Abortion Rate in U.S. Falls 21% in One Decade

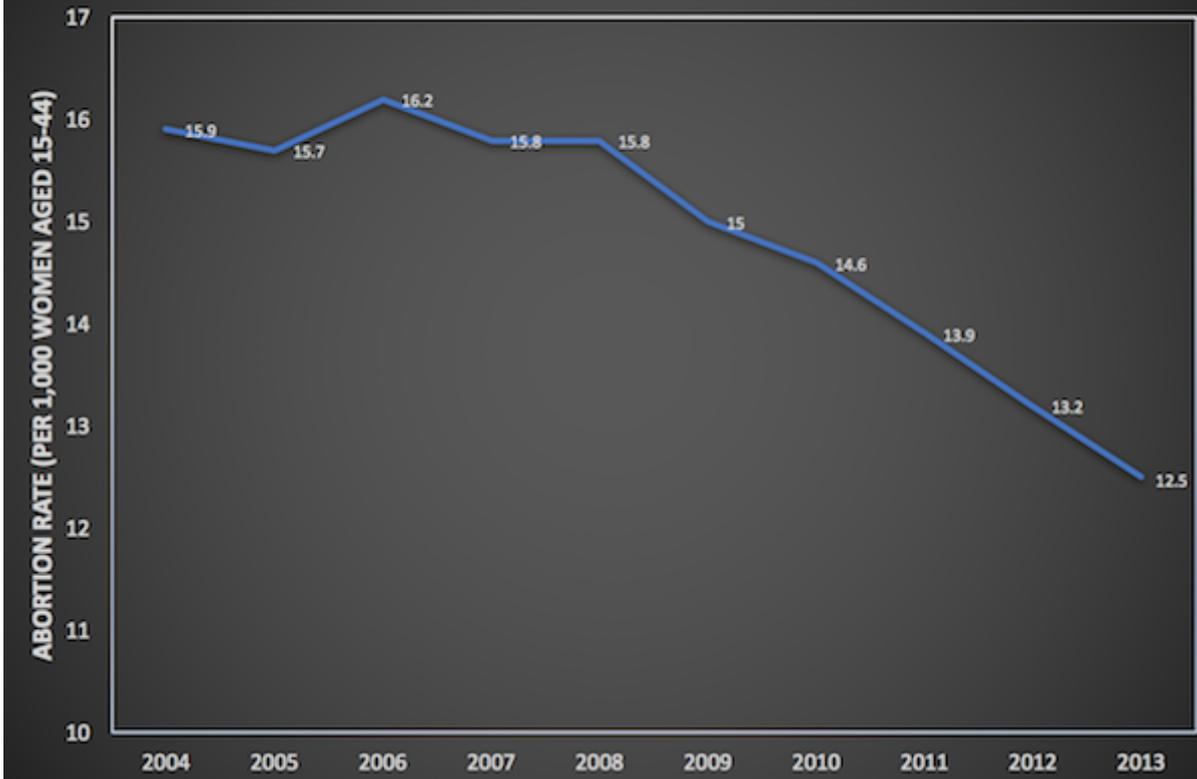*By Alex Berezow, PhD — December 9, 2016*

Credit: Shutterstock [1]

Even with the hot-button topic of abortion, there is one thing that all people can agree upon: It is preferable to have as few abortions as possible. And recent data from the CDC indicates good news. The abortion rate in America has fallen by about 20% from 2004 to 2013.

The CDC does not require states to provide it with data on abortions. Most do so voluntarily, but a few, such as California and New Hampshire, do not. While incomplete data obviously lowers the *total number* of reported abortions, it should not (in theory) influence the calculated *rate* of abortion if we assume that abortion rates in the non-reporting states are similar to those in the 45 states that do report data. (More on that below.)

Abortion Rate in the U.S., 2004-2013

Source: CDC

As shown, the abortion rate per 1,000 women aged 15-44 has fallen nationally by about 21%, from 15.9 in 2004 to 12.5 in 2013. Similarly, the abortion ratio (i.e., the number of abortions per 1,000 live births) has fallen 17%, from 241 to 200 over the same period.

In reality, the national abortion rate is almost certainly higher than 12.5 per 1,000 women. The reason is because the abortion rate varies substantially across states. South Dakota has the lowest abortion rate (4.7 per 1,000), while New York has the highest rate (23.6 per 1,000).

California is a large state with an abortion rate historically higher than that of the U.S. as a whole. According to the Guttmacher Institute [2], the abortion rates were:

2004
Calif.: 26.9
U.S.: 19.7

2011
Calif.: 23
U.S.: 16.9

In this seven-year period, abortions fell 14% in both California and the U.S. While Guttmacher reports higher overall abortion rates, it is in general agreement with the CDC that the trend is downward.

Why has the abortion rate fallen? The CDC lists several factors that contribute to the abortion rate:

- *Access to health care services, including contraception*
- *Availability of abortion providers*
- *State regulations, such as mandatory waiting periods, parental involvement laws, and legal restrictions on abortion providers*
- *Increasing acceptance of nonmarital childbearing*
- *Shifts in the racial/ethnic composition of the U.S. population*
- *Changes in the economy and the resulting impact on fertility preferences and use of contraception*

The report does not mention another factor, which may be just as important. According to PRRI [3], while Millennials (who are currently in the childbearing age range of 19-35) believe abortion should remain legal, 51% feel abortion is morally wrong. This has led some to conclude that Millennials are skeptical about abortion [4].

Thus, regardless of what position a person holds on abortion, this data should be received as welcome news*.

Source [5]: Jatlaoui TC, Ewing A, Mandel MG, et al. "Abortion Surveillance — United States, 2013." *MMWR Surveill Summ* 65 (12): 1-44. Published: 25-Nov-2016. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss6512a1 [6].

It is also worth noting that about 92% of abortions occur within 13 weeks of gestation, which is roughly within the first trimester. Slightly more than 1% of abortions occurred at or after 21 weeks, meaning late-term abortions were rare.

Source URL: https://www.acsh.org/news/2016/12/09/abortion-rate-us-falls-21-one-decade-10567
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[1] http://www.shutterstock.com/pic-520989715/stock-photo-pregnancy-rest-people-and-expectation-concept-happy-pregnant-woman-sitting-on-bed-and-touching-her-belly-over-holidays-lights-background.html
[2] https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/state-facts-about-abortion-california
[3] http://www.prri.org/research/millennial-values-survey-2012/
[4] http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2015/03/23/abortion-generation-demographics-choice-life-column/24900705/
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