

The decline in induced abortion in Italy

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Objective: To evaluate the time and geographic trend of induced abortion in Italy.

Design and Methods: The data collected by the Epidemiological Surveillance System established in the Istituto Superiore di Sanità (National Institute of Health) and data collected by Istat (National Institute of Statistics) from 1978 to 2000 were analysed.

Results: After legalisation in 1978, the annual number of induced abortions increased, peaking at 234801 cases in 1982. Since then, there has been a considerable decrease in the absolute number and rates. In 2000, there were 134828 induced abortions; the abortion rate per 1000 women aged 15-49 dropped from 17.2 (in 1982) to 9.6 in 2000. A reduction has occurred in all regions, although the decrease and the availability of services was not the same all over the country. The decline was higher in the areas where the use of modern contraceptives increased most, where abortion services were timely implemented and where public maternal and child centres (consultori familiari) were more widespread. The number of induced abortions to women born outside Italy has increased, from 4510 in 1981 to 24600 in 1999, and the rate is now estimated to be three times that of Italian born women. This can at least partly explain the recent slowing down of the decline in the total number performed in Italy.

Conclusion: The decline in induced abortion in Italy has been greater than in most other European countries. This is probably due to more widespread use of contraceptives, especially modern efficient methods. The increase observed among immigrant women is a cause for concern.