

BY PETER BRIMELOW

Who Has Abortions?

The distribution of abortion incidence within the population is not what you might have guessed.

EVERY YEAR ABOUT 2% OF U.S. WOMEN AGED 15 TO 44 have an abortion. The rate has been declining since 1980, when it was almost 3%. But, based on 1992 data, an estimated 43% of women now of childbearing age will have had at least one abortion by the time they are 45 years old.

A survey of 10,000 women undertaken in 1995 by the Alan Guttmacher Institute shows that abortion occurs widely among all races and classes. In 1995 almost as many white women from households with annual incomes above \$60,000 had about as many of that year's 1.4 million abortions as white women from households with incomes below \$15,000. "Highly educated people are less likely to have unintended pregnancies," says Stanley K. Henshaw of the New York-based Alan Guttmacher Institute, "but they are also less tolerant of them."

However, there are significant differences in abortion's distribution. Fewer than half (46%) of the women involved are white, although whites make up three-quarters (74%) of the population. Blacks, at 12% of the population, are responsible for 29% of the abortions. Hispanics, accounting for 11% of the population, are also disproportionate users of abortion, with 20% of the total.

Differences in religious background (not shown) are even more striking. Fifty-four percent of American women identify themselves as Protestants, but they had only 37% of the abortions. Since most blacks are Protestants, this suggests that the white Protestant abortion rate is quite low. Roman Catholics are more likely to abort than Protestants: They account for 31% of the population—and of the abortions. The small group of women who sternly professed no religion, 6% of the population, were responsible for a remarkable 24% of the abortion total.

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