

Induced Abortions in Western Australia, 1999-2005

Report of the WA Abortion Notification System



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FURTHER INFORMATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the statistics on induced abortion in Western Australia since the passage of the *Acts Amendment (Abortion) Act* in 1998. Because of changes to the notification form in 2001, the most complete information is available from 2002 onwards. As an update of the previous report (2005), it includes data on abortions performed in 2005.

The report includes information about time trends in abortion rates, characteristics of women having abortions (age and place of residence), and details about the abortions including the method, duration of pregnancy and the facilities where the abortions were performed. A comparison with national rates is also provided. New to this report is an analysis of rates of abortion by age group (age specific rates) by region, as well as analysis of teenage pregnancy rates by region.

In 2005, there were 7828 induced abortions reported in WA, and the rate of induced abortion was 18.2 per 1000 women of reproductive age (15-44 years). There has been a slight downward trend in the abortion rate since 2002; this trend continued in 2005. An estimate of the proportion of pregnancies ending in induced abortion (abortion proportion) indicates that approximately 23% of pregnancies resulted in termination.

Induced abortions occur across the reproductive age range, with women in their twenties having the highest abortion rates. In 2005, there has been a slight increase in abortion rates among women in their early twenties (30.9 in 2004 increased to 32.4 in 2005) and a decrease among women in their late twenties (24.5 in 2004 decreased to 23.0 in 2005). As might be expected, the groups with the highest proportion of pregnancies being terminated are those at the extremes of reproductive age (teenagers and women over 40), and this trend continued in 2005. More than half the pregnancies in WA teenagers were terminated.

The mean age of women having an induced abortion in 2005 was 26.4 years (with a standard deviation of 7.32), unchanged from the mean age in previous years.

The 2002-2005 rates for induced abortions by place of residence have shown a decline in the metropolitan rate and a slight upward trend in the non-metropolitan rate. However, rates of induced abortion are still higher in the metropolitan area, with abortion rates 17% lower in rural areas. There is wide variation between regions in the overall rates of abortion and in the age specific rates. For teenagers the highest pregnancy rates (abortion rate plus birth rate) were in the Kimberley and the Pilbara Gascoyne regions.

Women in rural areas comprise 21% of the female population of reproductive age. Eighteen percent of abortions were performed on women with a non-metropolitan place of residence. Only six percent of abortions took place in rural public hospitals. As in previous years, more than 90% of induced abortions took place in the private sector, most in freestanding clinics.

Consistent with previous years, over 90% of induced abortions in WA took place in the first three months of pregnancy and were carried out by vacuum aspiration (suction curettage), the accepted method of surgical abortion. Abortions over 20 weeks accounted for 0.6% of all abortions. From the figures presented in the report, it appears that women in WA do have ready access to early abortion, although this does not exclude limited access or undue delay for some groups or individuals. There may be issues of access for rural women and disadvantaged women.

Comparing the rates of induced abortion in WA with other state and national figures, the 2005 WA rates (18.2 per 1000) are somewhat higher than those in South Australia (15.9 per 1000, 2004) but they are comparable with national estimates (19.7 per 1000, 2003). In New Zealand the abortion rate for 2005 was 19.7 per 1000 women aged 15-44 years.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Legal status of induced abortion in Western Australia

The *Acts Amendment (Abortion) Act* was enacted in May 1998. Prior to that time, induced abortion had been readily available in WA for several years (with the procedure claimable under Medicare), but the legal position was uncertain and there had never been a test case. The 1998 Act made changes to the provisions relating to abortion in the *Criminal Code* and introduced a new section to the *Health Act 1911* setting out the requirements for the performance of an abortion to be justified.

The effect of the amendments was to make it lawful to perform an abortion where the abortion is:

- a) performed by a medical practitioner in good faith and with reasonable care and skill; and
- b) justified under section 334 of the *Health Act*

Abortion is available at the request of the women up to 20 weeks gestation, provided she has given informed consent. The counselling requirements for informed consent are spelled out in Section 334 of the *Health Act*. There are additional requirements for informed consent with respect to dependent minors. After 20 weeks gestation, the performance of the abortion must be approved by a medical panel appointed by the Minister for Health and it must be carried out in an approved facility¹.

1.2 The Abortion Notification System

Section 335 (d) of the *Health Act 1911* requires that *when a medical practitioner performs an abortion, the medical practitioner shall notify the Executive Director Public Health of the fact in the prescribed form within 14 days of the abortion being performed*. Paragraph 335 (e) states that *a notification under paragraph (d) must not contain any particulars from which it may be possible to ascertain the identity of the patient*.

The notification form developed in June 1998, immediately after the passage of the legislation, was modified in 2001 after wide consultation. Accordingly, information about some variables is only available from 2002 onwards. The notification form is attached to this report (see appendix B). The notification system is managed by the Information Collection and Management Directorate in the Department of Health. Further details about the notification process are available from:

<http://www.notifications.health.wa.gov.au/notifications/maternal/abortions.cfm>

¹ Department of Health, WA. *Notes for medical practitioners on the abortion legislation in Western Australia*. 2003.

http://www.health.wa.gov.au/publications/subject_index/a/abortion.cfm

2. TIME TRENDS IN ABORTION RATES

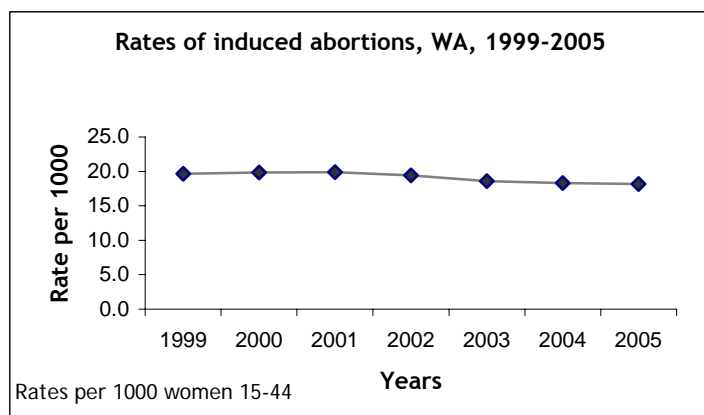
Table 1 and Figure 1 show the trends in the rate of induced abortion per 1000 women aged 15-44 years for the years 1999-2005, based on the Abortion Notification System. The rates were fairly constant in the first part of the period, immediately after the passage of the legislation, but there has been a slight decline since 2002². The downward trend has continued in 2005.

