

# Abortion: Worldwide Levels and Trends

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This presentation brings together the latest information about abortion incidence, services, legality and safety worldwide. Most of the data in this presentation are from research conducted by the Guttmacher Institute or published in peer-reviewed journals. Additional sources are the World Health Organization and the Center for Reproductive Rights.

For full references, see [http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb\\_AIW.pdf](http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/fb_AIW.pdf).

This presentation was prepared by Gilda Sedgh, with the assistance of Susheela Singh, Akinrinola Bankole, Rubina Hussain, Melanie Croce-Galis and Rebecca Wind, all of the Guttmacher Institute. It was made possible with support from the World Health Organization and the World Bank.

## Overview

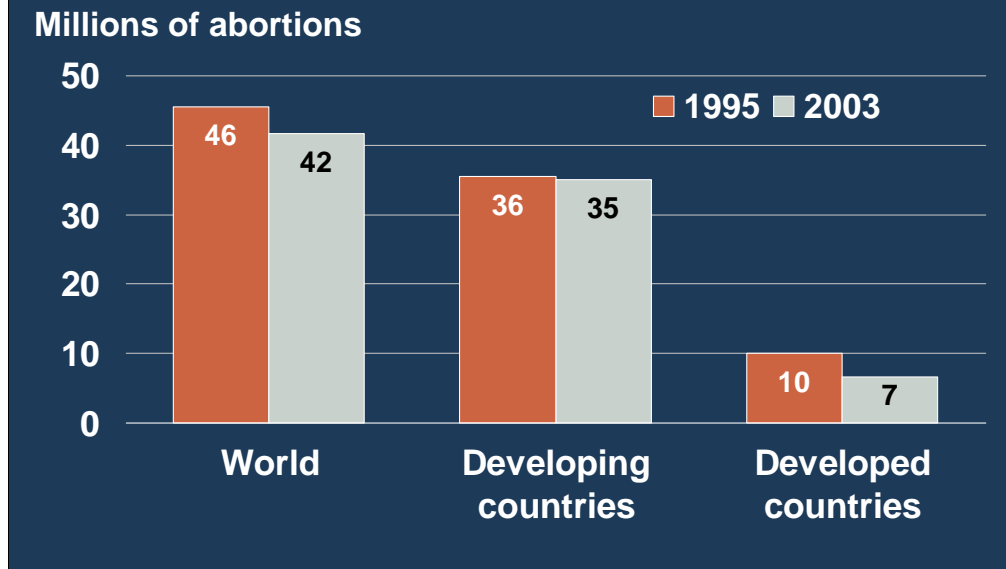
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- First estimates of worldwide abortion levels since 1995
- Key findings include the following:
  - The global abortion rate has declined modestly
  - Abortion rates have declined more in developed than in developing countries
  - Rates have declined most sharply in countries in the former Soviet bloc
  - The proportion of all abortions that are unsafe has increased



