



Roe Reality Check #2

myth: Most abortions are done because of maternal or fetal health problems, or in cases of rape or incest.

fact: Abortions are rarely done for these reasons.

According to an Alan Guttmacher Institute survey,¹ women cite these as the main reason for an abortion in a very small percentage of cases each year:

- 1% "rape or incest"
- 3% "woman has health problem" (physical or mental)
- 3% "fetus has possible health problem"²

For all other abortions, the main reason cited is:

- 21% "unready for responsibility"
- 21% "can't afford baby now"
- 16% "concerned about how having a baby could change her life"
- 12% "has problems with relationship or wants to avoid single parenthood"
- 11% "is not mature enough, or is too young to have a child"
- 8% "has all the children she wanted, or has all grown-up children"
- 1% "husband or partner wants woman to have abortion"
- 1% "doesn't want others to know she has had sex or is pregnant"
- <0.5% "woman's parents want her to have abortion"
- 3% "other"

Under *Roe v. Wade*, abortions for these reasons or any other reason must be legally permitted.³

1 A. Torres and J. Forrest, "Why Do Women Have Abortions?", *Family Planning Perspectives* 20.4 (July/August 1988), 169-76; still the best source of U.S. data according to A. Bankole et al., "Reasons Why Women Have Induced Abortions: Evidence from 27 Countries," *Family Planning Perspectives* 24.3 (August 1998), 117-25, 152.

2 In most of these cases, no doctor had told the woman her child would have a defect or abnormality. Torres at 172.

3 In *Roe v. Wade* the Supreme Court ruled that abortion may not be restricted at all in the first trimester, may be regulated only for the mother's health in the second trimester, and must be allowed even after viability if necessary to preserve the mother's "health." *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113, 164-65 (1973). *Roe's* companion case, *Doe v. Bolton*, defined maternal "health" as "all factors -- physical, emotional, psychological, familial, and the woman's age -- relevant to the well-being of the patient." *Doe v. Bolton*, 410 U.S. 179, 192 (1973). In *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the Court abandoned the trimester framework but reaffirmed the legality of abortion "subsequent to viability" for the "preservation of the... health of the mother." 505 U.S. 833, 879 (1992).

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