Table 1. Number and rate of induced abortions, WA, 1999-2005

Year	Number of Abortions	Popn of Women 15-44 ²	Abortion Rate
1999	8217	417,578	19.7
2000	8337	419,838	19.9
2001	8378	420,758	19.9
2002	8262	424,944	19.4
2003	7942	426,756	18.6
2004	7868	429,844	18.3
2005	7828	430,765	18.2

Abortion Rate = Number of abortions per 1000 women aged 15-44. Numerator includes abortions at all ages

Figure 1



² It should be noted that the denominator for this rate is the female population aged 15-44 years, a range which is used in international statistics. To facilitate national and international comparisons, abortions at all ages are included in the numerator, although it is acknowledged that a small number of these occur in women outside the age range.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN HAVING INDUCED ABORTIONS

3.1 Age

There are various ways of looking at induced abortion by age, including the way in which abortions are distributed across the age groups (Table 2, Figure 2), the rate of abortion per 1000 women in each age group (Table 3, Figure 3) and the proportion of pregnancies ending in abortion (Table 4, Figure 4).

3.1.1 Percentage distribution of abortions by age

As shown in Table 2 and Figure 2, abortions are performed across the reproductive age range with women in their twenties accounting for almost half the number of abortions performed. Nineteen percent of abortions were performed in teenagers. The mean age of women having an induced abortion in 2005 was 26.4 years (with a standard deviation of 7.32), unchanged from the mean age in previous years.

Table 2. Induced abortions by age of woman, WA, 2002-2005

Year	Total	Age group (yrs)							
		<15	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+
Number									
2002 ¹	8091	23	1564	2261	1695	1331	844	338	35
2003 ²	7867	20	1506	2197	1673	1262	816	358	35
2004 ³	7811	35	1491	2160	1606	1269	853	363	34
2005	7828	37	1450	2263	1518	1247	861	395	57
Percentage									
2002 ¹	8091	0.3	19.3	27.9	21.0	16.5	10.4	4.2	0.4
2003 ²	7867	0.3	19.1	27.9	21.3	16.0	10.4	4.6	0.4
2004 ³	7811	0.4	19.1	27.7	20.6	16.2	10.9	4.6	0.4
2005	7828	0.5	18.5	28.9	19.4	15.9	11.0	5.0	0.7

¹ Note: For 2002, there are 171 records with missing data on age

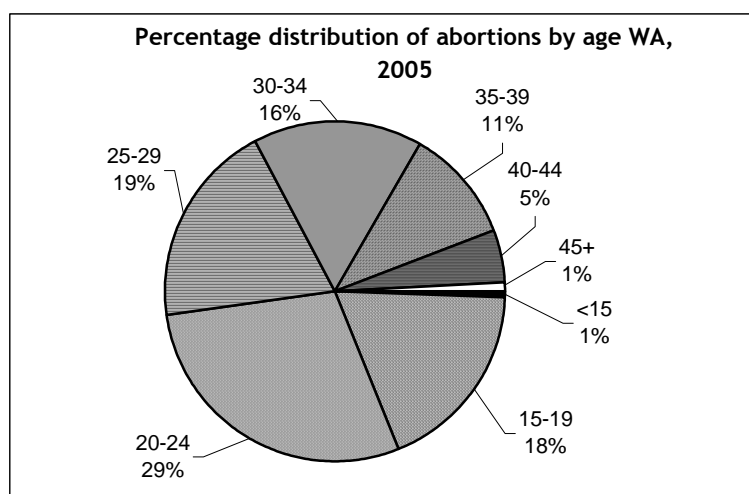
² Note: For 2003, there are 75 records with missing data on age

³ Note: For 2004, there are 57 records with missing data on age

Note: For 2005, there was no missing data on age

Percentages are row percentages for each year

Figure 2



Note: percentages are rounded to nearest whole number

3.1.2 Abortion rates and birth rates by age group

As shown in Table 3(a and b) and Figure 3, women in the 20-24 year age group had the highest abortion rates (32 per 1000 in 2005), followed by women aged 25-29 years (23 per 1000 in 2005). Women in the 30-34 year age group had the highest birth rate (120 per 1000 in 2005), followed by women in the 25-29 year age group (108 per 1000 in 2005). Table 3c summarises teenage abortion rates, birth rates and pregnancy rates for 2002-2005. (The pregnancy rates are compiled by adding the birth rate and the abortion rate. They do not include spontaneous miscarriages or stillbirths). The rates have fluctuated over the four years, with no specific trend.

Table 3a. Induced abortion rates by age of woman, WA, 2002-2005

Year	Age group (yrs)						Overall Rate
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	
2002	22.8	34.0	25.6	18.2	11.5	4.9	19.0
2003	21.8	32.4	25.6	17.1	11.2	5.1	18.4
2004	21.7	30.9	24.5	17.2	11.7	5.1	18.3
2005	21.1	32.4	23.0	17.1	11.6	5.8	18.2

Abortion Rate = Number of abortions per 1000 women for each age group.