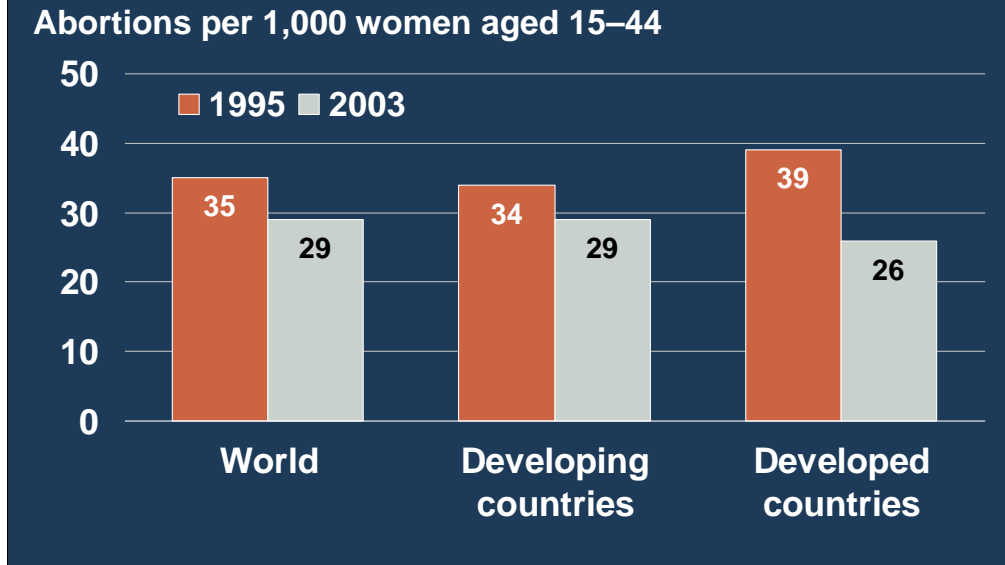
## **Worldwide Incidence and Trends**

## Almost 42 million abortions occurred in 2003, compared with 46 million in 1995



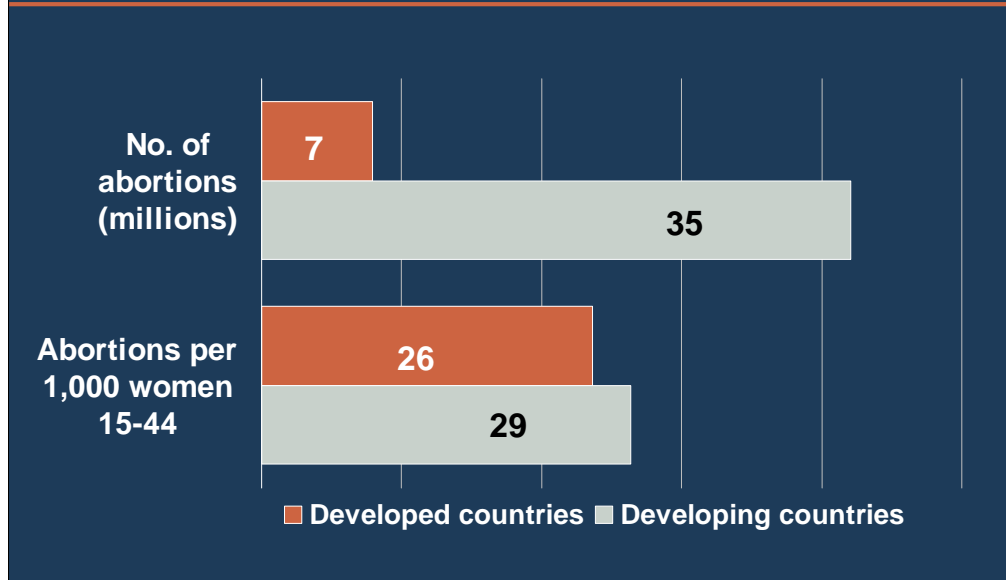
Source: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345.

## Abortion rates have fallen worldwide, but primarily in developed countries



Source: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345.

## Most abortions occur in developing countries, but the abortion *rate* is similar in both regions



A woman's likelihood of having an abortion is similar whether she lives in a developed or a developing region (26 and 29 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44, respectively).

Source: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345.

## The many reasons women give for having an abortion include these:

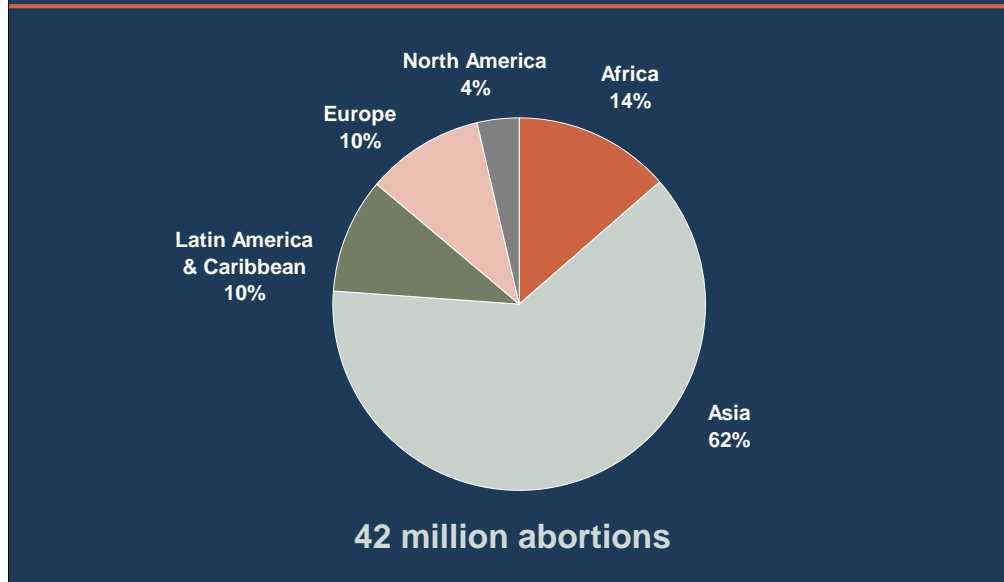
- They have had all the children they want
- They want to delay their next birth
- They are too young or too poor to raise a child
- They are estranged from or on uneasy terms with their sexual partner
- They do not want a child while they are in school or working
- Their contraceptive method failed
- They became pregnant as a result of nonconsensual sex

Source: The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), *Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide*, New York: AGI, 1999.



