in several countries, the difference is not great. The proportion drops notably among women aged 35–39 in all countries and generally is markedly lower among women at either end of the reproductive spectrum (those younger than 20 and 40 or older) than among other age-groups.

The proportion of abortions occurring among women younger than 20 is less than 10% in 21 countries, between 10% and 20% in 25 countries, and at least 20% in nine countries. (Information on teenagers was unavailable for Korea.) Since 15–19-year-olds make up 12–29% of women of reproductive age in these countries, these results suggest that in general, adolescents do not disproportionately obtain abortions. In some countries, however, the proportion of abortions that are provided to adolescents is substantial: It is 20% or more in three countries with complete data and six with subnational data, including five of the six Sub-Saharan African countries in this category. In Nigeria, adolescents obtain 53% of abortions, but they constitute only 24% of women aged 15–44. However, the data are for patients with septic abortion, a group in which young women may be overrepresented, because they typically have greater than average difficulty in obtaining a safe abortion.

A number of studies of clandestine abortion in developing countries have reported that abortion and abortion morbidity are most common among young, unmarried women. In Lusaka, Zambia, for example, 60% of women hospitalized for abortion complications were aged 15–19. Among women hospitalized with abortion-related complications in Uganda, about two-thirds were aged 15–19, two-thirds were students and four out of five had never been married.

Women aged 40–44 account for the lowest proportion of abortions in about two-thirds of the 56 countries. The proportion is lower than 10% in all but seven countries—Israel, Slovenia, Croatia, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia and Nepal (Table 1).

Abortion rate. We have estimated age-specific abortion rates for 34 countries with official statistics or national sample surveys that included data on abortion (Table 2). These rates show differences in the annual incidence of abortion, according to women’s age.

In 27 countries, abortion rates are highest among women in their 20s—in 17 countries, among women aged 20–24, and in 10, among 25–29-year-olds. (In several of these countries, rates differ very little between the two age-groups.) The rate for women aged 30–34 is slightly higher than rates for women in their 20s in six countries (Israel, Slovenia, Italy, Japan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan). Thus, in most of these countries, abortion rates show an inverted U pattern with age of women.

The incidence of abortion among adolescents is by no means negligible in many of the 34 countries. The adolescent abortion rate is extremely high (91 abortions per 1,000 adolescents per year) in Cuba, high (30–44 per 1,000) in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, the United States, Romania and Russia, and moderately high (22–24 per 1,000) in Australia and Canada. However, only 10–20 abortions occur per 1,000 adolescent women in 13 countries, and fewer than 10 per 1,000 occur in 10 countries. Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands have complete national statistics and very low adolescent abortion rates; the low rates reflect very low overall levels of abortion in these countries.

Abortion rates are generally lower for women aged 40 and older. While rates for this age-group are typically quite low, they are 10 or more per 1,000 women in 12 countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Singapore, Slovenia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Uzbekistan).

The total abortion rate represents the number of abortions that an average woman will have in her lifetime if she experiences the prevailing period age-specific abortion rates. As the table indicates, this rate is highest in Romania (3.4 abortions per woman) and Russia (2.4); it is less than 0.5 in 15 countries, 0.5–1.0 in 10 countries and more than 1.0 in the remainder. However, for countries with incomplete data, the true age-specific and total abortion rates will be somewhat higher than those shown here.

In addition, the youngest age-group in the Nigeria data was younger than 21, so it includes slightly more women than the youngest group in other countries (younger than 20).

We cannot estimate abortion rates from ad hoc survey or hospital record data because they are not representative of all women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>completeness of statistics</th>
<th>&lt;20</th>
<th>20–24</th>
<th>25–29</th>
<th>30–34</th>
<th>35–39</th>
<th>&gt;40*</th>
<th>Total abortion rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia, 1995–1996</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>Belgium, 1995</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Denominator is women 40–44. †Based on average number of abortions for three years preceding the survey. ‡Includes abortions performed in England and Wales. §Age defined as age attained during the year. **Based on survey of married women 20–44. ††Based on survey of women 15–44, from published report, calculated for three years preceding the survey. §§Based on survey of women 15–44 in three locations, calculated for two years preceding the survey. The rates reported here are simple averages of the rates for all three sites, from published report. §§§Based on 49,400 women. Rates are for an earlier year than the distribution shown in Table 1, because 1996 rates are not available. na=not applicable. The total abortion rate is the number of abortions that an average woman will have in her lifetime if she experiences the prevailing period age-specific abortion rates. Sources: See appendix.