The abortion rate for women aged 15-19 years includes abortions for younger ages

The abortion rate for women aged 40-44 years includes abortions for older ages

The total abortion rate includes all abortions where age was known

Table 3b. Birth rates by age of woman, WA, 2002-2005

Year	Age group (yrs)						Overall Rate
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	
2002	20.6	60.6	107.7	107.4	47.3	8.7	57.9
2003	19.0	55.9	103.5	111.0	50.7	9.5	57.4
2004	19.8	56.6	105.5	113.7	54.1	9.6	59.0
2005	20.9	58.9	107.8	120.0	60.0	10.8	62.0

Birth Rate = Number of livebirths per 1000 women for each age group.

The birth rate for women aged 15-19 years includes births for younger ages

The birth rate for women aged 40-44 years includes births for older ages

Source: WA Midwives Notification System 2002-2005

Refer to Appendix A for population data

Table 3c. Teenage abortion rates, birth rates and pregnancy rates, WA, 2002-2005

Year	Abortion Rate	Birth Rate	Pregnancy Rate
2002	22.8	20.6	43.4
2003	21.8	19.0	40.8
2004	21.7	19.8	41.5
2005	21.1	20.9	42.0

Abortion Rate = Number of abortions per 1000 women aged 15-19. Includes abortions for younger ages.

Birth Rate = Number of live births per 1000 women aged 15-19. Includes births for younger ages.

Pregnancy Rate = Number of abortions and live births per 1000 women aged 15-19. Includes abortions and births for younger ages. **Please note:** the pregnancy rate does not include stillbirths or spontaneous abortions.

Figure 3

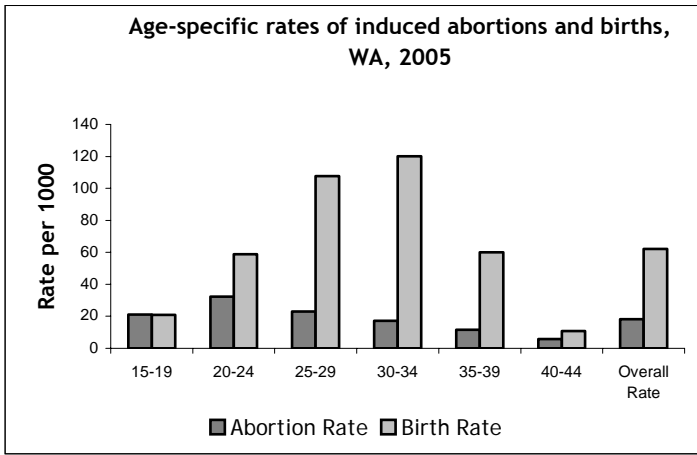
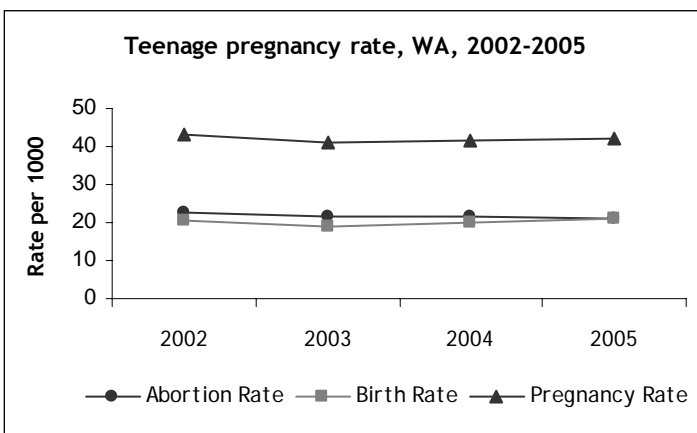


Figure 4



3.1.3 The abortion proportion by age group

The abortion proportion is expressed as the number of abortions per 100 (abortions plus livebirths). While the figure "abortions plus live births" clearly does not include *all* pregnancies (miscarriages and stillbirths are not included), it has been used here because it is the international standard way of reporting the abortion proportion.

As in previous years (Table 4c), the proportion of pregnancies being terminated was highest at each end of the reproductive age range. Among teenagers and among women over 45, more than half of the "known pregnancies" (abortions plus livebirths) were terminated. The lowest proportions of pregnancies terminated were in women in their thirties. In 2005, within the youngest and oldest age groups, there was a rise in the proportion of pregnancies ending in abortion; however the numbers of abortions were small in these age groups.

Table 4a. Induced abortions by age of woman, WA, 2002-2005

Year	Total	Age group (yrs)							
		<15	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+
2002 ¹	8091	23	1564	2261	1695	1331	844	338	35
2003 ²	7867	20	1506	2197	1673	1262	816	358	35
2004 ³	7811	35	1491	2160	1606	1269	853	363	34
2005	7828	37	1450	2263	1518	1247	861	395	57

¹ Note: For 2002, there are 171 records with missing data on age

² Note: For 2003, there are 75 records with missing data on age

³ Note: For 2004, there are 57 records with missing data on age

Note: For 2005, there was no missing data on age

Table 4b. Livebirths by age of woman, WA, 2002-2005

Year	Total	Age group (yrs)							
		<15	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+
2002	24609	18	1413	4026	7139	7873	3481	628	31
2003	24497	15	1315	3789	6769	8173	3703	697	36
2004	25340	16	1376	3952	6920	8378	3957	716	25
2005	26723	15	1463	4120	7099	8752	4442	808	24

