more than 50%, from 20.1 abortions per 1,000 in 1979 to 9.8 per 1,000 in 1993, while the rate in Piedmont declined from 20.8 per 1,000 in 1980 to 11.5 per 1,000 in 1993.

In 1993, the abortion ratio in Italy was 262 abortions per 1,000 live births (Table 2). However, this measure also varies regionally. The central and northern regions (in particular Emilia-Romagna, Liguria and Tuscany) are characterized by relatively low TFRs (one lifetime birth per woman), high abortion rates and elevated abortion ratios. While low levels of fertility can also be found in some of the northwestern regions, abortion rates are moderate in these regions (9–12 abortions per 1,000); therefore, abortion ratios in a few of these areas are closer to the national level.

The southern and island regions, which have the highest fertility and the lowest abortion rates (Campania, Basilicata, Calabria and the island of Sicily) demonstrate the lowest abortion ratios (150 abortions per 1,000 live births in Sicily, for example). On the other hand, a low abortion rate and a low abortion ratio is a pattern also seen in the northeastern regions of Trentino and Veneto. Meanwhile, the southern regions of Puglia and Molise show a pattern more similar to those seen in central and northwestern Italy.

In the years since the enactment of the Italian abortion law, regional differences appear to have diminished. We measured regional variability in abortion levels using the coefficient of variation (the standard deviation divided by the mean, multiplied by 100). For abortion ratios, this measure has decreased from 58.8 in 1979 to 38.0 in 1991, and for abortion rates it has fallen from 34.6 in 1979 to 26.6 in 1987.

None of the data cited in this article take into account the role of clandestine abortion. In Italy, abortions performed by a physician, but not reported through the proper administrative channels, are considered illegal. The actual dimensions of this phenomenon are not known, but the health ministry estimates that approximately 50,000 clandestine abortions were carried out in 1993; of this number, approximately 70% occurred in the southern regions.

Caution is therefore required in evaluating geographical differences in abortion in Italy. This is especially so for abortions obtained by women aged 15–19. Considerably lower abortion rates occurred in the south, where the role of clandestine abortion remains especially unclear. Nevertheless, official sources suggest that the level of clandestine abortion is decreasing in Italy, so regional variations are less likely to be influenced by this phenomenon; therefore, we believe our data provide a fairly accurate description of geographic differences in induced abortion in Italy.


#### Age Patterns

To examine age patterns in the occurrence of abortion in Italy, we used census data collected in 1981 and 1991 that provided specific regional information about the age structure of the population. These data enabled us to calculate the age-specific abortion rate and the total abortion rate, a standardized measure not influenced by age structure that can be used to make comparisons.

Table 3 (page 270) shows total abortion rates and age-specific abortion rates by region for 1981 and 1991. The overall total abortion rate declined by approximately one-third, from 545 lifetime abortions per 1,000 women in 1981 to 366 per 1,000 in 1991. Decreases in the total abortion rate were the least pronounced in the south, where in several regions (such as Basilicata, Campania and Molise), rates remained relatively unchanged.

Abortion rates were highest for women aged 25–29 in the 1981 cohort (25.3 per 1,000) and, not surprisingly, lowest among women aged 45–49 (0.9 per 1,000). Abortion rates among adolescent women aged 15–19 were also quite low (76 per 1,000). Age-specific rates varied by region. In the southern regions (with the exception of Calabria), women aged 30–34 registered the highest abortion rate (e.g., 42.7 per 1,000 in Puglia and 277 per 1,000 in Abruzzo). In the northeast, rates were highest among women aged 20–24 years old (35.6 per 1,000 in Emilia-Romagna and 174 per 1,000 in Trentino). Women aged 25–29 had the highest abortion rates in the central regions of Tuscany (31.5), Umbria (32.0) and Lazio (26.4).

Regional differences occurred within