 abortions performed, that is, about 20 each week, or 3 or 4 each day. This was the highest total in the area and probably reflects the presence of a university campus – 40% of the aborted women were aged 18 to 24. While the majority were performed on young women, 157 were on women over 35, and a dozen were on girls under 16.

Apart from Slough, Reading had the highest abortion rate in the area – 22.0 per thousand women, and as high as 38 per thousand among the 18 to 19-year-olds. In addition, Reading had a particularly low proportion of its abortions (2%) performed on NHS premises, and a high share (82%) performed by NHS agencies. Over a quarter (27%) of Reading women under the age of 25 undergoing abortion, had had a previous abortion.

This is but a snapshot of abortion in Reading. You can find out what is happening in your area by examining the relevant pages of the Department of Health's statistics.

In conclusion

I find abortion statistics absorbing. On the other hand, I could understand if you find such facts and figures dry and dusty, but not your finding them irrelevant. Every single figure represents a

disaster. It is the death of an unborn child. It is the result of broken relationships, coercion and desperation. These women, as well as the children's fathers, have become unwilling parents. Their hope was that abortion would solve their problems – the evidence is quite the opposite. What they need is some care, practical help and, above all, love. They are our neighbours and we have a duty towards them, as well as towards all unborn children under threat. These facts and figures have warm flesh on them. May these bare statistics galvanise us to respond with principled compassion.

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