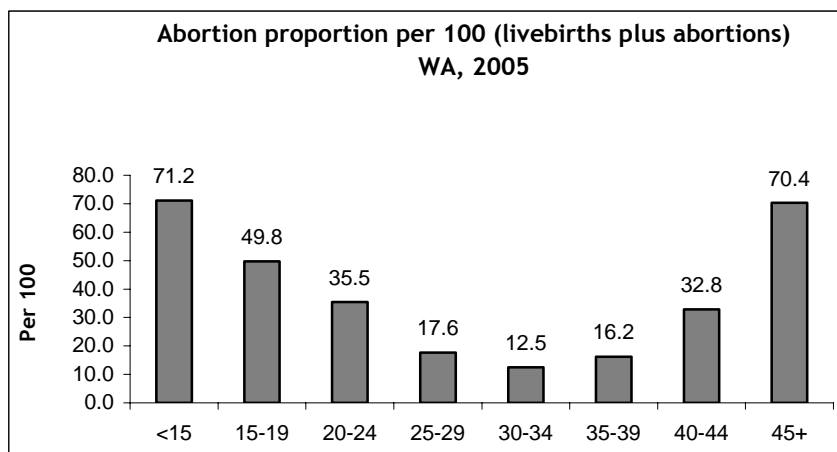
Source: WA Midwives Notification System 2002-2005

Table 4c. Abortion proportion per 100 (livebirths plus abortions) by age of woman, WA, 2002-2005

Year	Age group (yrs)								
	<15	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	Overall
2002	56.1	52.5	36.0	19.2	14.5	19.5	35.0	53.0	24.7
2003	57.1	53.4	36.7	19.8	13.4	18.1	33.9	49.3	24.3
2004	68.6	52.0	35.3	18.8	13.2	17.7	33.6	57.6	23.6
2005	71.2	49.8	35.5	17.6	12.5	16.2	32.8	70.4	22.7

Abortion proportion = Abortions / (Abortions + Livebirths)

Figure 5



3.2 Place of residence

The postcode of the woman's place of residence is collected on the notification form. These postcodes have been grouped according to the boundaries of the various health service areas (North Metropolitan, South Metropolitan and the various regions of WA Country Health Services). Table 5 gives the abortion rate for each area per 1000 women aged 15-44 in that area.

As Table 5 and Figure 5 show, the overall non-metropolitan abortion rate in 2005 (15.4 per 1000) was lower than the metropolitan rate (18.6 per 1000). Women living in non-metropolitan areas accounted for 21% of the female population of reproductive age, and 18% of the induced abortions. In 2005, the highest rates were in the metropolitan area, both North and South, while among the non-metropolitan regions the highest rates continued to be in the Pilbara Gascoyne and South West.

Over the four-year period (2002-2005), there has been a declining trend in the abortion rate in the metropolitan area (from 20.1 per 1000 women in 2002 to 18.6 per 1000 in 2005). The overall non-metropolitan abortion rate showed a slight increase in 2005 (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

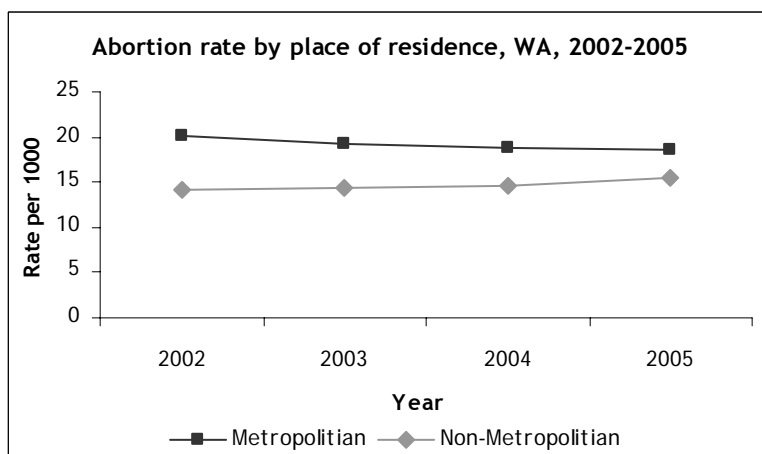


Table 5. Induced abortions by place of residence, WA, 2002-2005

Residence ¹	2002		2003		2004		2005	
	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate	Number	Rate
Metropolitan								
North Metro	3651	20.4	3486	19.4	3445	19.0	3353	18.4
South Metro	2995	19.7	2904	18.9	2876	18.5	2933	18.7
Total Metropolitan	6646	20.1	6390	19.2	6321	18.8	6286	18.6
Non-Metropolitan								
Kimberley	155	19.2	127	15.5	111	13.2	114	13.5
Pilbara Gascoyne	188	16.2	210	18.2	203	17.8	196	17.7
Midwest Murchison	160	15.6	145	14.3	150	14.9	161	16.3
Wheatbelt	153	11.1	144	10.7	191	14.0	164	12.9
Goldfields SE Coastal	106	8.5	164	13.4	136	11.2	171	14.7
Great Southern	135	13.0	129	12.6	108	10.5	126	12.8
South West	437	15.9	427	15.6	455	16.4	489	17.2
Total Non-Metropolitan	1334	14.2	1346	14.4	1354	14.5	1421	15.4
Other	282	na	206	na	193	na	121	na
Overall State	8262	19.4	7942	18.6	7868	18.3	7828	18.2

¹ Place of residence is grouped into Area Health Services or WA Country Health Service Regions

Abortion Rate = Number of abortions per 1000 women aged 15-44. Numerator includes abortions at all ages

