



## REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

**In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortions for all women in its landmark ruling in *Roe v. Wade*. The Court's ruling in July of 1989 in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* all but overturned *Roe v. Wade* by giving states more freedom to restrict women's access to abortion.**

- A 1988 poll showed that 77 percent of Americans agreed that abortion "should be left to the woman and her doctor," and that support for abortion rights cuts across political, age, religious, income, education, race and sex differences. Only 19 percent favored a constitutional amendment outlawing abortion.
- Almost half (46 percent) of American women will have an abortion in their lifetime.
- Sixty percent of blacks polled by the *Washington Post* support a woman's right to choose abortion.
- Of all abortions in the U.S., 91 percent take place in the first trimester, with 50 percent occurring in the first eight weeks. Only 8 percent of all abortions are performed in the second trimester and only a tiny fraction (1/100th of one percent) are performed during the third trimester -- and those are performed exclusively for serious medical reasons.

**Women would still have abortions, even if they were made illegal. Illegal abortions are life-threatening and degrading experiences.**

- Before abortion was legalized in the U.S. in 1973, it was estimated that 10,000 women died every year from botched illegal abortions.
- A recent survey of 300 women in New York revealed that over half (57 percent) would still have an abortion even if it were made illegal again.

**The more contraceptive options and information available to a society, the less dependent it is on abortion.**

- In 1970 there were 13 pharmaceutical companies worldwide doing contraceptive research. Today there are three. Seven were in the U.S. in 1970 -- today only one is. This dramatic decrease reflects severe cuts in funding for reproductive health services and research, largely due to pressure from a vocal, well-organized, anti-choice minority.
- One contraceptive breakthrough has been the development of RU-486, a pill that provides a woman with the option of a chemical method to end a pregnancy. When taken within several weeks of a missed menstrual period in conjunction with other medication, the pill acts as an abortifacient. RU-486 is on the market in France, but pressure from anti-choice forces is blocking its distribution in this country and internationally -- even for its other life-saving medical applications (e.g., treating ulcers, breast cancer, and endometriosis).

**In addition to safe and legal abortions, women and girls need family planning education and services to help them make informed choices about their reproductive lives.**

- Four out of every 10 females become pregnant before they turn twenty. More than one in every 10 teenage girls gets pregnant each year.
- Only half (49 percent) of women aged 15-19 who engage in sexual intercourse use some method of birth control the first time.
- A 1988 Harris poll shows that 73 percent of Americans favor making birth control information and contraceptives available in school-based clinics.
- Twenty-five percent of unmarried mothers drop out of high school, as do 75 percent of high school girls who both marry and have a child.

**A woman's economic status should not restrict her reproductive choices.**

- Prior to 1977, Medicaid funding -- a joint federal-state program that pays for medical care for very low-income families -- paid for approximately 20 percent of abortions. As of 1977, however, the federal Hyde Amendment (named after Rep. Henry Hyde of Illinois) prohibited states from using federal Medicaid funds to pay for abortions except in cases of rape, incest, and life endangerment. Since 1981, this restriction has been tightened to allow federal funding of Medicaid abortions only in cases in which the woman's life is endangered. Restricting public funding for a common, legal medical service discriminates against low-income women and endangers their health.
- Title X provides federal funds for approximately 5000 family planning clinics in the U.S. and serves over four million low-income women and girls a year. Funding for Title X programs has been cut continually since 1981.

**The U.S. Mexico City Policy (announced at the 1984 U.N. Population Fund Conference in Mexico City) prohibits the transfer of any U.S. aid for family planning to any organization that provides, with its own funds, any information or services related to abortion.**

- Each year in the Third World some 200,000 women -- one woman every three minutes -- die of illegal, botched abortions.
- Over 80 percent of the population in the developing world has inadequate access to contraceptives.
- Worldwide, the Population Crisis Committee estimates that 30 million unwanted pregnancies per year result from contraceptive failures.

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The American Association of University Women supports the right of every woman to safe and comprehensive reproductive health care. AAUW believes that decisions concerning reproductive health care are personal ones, and that the right to make informed decisions should be available to all women.

“AAUW advocates choice in determination of one’s reproductive life” is the statement in the 1989-91 Legislative Program. Affirmed by large majorities of AAUW members at every convention since 1977, this position reaffirms AAUW’s strong commitment to the right of privacy and the rights of individuals. AAUW has had a commitment to reproductive health care for over sixty years:

- In 1920, the Association served on the U.S. Public Health Service Advisory Council of the Division of Venereal Diseases, dealing with effects on women of a campaign to control venereal diseases.
- In 1935, the Association Legislative Program advocated legalization of the dispensing of contraceptive information by physicians.
- In 1970, the Hawaii Division of AAUW launched a successful drive to repeal the state’s restrictive abortion laws, stimulating AAUW’s involvement in other states and divisions.
- In 1971, the Association convention adopted a resolution calling on members in all fifty states to work for repeal of restrictive abortion laws, so that abortion would be legal for those who wish it after medical consultation.
- In 1971, AAUW joined an *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) brief in the Supreme Court case of *Roe v. Wade* that led to the 1973 decision legalizing abortion.
- In 1989, AAUW initiated the *AAUW Campaign for Choice* in response to the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*. Through the Campaign, AAUW has taken a lead nationwide in fighting for reproductive rights for all women.

Choice, self determination, is the foundation of all civil rights. Among a woman’s most basic rights is the freedom to make informed choices concerning her reproductive health within the dictates of her religious and moral beliefs. Her economic status should not restrict her ability to make that choice.

AAUW hopes that pregnancy prevention can become the new meeting ground for all those concerned about abortion. The Association is greatly concerned about attacks on family planning and restrictions on access to abortion. Both undermine a woman’s right to decide when and whether to bear children. Until threats to reproductive freedom end, AAUW’s advocacy of women’s right to safe, accessible and comprehensive reproductive health care will remain an integral part of its efforts to gain equity and justice for women.

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