# Regional Incidence and Trends

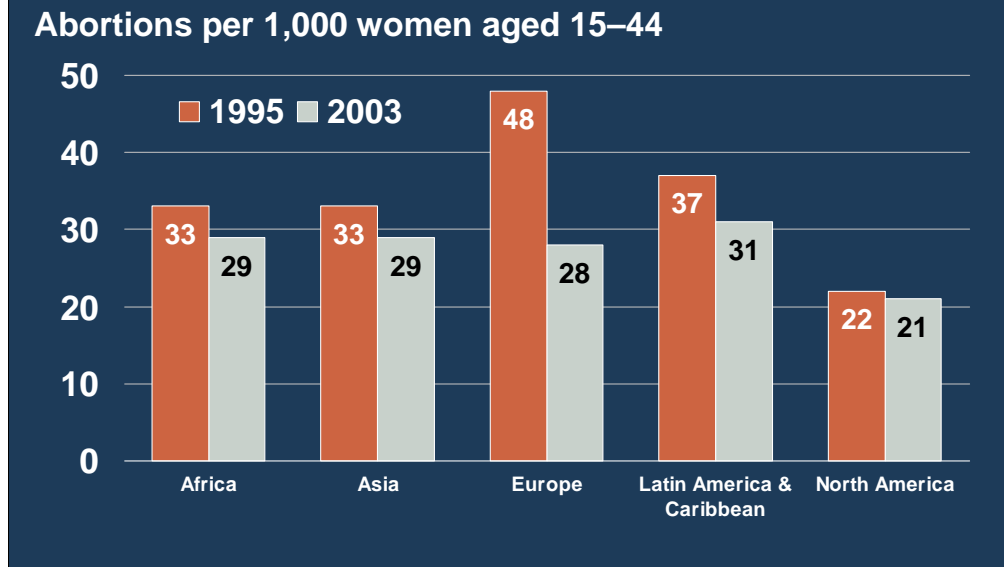
## Most abortions occur in Asia, though the abortion rate varies little across regions



Most abortions occur in Asia, because the world's population is concentrated in Asia. Of the 26 million abortions that occur yearly in Asia, nine million take place in China.

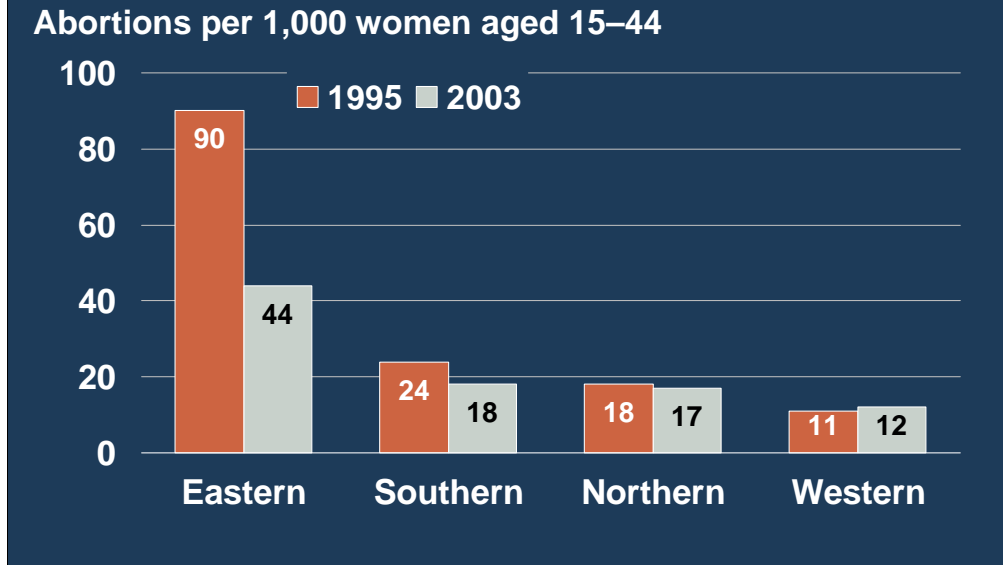
Source: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345.

## Abortion rates have declined dramatically in Europe



Source: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345.