Refer to Appendix C for population data

Figure 7

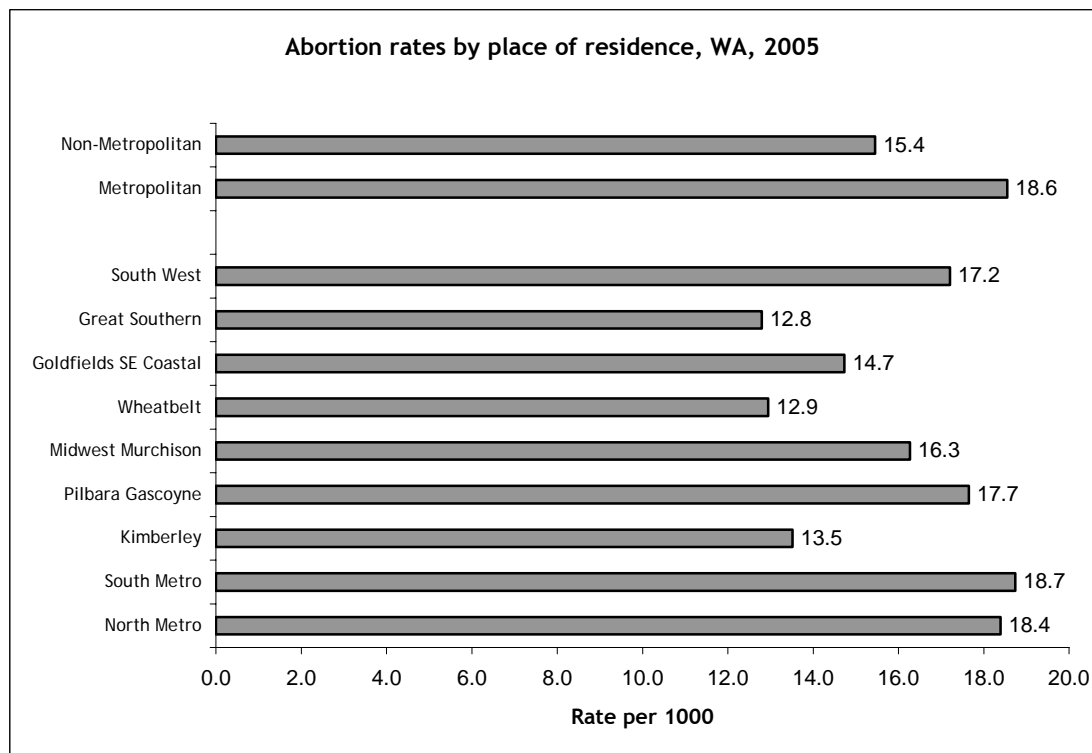


Table 6 shows the abortion rates by age group and place of residence. As can be seen, there is wide variation in the abortion rates across the regions. The highest rates for teenage abortions were in the Pilbara Gascoyne and Goldfields SE Coastal regions, while for young women 20-24 the highest rates were in the Pilbara Gascoyne and the South West. As illustrated in Table 7, there are large regional differences in teenage abortion, birth and overall pregnancy rates, with metropolitan regions reporting higher abortion rates and non-metropolitan regions (apart from the South West) reporting higher birth rates. The highest rates for teenage pregnancy were in the Kimberley and Pilbara Gascoyne region (137.1 and 79.9 per 1000 women aged 15-19 years respectively).

Factors affecting teenage pregnancy are complex; differences between regions could be related to preferences for pregnancy outcomes in different groups or barriers for young women in regional areas in accessing contraceptive and abortion services.

Table 6. Rates of induced abortions by place of residence and age group, WA, 2005

Residence	Age group (yrs)						Overall Rate
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	
Metropolitan							
North Metro	20.3	31.2	23.6	17.4	13.2	5.9	18.4
South Metro	21.9	33.0	22.3	18.4	11.0	6.3	18.7
Non-Metropolitan							
Kimberley	18.4	22.0	17.9	14.0	7.5	2.2	13.5
Pilbara Gascoyne	26.9	34.2	19.8	15.8	8.1	7.8	17.7
Midwest Murchison	21.3	32.6	24.1	13.0	8.5	4.2	16.3
Wheatbelt	15.9	28.8	16.7	12.6	8.7	3.7	12.9
Goldfields SE Coastal	22.9	33.9	19.3	9.2	6.0	2.6	14.7
Great Southern	12.7	21.8	17.7	9.7	13.4	5.9	12.8
South West	20.8	34.4	25.5	14.7	10.7	5.0	17.2
Overall State	21.1	32.4	23	17.1	11.6	5.8	18.2

Abortion Rate = Number of abortions per 1000 women for each age group

The abortion rate for women aged 15-19 years includes abortions for younger ages

The abortion rate for women aged 40-44 years includes abortions for older ages

Table 7. Teenage abortion rates, birth rates and pregnancy rates by place of residence, WA, 2005

Residence	Abortion Rate	Birth Rate	Pregnancy Rate
Metropolitan			
North Metro	20.3	13.1	33.4
South Metro	21.9	20.5	42.4
Non-Metropolitan			
Kimberley	18.4	118.7	137.1
Pilbara Gascoyne	26.9	53.0	79.9
Midwest Murchison	21.3	38.9	60.2
Wheatbelt	15.9	31.8	47.7
Goldfields SE Coastal	22.9	42.6	65.5
Great Southern	12.7	34.1	46.8
South West	20.8	18.7	39.5
Overall State	21.1	20.9	42.0

Abortion Rate = Number of abortions per 1000 women aged 15-19. Includes abortions for younger ages.

Birth Rate = Number of livebirths per 1000 women aged 15-19. Includes births for younger ages.

Pregnancy Rate = Number of abortions and livebirths per 1000 women aged 15-19. Includes abortions and births for younger ages. **Please note:** the pregnancy rate does not include stillbirths or spontaneous abortions.

4. DETAILS ABOUT THE INDUCED ABORTIONS

4.1 Facilities where abortions were performed

As shown in Table 8 and Figure 6, almost half of the induced abortions in WA were carried out in private clinics in the metropolitan area, with another 40% in metropolitan private hospitals. It should be noted that one of the two large freestanding clinics is classified as a private hospital.

