

Report says access to contraception led to decrease in abortions: A Guttmacher Institute study

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A rise in contraceptive use has led to a decline in unwanted pregnancies and consequently a decline in abortions worldwide—from 45.5 million procedures in 1995 to 41.6 million in 2003, according to a study released by the Guttmacher Institute.

“The progress made during the past decade in increasing contraceptive use and reducing the need for abortion is fundamentally good news—the world is moving in the right direction,” said Sharon Camp, president and CEO of the Guttmacher Institute, in a press release.

Despite the “good news,” Camp nonetheless still has concerns about abortion and unwanted pregnancies, including highly restricted access to abortion in developing countries and the continuation of unsafe abortions.

While 2003 (the latest year for which data were available) saw 3.9 million fewer abortions than in 1995, the number of “unsafe” abortions changed very little—only 200,000 fewer unsafe abortions in the same time frame. Most of these unsafe abortions occur in developing countries that are more likely to have restrictive abortion laws.

Unsafe abortions—performed by someone who lacks necessary skills, done in an environment without minimal medical standards, or both—account for an estimated 70,000 deaths each year, the report said. In addition, 5 million women are treated each year for complications related to such abortions, and 3 million more go untreated.

Preventing unwanted pregnancies reduces the need for women to turn to abortion. Contraceptive use has risen globally at an annual rate of 1.3 percent, while the

unintended pregnancy rate has been dropping worldwide.

“The evidence is strong and growing that empowering women with the means to decide for themselves when to become pregnant and how many children to have significantly lowers unintended pregnancy rates and thereby reduces the need for abortion,” Camp said.

The report recommends expanding access to modern contraceptives, expanding access to legal and safe abortions, and improving the quality of postabortion care to reduce unsafe abortions and their consequences. *-Religion News Service*