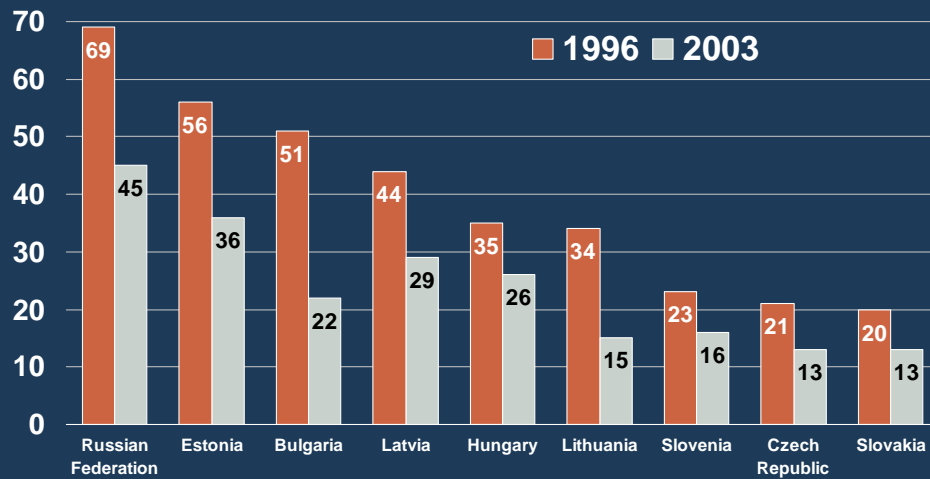
## Within Europe, the decline has occurred largely in the former Soviet bloc



Source: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345.

## The decline in the former Soviet region can be seen at the national level

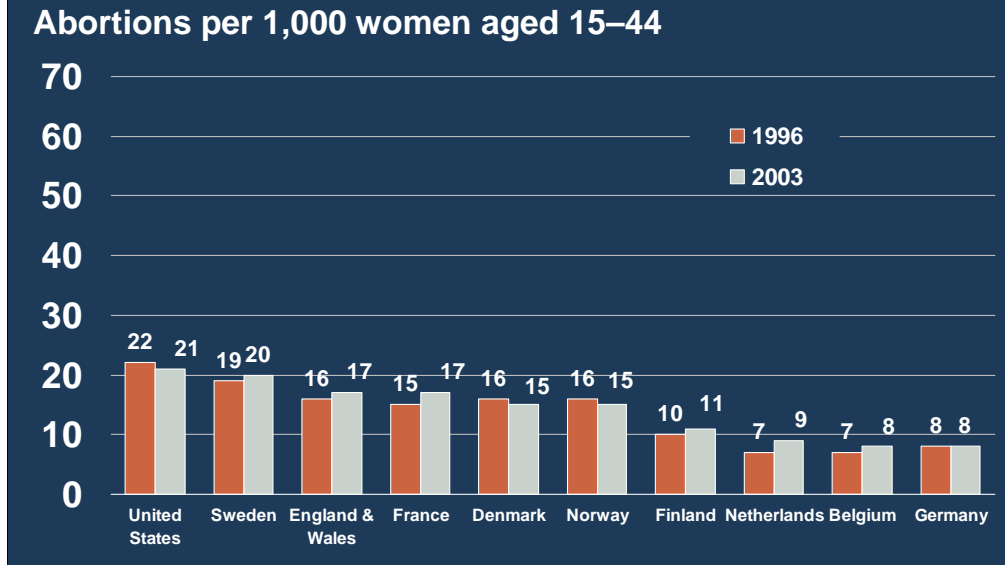
Abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44



The dramatic decline has coincided with substantial increases in contraceptive use within the region.

Source: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345.

## The U.S. abortion rate is higher than rates in northern and western Europe



Source: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345.

## Abortion rates are lowest where contraceptive use is high

- The lowest abortion rates in the world are in Europe; rates are below 10 per 1,000 women aged 15–44 in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, for example. In these countries and throughout most of Europe, abortion is legal and widely available—but contraceptive use is high.
- By contrast, in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, where abortion laws are most restrictive and contraceptive prevalence is lower, the rates range from the mid-20s to 39 (in eastern Africa).

Source: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345.

# Abortion Law

## The legal status of abortion does not predict its incidence

- The lowest abortion rates in the world—less than 10 per 1,000 women of reproductive age—are in Europe, where abortion is legal and widely available.
- By contrast, in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, where abortion law is most restrictive, the regional rates are 29 and 31, respectively.

Source: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345.

## Where abortion is legal, it is generally safe, and where illegal, often unsafe

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- After the abortion law was liberalized in South Africa in 1996
  - the incidence of infection resulting from abortion decreased by 52%
  - the maternal mortality rate declined by 91%

Source: Jewkes R. et al., The impact of age on the epidemiology of incomplete abortion in South Africa after legislative change, *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 2005, 112(3):355–359.