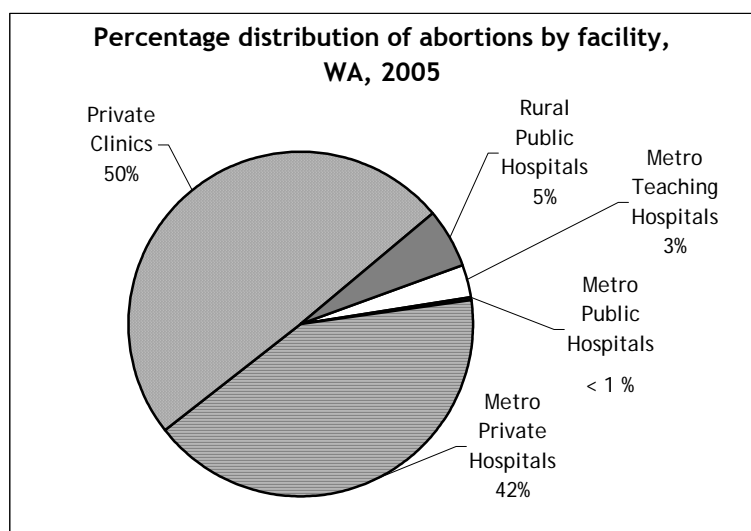
Over 90% of abortions in WA were carried out in the private sector in 2005. Abortion procedures in metropolitan teaching hospitals were mainly late abortions. Although rural women accounted for 18% of abortions, only six percent of abortions were carried out in rural public hospitals. While some women may prefer to travel to the city for reasons of privacy, there are likely to be substantial travel costs for many women, and the issue of access to abortion services for rural women is still an important one.

Table 8. Induced abortions by facility, WA, 2002-2005

Year	Total	Facility				
		Metro Teaching	Metro Public	Metro Private	Private Clinics	Rural Public
Numbers						
2002	8262	205	213	3218	4103	523
2003	7942	183	81	3061	4113	504
2004	7860	207	57	3295	3884	417
2005	7828	231	23	3259	3881	434
Percentage						
2002	8262	2.5	2.6	38.9	49.7	6.3
2003	7942	2.3	1.0	38.6	51.9	6.2
2004	7860	2.6	0.7	41.9	49.6	5.2
2005	7828	3.0	0.3	41.6	49.6	5.5

Percentages are row percentages for each year

Figure 8



Note: percentages are rounded to nearest whole number

4.2 Gestational age (duration of pregnancy)

The safest time for induced abortion is early in pregnancy, ideally less than 12 weeks from the last menstrual period (in the first trimester of pregnancy). There is good evidence that the rate of complications increases with increasing duration of pregnancy and the rate of complications rises sharply after 14 weeks. After 16 weeks the procedure may involve dilatation and evacuation or induction of labour, and require admission to hospital.

As in previous years, there is little evidence of undue delay in abortion procedures in WA, although this does not rule out delay in individual cases. In 2005, 70% of induced abortions were carried out in the first eight weeks, 85% in the first 10 weeks, and 94% at 12 weeks or less. Only 0.6% of abortions were carried out at 20 weeks or over.

Table 9. Induced abortions by gestational age, WA, 1999-2005

Year	Total	Gestational Age					
		≤ 8 weeks	9-10 weeks	11-12 weeks	13-15 weeks	16-19 weeks	20 + weeks
Number							
1999 ¹	8188	5663	1606	554	189	148	28
2000 ²	8319	5939	1369	596	223	155	37
2001 ³	8316	5835	1347	662	258	187	27
2002 ⁴	8240	5724	1340	682	279	184	31
2003 ⁵	7928	5689	1212	541	294	161	31
2004 ⁶	7859	5574	1229	614	251	153	38
2005	7828	5481	1202	638	275	183	49
Percentage							
1999 ¹	8188	69.2	19.6	6.8	2.3	1.8	0.3
2000 ²	8319	71.4	16.5	7.2	2.7	1.9	0.4
2001 ³	8316	70.2	16.2	8.0	3.1	2.2	0.3
2002 ⁴	8240	69.5	16.3	8.3	3.4	2.2	0.4
2003 ⁵	7928	71.8	15.3	6.8	3.7	2.0	0.4
2004 ⁶	7859	70.9	15.6	7.8	3.2	1.9	0.5
2005	7828	70.0	15.4	8.2	3.5	2.3	0.6

¹ Note: In 1999 gestational age was not recorded for 29 cases

² Note: In 2000 gestational age was not recorded for 18 cases

³ Note: In 2001 gestational age was not recorded for 62 cases

⁴ Note: In 2002 gestational age was not recorded for 22 cases

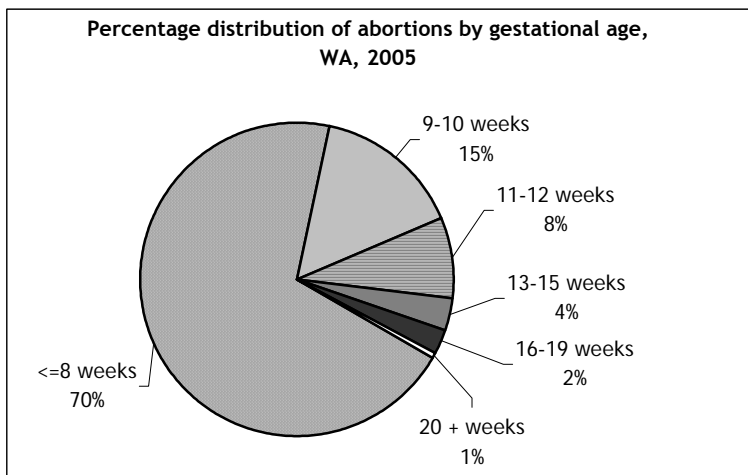
⁵ Note: In 2003 gestational age was not recorded for 14 cases

⁶ Note: In 2004 gestational age was not recorded for 9 cases

Note: In 2005, there was no missing data on gestational age

Percentages are row percentages for each year

Figure 9



Note: percentages are rounded to nearest whole number

4.3 Method of induced abortion

Consistent with the fact that over 90% of induced abortions took place in the first three months, the main method of abortion was vacuum aspiration (suction curettage), 95% in 2005. Dilatation and evacuation accounted for nearly three percent and other methods, including prostaglandin, intravenous or intra-uterine infusion, another two percent.

