

# The abortion underground in Poland - myths and facts

## The legal state

„The Act on Family Planning, Protection of the Human Foetus and Conditions for Acceptability of Abortion” was passed on the 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1993. It makes abortion illegal except for 3 cases (when pregnancy is a threat either to mother’s life or mother’s health, when the foetus is seriously damaged and when the pregnancy is an effect of an illegal act). The Act penalises doctors, who perform abortion, not women who have it.

## The official government statistics

The act obligates the government to prepare annual reports on the execution of the Act. According to government statistics, the number of illegal abortions is low (17 in 1998, 99 in 1999, 30 in 2000, 21 in 2001, 210 in 2002, 42 in 2003, 31 in 2004, 60 in 2005, 52 in 2006, 49 in 2007, 195 in 2008)<sup>1</sup>.

All the estimations about the scale of abortion underground in Poland are loaded with a high risk of mistake. The police and the prosecution investigate a mere few cases of illegal abortion a year. The organs of prosecution, that were established in order to detect the crimes, are not active enough in prosecuting illegal abortions. The juxtaposition of press adverts (promoting „regulation of menstruation”, „gynaecological surgeries”) with the number of crimes investigated by prosecution shows the negligence of the prosecution organs. The situation is even more astonishing as according to the Polish law the police is allowed to use the means of controlled provocation.

## The scale of the phenomenon in Poland: circa 7-14 thousands a year

The data about the scale of the phenomenon in Poland coming from 1997 (during a year-validity of, the amended Act - passed on 30th August 1996 - allowing on abortion whenever a woman wishes)<sup>2</sup>. are the most reliable source of estimations. The number of abortions in 1997 was 3047. It is worth emphasising that the abortions were carried out legally, in proper medical conditions, free of charge and mostly on request.

It is obvious that official statistics on the number of abortions (even when legal) differ from reality. Not all of the abortions are registered (because of women’s personal motives, or in order to avoid paying taxes by doctors). Taking under consideration above-mentioned facts we estimate that the number of illegal abortions in Poland is higher than 7 thousands and lower than 14 thousands a year.

## How has the number been reached?

The most accurate data about the number of abortions carried out legally in 1997 (when the abortion was legal for so-called social reasons) were multiplied by created by demographers ratio of the number of legal to illegal abortions in conditions of acceptability of abortion. This ratio was compiled on basis of estimations of professor Marek Okólski, demographer, who found that a legal abortions to illegal proportion is 1:2<sup>3</sup>. An independent scientist, lek. med. Karol Meissner estimated the ratio, in turn, at 1:4<sup>4</sup>. Professor Janina Józwiak and dr Jan Paradysz Ph.D., comparing the situation in Poland to the situation in Czech Republic and Slovakia estimated the ratio at between 1:2,2 and 1:4,7<sup>5</sup> (this estimation we find the most adequate, because it is the most recent).

Thus taking under consideration the worst variant (1:4,7), we multiply number of abortions in 1997 - 3047 by indicator 4,7, we get the estimation of 14 thousands of illegal abortions. However, using the ratio of 1:2,2, we get 7 thousands of illegal abortions annually.

## Drastically overestimated data of pro-abortion groups

Broadcast number of 200 thousand of illegal abortions, has originated from in the report of The Federation for Women and Family Planning entitled: „The Anti-abortion Law in Poland. Functioning, social effects, attitudes and behaviours”<sup>6</sup>.

This report seems unreliable in every aspect. For example conclusions in chapter „Attitudes of medical environment towards abortion” are based on 10 questionnaires, conducted among 6 doctors and 4 midwives.

Let’s analyse the methods of estimating the number of illegal abortions at 80 - 200 thousand a year.

1. According to the authors of the report, the decreasing number of deliveries in Poland reveals an enormous scale of abortion in Poland. At the same time, for dozens of years, sociologists have been noting a decrease of birth rate as a European trend. A change in family structure, a shift in the age of getting married, an increase in the use of methods and means of family planning, a decrease in the number of woman in procreation age (as well as high unemployment, lack of pro-family policy, promotion of consumer lifestyle in Poland) are objective reasons for

the decrease in birth rate. The acceptability of abortion is just one of many (not the most important) factors influencing the trend.

2. The authors of the report estimate the scale of abortion underground comparing the situation in Poland with the ones in countries like Lithuania, Czech Republic, Latvia. However, such estimates do not seem authoritative. „Comparisons with Baltic countries and other European neighbours cannot be any justification for the evaluation of the number of abortions in Poland. Frequency of STD’s (including HIV), deaths connected with pregnancy, confinement and delivery, foetus and infant mortality are in these countries higher than in Poland. The high amount of abortions which leads to such complications are one of the reasons of this state is. (...) Social and healthy situation of this countries and of Poland is uncomparable.”<sup>7</sup>.