## Changes in abortion law between 1995 and 2007

- Seventeen countries liberalized their laws to increase access to safe abortion: *Albania, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Chad, Colombia, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mali, Nepal, Portugal, Saint Lucia, South Africa, Swaziland, Switzerland and Togo.*
- Three countries tightened restrictions on abortion: *El Salvador, Nicaragua and Poland.*

Source: Center for Reproductive Rights, Abortion worldwide: twelve years of reform, 2007, <[http://www.reproductiverights.org/pdf/pub\\_bp\\_abortionlaws10.pdf](http://www.reproductiverights.org/pdf/pub_bp_abortionlaws10.pdf)>, accessed Sept. 13, 2007.



# Unsafe Abortion

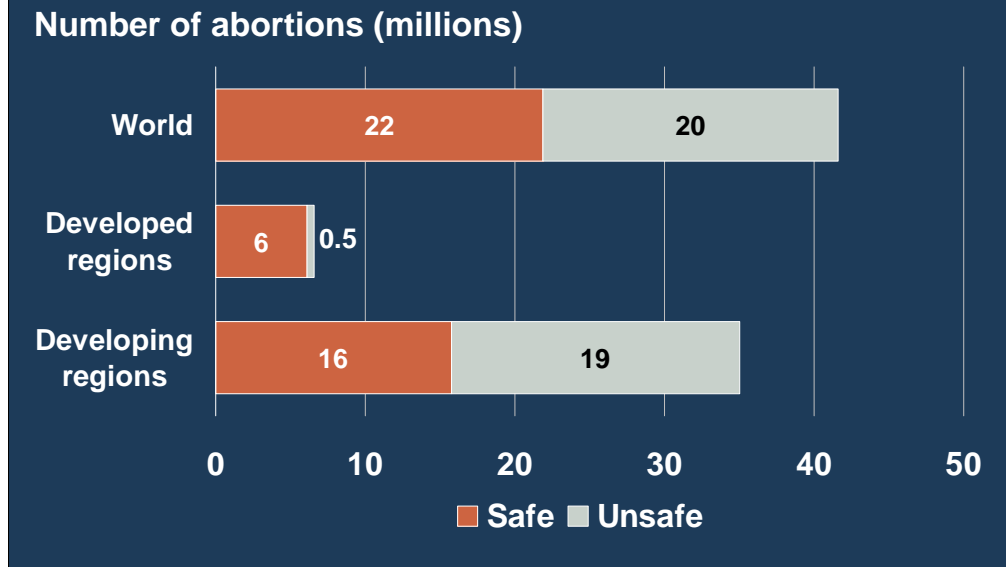
## Definition of unsafe abortion

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- The World Health Organization defines unsafe abortion as a procedure for terminating an unintended pregnancy carried out either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment that does not conform to minimal medical standards, or both.

Source: World Health Organization (WHO), *The Prevention and Management of Unsafe Abortion: Report of a Technical Working Group*, Geneva: WHO, 1992.

## 20 million unsafe abortions occur each year



Source: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345.

## Trends in unsafe abortion

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- Because the overall abortion rate has declined, the proportion of all abortions that are unsafe has increased from 44% to 48%.
- The unsafe abortion rate was essentially unchanged between 1995 and 2003 (15 and 14 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44, respectively).

Sources: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345; and Henshaw SK, Singh S and Haas T, The incidence of abortion worldwide, *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 1999, 25(Suppl.):S30–S38.

## Examples of unsafe abortion methods used

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- Drinking turpentine, bleach or tea made with livestock manure
- Inserting herbal preparations into the vagina or cervix
- Placing a foreign body, such as a stick, coat hanger or chicken bone, into the uterus
- Jumping from the top of stairs or a roof

Source: Grimes DA et al., Unsafe abortion: the preventable pandemic, *Lancet*, 2006, 368(9550):1908–1919.