Table 10. Induced abortions by method, WA, 2002-2005

Year	Total	Method of Abortion			
		Vacuum Aspiration	Dilatation & Curettage	Dilatation & Evacuation	Other ⁴
Number					
2002 ¹	8242	7852	28	240	122
2003 ²	7937	7629	18	162	128
2004 ³	7858	7556	10	137	155
2005	7828	7469	11	191	157
Percentage					
2002 ¹	8242	95.3	0.3	2.9	1.5
2003 ²	7937	96.1	0.2	2.1	1.6
2004 ³	7858	96.2	0.1	1.7	2.0
2005	7828	95.4	0.1	2.5	2.0

¹ Note: For 2002, there are 20 records with missing data on method of abortion

² Note: For 2003, there are 5 records with missing data on method of abortion

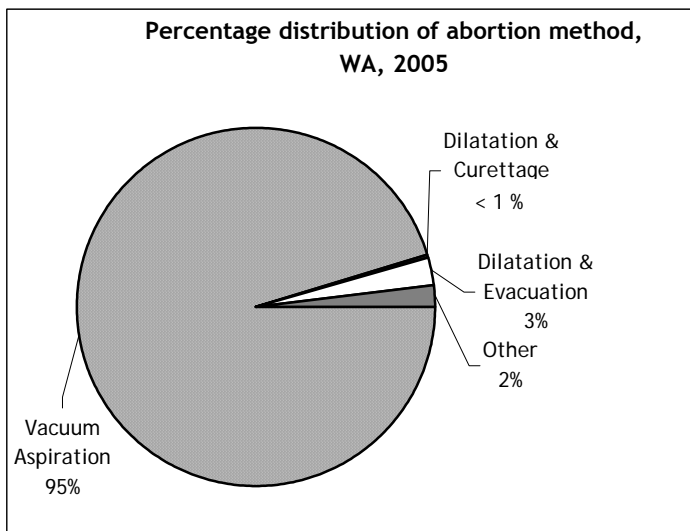
³ Note: For 2004, there are 10 records with missing data on method of abortion

Note: In 2005, there was no missing data on method of abortion

⁴ Note: Other methods include- Prostaglandin, I/V Infusions, I/U Injection

Percentages are row percentages for each year

Figure 10



Note: percentages are rounded to nearest whole number

4.5 Abortions for suspected or identified congenital malformations

One question on the notification form asks whether the abortion was carried out for suspected or identified congenital malformations or for selective reduction of a multiple pregnancy. In the four year period, 1.9% of all induced abortions (622 cases) were carried out for suspected or identified congenital malformations, with 14.6% of these (91 cases in four years) due to suspected or identified Neural Tube Defects (such as spina bifida and anencephaly). Up to 70% of Neural Tube Defects are preventable and the numbers still occurring represent a missed opportunity for primary prevention with the vitamin folate before and in early pregnancy.

5. NATIONAL COMPARISONS

Table 9 shows how abortion rates and abortion proportions in Western Australia compare with South Australian abortion statistics, the only other State in Australia that has a legislated abortion notification system. Notification is not required in any other state or territory, making a comprehensive national comparison difficult to achieve.

The National Perinatal Statistics Unit (NPSU) of the Australian Institute of Health & Welfare estimated national abortion rates using a combination of data from the National Hospital Morbidity Database (NHMD) and Medicare data³. They calculated the national rate for 2003 to be 19.7 per 1000 aged 15-44 years, slightly above the WA rate of 18.6 per 1000 for that year.

Table 11. Comparisons of induced abortions

Country / State	Abortion Rate	Abortion Proportion
South Australia ⁴	15.9 (2004)	21.6 (2004)
Western Australia	18.2 (2005)	22.7 (2005)
Australia (estimated)	19.7 (2003) ³	25.5 (2002) ⁵
New Zealand ⁶	19.7 (2005)	23.2 (2005)

Abortion Rate = Number of abortions per 1000 women aged 15-44 years

Abortion proportion = Abortions / (Abortions + Live Births)

³ AIHW NPSU: Grayson N, Hargreaves J & Sullivan EA 2005. Use of routinely collected national data sets for reporting on induced abortion in Australia. AIHW Cat. No. PER 30. Sydney: AIHW National Perinatal Statistics Unit (Perinatal Statistics No.17).

⁴ Chan A, Scott J, Nguyen A-M, Sage L. Pregnancy Outcome in South Australia 2004. Adelaide: Pregnancy Outcome Unit, South Australian Department of Health, 2006.

⁵ Chan A and Sage LC, Estimating Australia's abortion rates 1985-2003. MJA 2005; 182 (9): 447-452.

⁶ Statistics New Zealand, Abortions year ended December 2005.
<http://www.stats.govt.nz/products-and-services/info-releases/abortion-stats.htm> [accessed 25 Sept 2006].

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Department of Health, WA. *Notes for medical practitioners on the abortion legislation in Western Australia*. 2003. Available from: http://www.health.wa.gov.au/publications/subject_index/a/abortion.cfm [accessed 20 Sept 2006].

