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Pregnancy and Abortion Among Young People

Compared to other OECD countries Australia's teenage fertility rate (TnFR) lies in the middle to upper range. In the late 1990s the teenage fertility rate¹ ranged from 2.9 in Korea to 52.1 in the United States. The TnFR in Australia was 18.4². Health Insurance Commission figures indicate that from July 2001 to May 2002, 9874 Australian teenagers had an abortion³.

The rate of teenage pregnancy has reduced since the 1970s. In 1971 the TnFR was 55.5. In 2000 it was 17.4. Births to Australian teenagers represent a decreasing proportion of all births in Australia, 8.5% in 1976 compared with 5% in 2000⁴.

Teenage pregnancy is considered to be a major problem because of concerns about the social implications for the mother and possible increased financial costs to society through welfare support⁵.

A National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) paper noted that it is unlikely that there will be a significant reduction in demand for abortion services among young people without a major change in sexual behaviour and/or major technical developments in contraceptive methods. Among the proposals raised in this paper were suggestions for improved sex education in schools and better access to emergency contraception⁶.

The Netherlands (where reliable abortion statistics are available) has the lowest rate of teenage pregnancy and abortion in the world. In 1980 one in six (17%) of all Dutch women having abortions were aged 15-19 years. By 1993 this proportion had dropped to less than one in nine. Dutch researchers attribute this reduction to access to modern contraceptives, quality sexual health education and a culture of openness about sexuality⁷.

The Australian Reproductive Health Alliance (ARHA) is an advocacy agency that seeks to advance the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo 1994). ARHA promotes public support for reproductive rights and gender equity.

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(Footnotes)

¹ Teenage fertility rate is measured by the annual number of live births to woman aged less than 20 per 1000 women in the 15-19 age bracket

² Evans, Ann 2003 *The Outcome of Teenage Pregnancy: Temporal and Spatial Trends* People and Place v11(3) pp39-49

³ Dixon, Nicolee 2003 Abortion Law Reform: An Overview of Current Issues *Queensland Parliamentary Library, Brisbane* <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/parlib/publications/publications.htm>

⁴ Australian Bureau Statistics 2001 *Births Australia 2000* Cat 3301.0 ABS, Canberra

⁵ Van der Klis, K, Westenberg, L, Chan, A, Dekker, G, Keane, R 2002 *Teenage Pregnancy: Trends, Characteristics and Outcomes in South Australia and Australia* Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health v26(2) pp125-131

⁶ National Health and Medical Research Council (1996). An Information Paper on Termination of Pregnancy in Australia. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service cited in Dixon, Nicolee 2003 Abortion Law Reform: An Overview of Current Issues Queensland Parliamentary Library, Brisbane <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/parlib/publications/publications.htm>

⁷ David, Henry and Rademakers, Jany 1996 *Lessons from the Dutch Abortion Experience* Studies in Family Planning v27(6)

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