## **Consequences of Unsafe Abortion**

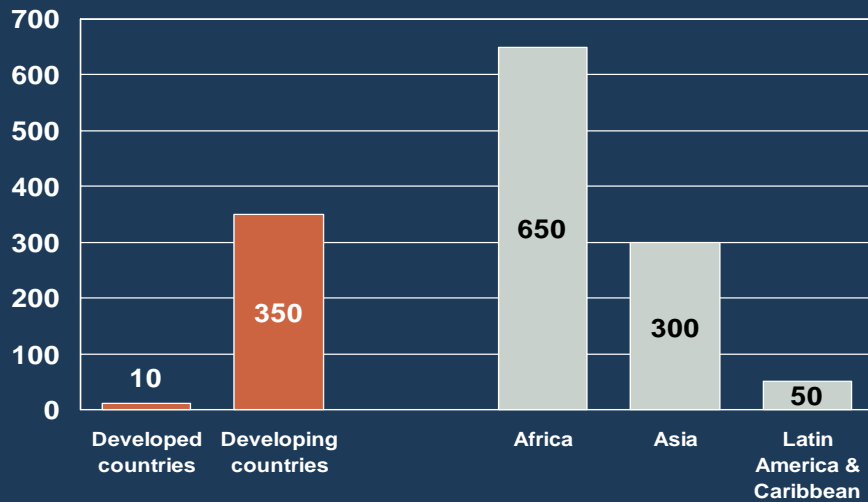
## Complications of unsafe abortion

- An estimated five million women are hospitalized each year for treatment of abortion-related complications, such as hemorrhage and sepsis.
- Complications from unsafe abortion procedures account for 13% of maternal deaths, or 67,000 per year.
- Approximately 220,000 children worldwide lose their mothers every year because of abortion-related deaths.

Sources: Singh S, Hospital admissions resulting from unsafe abortion: estimates from 13 developing countries, *Lancet*, 2006, 368(955):1887–1892; World Health Organization (WHO), *Unsafe Abortion: Global and Regional Estimates of Incidence of Unsafe Abortion and Associated Mortality in 2003*, Geneva: WHO, 2007 (forthcoming); and Grimes DA et al., Unsafe abortion: the preventable pandemic, *Lancet*, 2006, 368(9550):1908–1919.

## Almost all abortion-related deaths occur in developing countries

Deaths per 100,000 unsafe abortions, 2003



Source: World Health Organization (WHO), *Unsafe Abortion: Global and Regional Estimates of Incidence of Unsafe Abortion and Associated Mortality in 2003*, Geneva: WHO, 2007 (forthcoming).

## Additional consequences

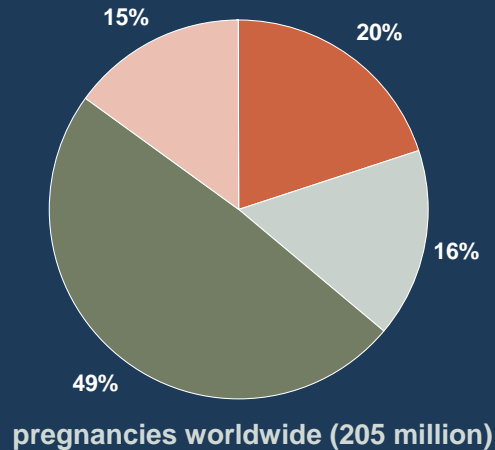
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- Additional consequences of unsafe abortion include loss of productivity, economic burden on public health systems, stigma and long-term health problems, such as infertility.



## **Unintended Pregnancies: The Root of Abortion**

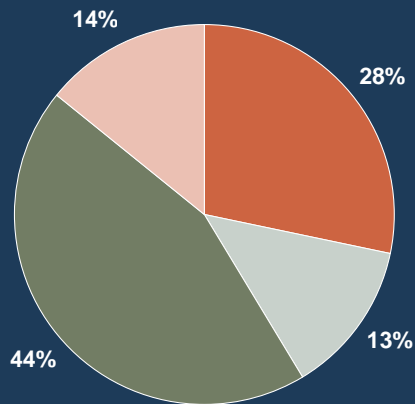
**More than one-third of all pregnancies worldwide each year are unintended, and one in five end in abortion**



■ Induced abortions      ■ Unwanted or mistimed births  
■ Wanted births      ■ Spontaneous abortions

Sources: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345; The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), *Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide*, New York: AGI, 1999; Population Division, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects: The 2004 revision*, New York: United Nations, 2005; and Leridon H, *Human Fertility: The Basic Components*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