Statistics New Zealand, Abortions year ended December 2005. <http://www.stats.govt.nz/products-and-services/info-releases/abortion-stats.htm> [accessed 25 Sept 2006].

Appendix A

Table A1. Population data by year and age of women, WA, 2002-2005

Year	Age group (yrs)						Total 15-44
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	
2002	69,633	66,472	66,263	73,276	73,663	75,637	424,944
2003	69,996	67,774	65,370	73,651	72,971	76,994	426,756
2004	70,250	69,863	65,567	73,708	73,090	77,366	429,844
2005	70,639	69,951	65,875	72,913	74,063	77,324	430,765

Source: ABS 3235.5.55.001, Population by age & sex, Western Australia

Table A2. Population data by place of residence for women aged 15-44 years, WA, 2002-2005

Residence ¹	2002	2003	2004	2005
Metropolitan				
North	178834	180075	180970	182279
South	152110	153445	155200	156507
Total Metropolitan	330944	333520	336170	338786
Non-Metropolitan				
Kimberley	8071	8211	8405	8435
Pilbara Gascoyne	11582	11517	11384	11104
Midwest Murchison	10289	10109	10090	9894
Wheatbelt	13778	13489	13617	12668
Goldfields SE Coastal	12415	12265	12108	11609
Great Southern	10414	10255	10327	9849
South West	27451	27390	27743	28420
Total Non-Metropolitan	94000	93236	93674	91979
Total State	424944	426756	429844	430765

Source: Epidemiology Branch, Department of Health Western Australia 2005

¹ Place of residence is grouped into Area Health Services or WA Country Health Service Regions

Table A3. Population data by place of residence and age of women, WA, 2005

Residence	Age groups (yrs)					
	F15-19	F20-24	F25-29	F30-34	F35-39	F40-44
Metropolitan						
North Metro	29,900	30,437	28,040	30,599	30,880	32,423
South Metro	26,436	27,040	23,848	25,427	26,151	27,605
Non-Metropolitan						
Kimberley	1,087	1,365	1,511	1,646	1,473	1,353
Pilbara Gascoyne	1,378	1,519	1,968	2,345	2,090	1,804
Midwest Murchison	1,644	1,382	1,452	1,767	1,758	1,891
Wheatbelt	1,886	1,527	1,736	2,306	2,521	2,692
Goldfields SE Coastal	1,618	1,681	1,964	2,272	2,169	1,905
Great Southern	1,729	1,284	1,359	1,654	1,785	2,038
South West	4,961	3,716	3,997	4,897	5,236	5,613
Total	70,639	69,951	65,875	72,913	74,063	77,324

Source: Epidemiology Branch, Department of Health Western Australia 2005

Table A4. Livebirths by place of residence and age of women, WA, 2005

Residence	Age groups (yrs)						Total
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	
Metropolitan							
North Metro	392	1312	2681	3813	2099	379	10676
South Metro	542	1524	2530	3010	1454	285	9345
Non-Metropolitan							
Kimberley	129	153	154	159	65	10	670
Pilbara Gascoyne	73	167	228	273	116	26	883
Midwest Murchison	64	157	232	191	106	17	767
Wheatbelt	60	167	288	287	134	32	968
Goldfields SE Coastal	69	206	264	260	111	19	929
Great Southern	59	141	207	210	96	19	732
South West	93	290	532	563	261	42	1781
Other	1	8	9	11	9	3	41
Total	1482	4125	7125	8777	4451	832	26792

Source: Midwives Notification System, WA 2005

Appendix B

FORM 1

(Regulation 2)

Health Act 1911
Health (Section 335 (5) (d) Abortion Notice) Regulations 1998
Notification by Medical Practitioner of Induced Abortion

To Executive Director, Public Health¹

Under section 335 (5) (d) of the *Health Act 1911*, I

(please print full name)

provide notice² of an abortion I performed, at

(address where procedure performed)

on

(date of abortion)

1. Gestational age at date of abortion (best estimate):

weeks

2. Method of termination: (tick one or more)

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----|
| Vacuum aspiration (suction curettage) | <input type="checkbox"/> | (1) |
| Dilatation and curettage (sharp) | <input type="checkbox"/> | (2) |
| Dilatation and evacuation | <input type="checkbox"/> | (3) |
| Vaginal prostaglandin or analogue instillation | <input type="checkbox"/> | (4) |
| Other (specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> | (5) |

3. Reason for termination of pregnancy: (tick one)

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----|
| Reason other than fetal abnormality | <input type="checkbox"/> | (1) |
| Suspected fetal abnormality | <input type="checkbox"/> | (2) |
| Actual fetal abnormality
Specify if known | <input type="checkbox"/> | (3) |
| Selective reduction of multiple pregnancy | <input type="checkbox"/> | (4) |

4. Patient's age (last birthday): **years**

5. Origin of patient

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----|
| Aboriginal but not Torres Strait Islander origin | <input type="checkbox"/> | (1) |
| Torres Strait Islander but not Aboriginal origin | <input type="checkbox"/> | (2) |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin | <input type="checkbox"/> | (3) |
| Neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander origin | <input type="checkbox"/> | (4) |
| Not stated | <input type="checkbox"/> | (5) |

6. Postcode of residence of patient:

Signature

(Signature of Medical Practitioner)

Date:

Notes

¹ Executive Director, Public Health, PO Box 8172, Stirling Street, Perth 6849

² As required by section 335 (5) (d) of the *Health Act 1911* notice must be given within 14 days of the abortion being performed.

*Forward completed form (top copy) to Executive Director, Public Health
Duplicate (yellow copy) to be retained by medical practitioner*



Delivering a **Healthy WA**