**More than 40% of all pregnancies in developed countries are unintended, and 28% end in abortion**

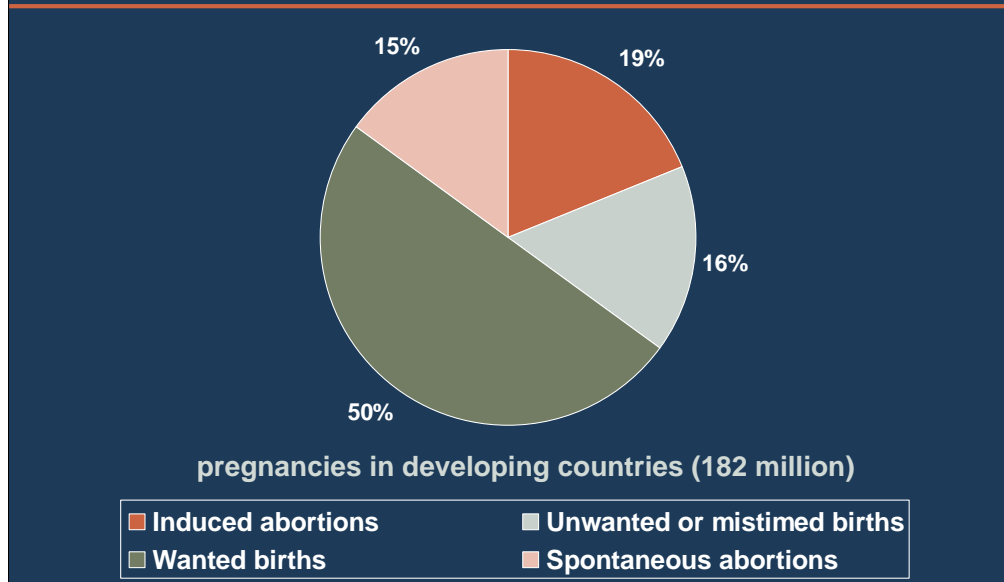


pregnancies in developed countries (23 million)

- |                   |                             |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| Induced abortions | Unwanted or mistimed births |
| Wanted births     | Spontaneous abortions       |

Sources: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345; The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), *Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide*, New York: AGI, 1999; Population Division, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects: The 2004 revision*, New York: United Nations, 2005; and Leridon H, *Human Fertility: The Basic Components*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

**More than one-third of all pregnancies *in developing countries* each year are unintended, and 19% end in abortion**



Eight percent end in abortions performed by safe procedures, and 11% in unsafe abortions.

Sources: Sedgh G et al., Induced abortion: rates and trends worldwide, *Lancet*, 2007, 370(9595):1338–1345; The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), *Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide*, New York: AGI, 1999; Population Division, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects: The 2004 revision*, New York: United Nations, 2005; and Leridon H, *Human Fertility: The Basic Components*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

## The role of contraception

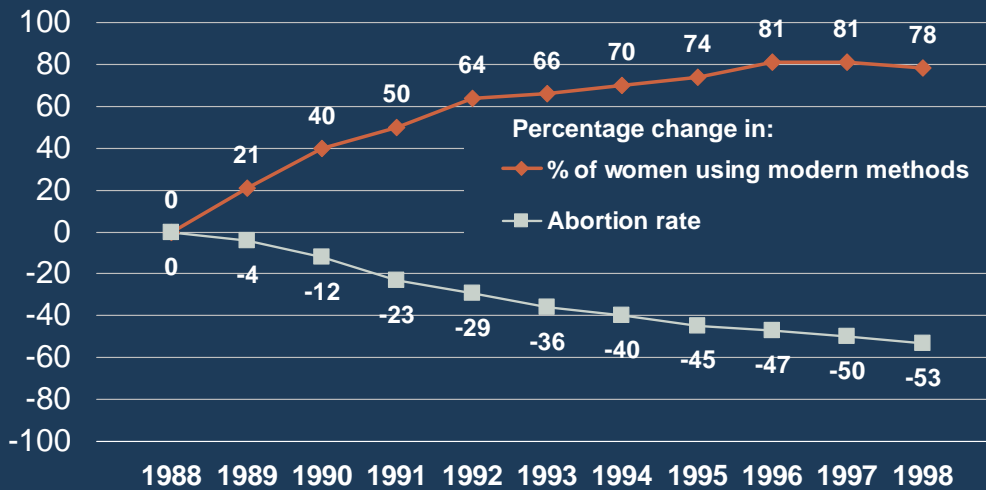
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- The average woman must use some form of effective contraception for at least 20 years if she wants to limit her family size to two children, and 16 years if she wishes to have four children

Source: The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), *Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide*, New York: AGI, 1999.

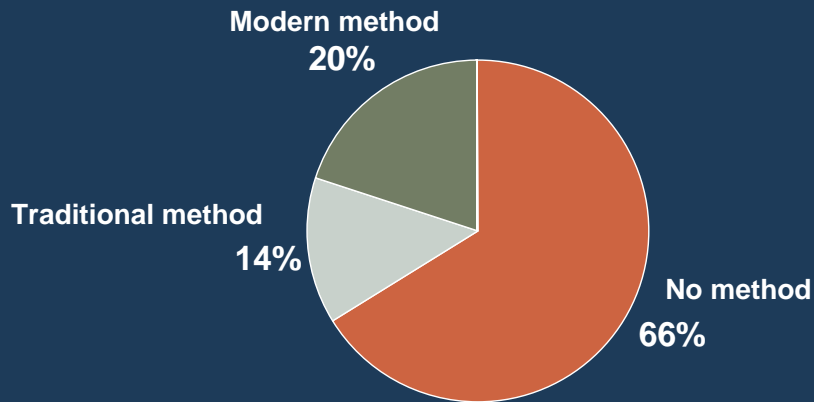
## Abortion rates sharply declined as use of modern contraceptives increased in the Russian Federation

Percentage change since 1988



Source: Westoff C, Recent trends in abortion and contraception in 12 countries, *DHS Analytical Studies*, Princeton, NJ, USA: Office of Population Research, Princeton University; and Calverton, MD, USA: ORC Macro, 2005, No. 8.

## Most unintended pregnancies occur among women who were not using any contraceptive



Unintended pregnancies in developing countries, by women's contraceptive use

Two-thirds of unintended pregnancies in developing countries occur among women who were not using any method of contraception.

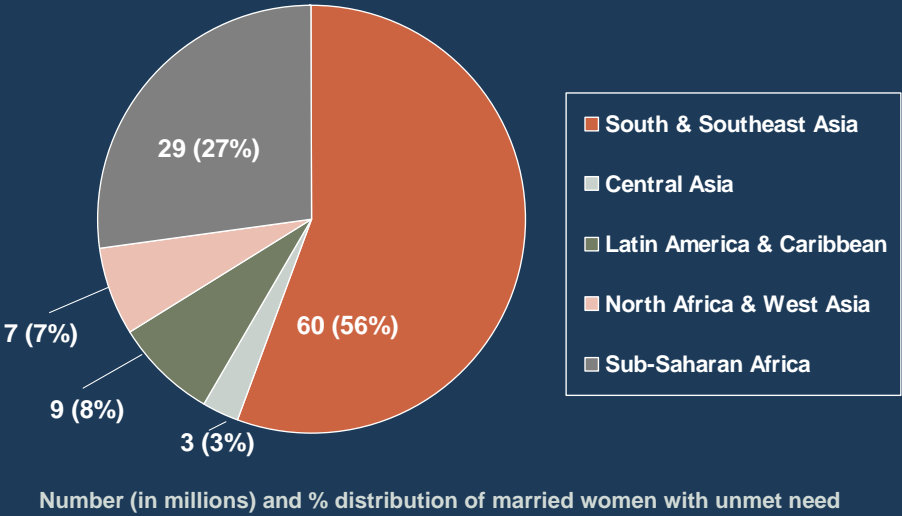
Source: Singh S. et al., *Adding It Up: The Benefits of Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health Care*, New York: The Alan Guttmacher Institute and United Nations Population Fund, 2003.

## What is unmet need?

- Women have an unmet need for contraception if they
  - are sexually active
  - do not want to have a child soon or at all
  - are not using any contraceptive method
  - are able to conceive

A woman has an unmet need for contraception if she is married, in a consensual union, or unmarried and sexually active; is able to become pregnant; does not want to have a child in the next two years or wants to stop childbearing; and is not using any method of contraception, either modern or traditional. Women who use modern or traditional methods of contraception are considered to have their contraceptive needs met.

# More than 100 million married women have an unmet need for contraception



Source: Sedgh G et al., Women with an unmet need for contraception in developing countries and their reasons for not using a method, *Occasional Report*, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2007, No. 37.

## Reasons for not using contraceptives

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- The reasons women (married and unmarried) do not use contraceptives most commonly include concerns about possible health and side effects and women's belief that they are not at risk of getting pregnant

Source: The Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), *Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide*, New York: AGI, 1999.



# Recommendations

## Recommendations

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- **Prevent unintended pregnancy**
  - Increase contraceptive services and information to ensure greater and correct use of contraceptive methods
- **Make abortion care safer**
  - Liberalize abortion laws to allow services to be provided openly by skilled practitioners
  - Improve training for medical providers

## Recommendations

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- **Improve postabortion services**
  - The World Health Organization strongly advises that all health facilities that treat women with incomplete abortions should have the appropriate equipment and trained staff needed to ensure that care is consistently available and provided at a reasonable cost

## Recommendations

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- **Improve postabortion services**
  - Improving contraceptive use through postabortion family planning counseling and referral is crucial to reducing the incidence of unintended pregnancy, a root cause of induced abortion

**This presentation was made possible with support from the World Health Organization and the World Bank**

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