**The points showing fallacies of pro-abortionist’s estimates**

1. The Poles have stopped to perceive abortion neither as a „surgery” nor as „the method of the birth control”. Even before passing the life protection Act, a rapid decrease in the number of abortions had been observed (see: the graph). The number of respondents showing a need for protection of the unborn child has risen in the last 20 years. The OBOP data from June 2003<sup>8</sup> say about 81% (50% said „yes” and 31% said „rather yes”) of advocates of legal protection of unborn children.

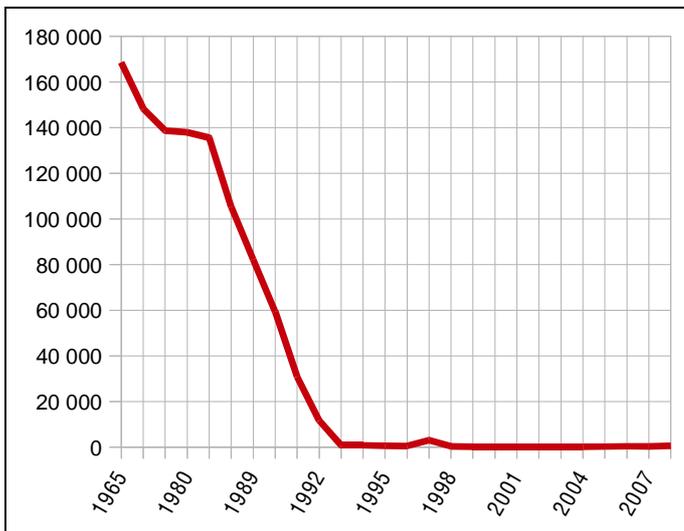


Diagram 1. Abortions carried out legally in Poland. Data source: 2001-2009 Government Report on the Execution of the 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1993 Act, The Ministry of Health Report 2002.

2. The decreasing death rate related to pregnancy, confinement and delivery (compare with the graph below), continuously better reproduction health of

women and falling infant death rate contradict the 200 thousand illegal abortions a year suggested by The Federation for Women and Family Planning. The mass scale of illegal abortions would rather cause the situation to worsen, not to improve, as it does.

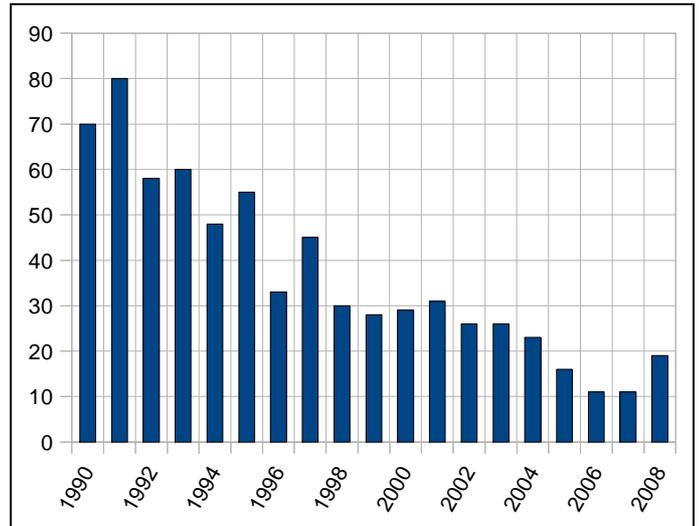


Diagram 2. Deaths connected with pregnancy, confinement and delivery. Data source: 2001-2009 Government Report on the Execution of the 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1993 Act.

3. The falling number of stillbirths is observed in Poland. The mass classification of illegal abortions as miscarriages is impossible then. The rate of stillbirths of 1000 women in reproduction age in years 1990 - 2001 fell twice (from 6 to 3). An absolute decrease in the rate of stillbirths is shown below.

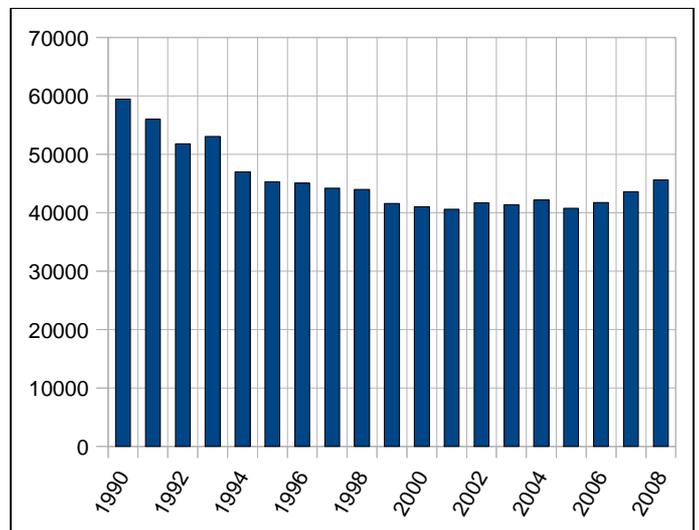


Diagram 3. Natural miscarriages in Poland. Data source: 2001-2009 Government Report on the Execution of the 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1993 Act and data from the Ministry of Health (MZ-BP-P-0620-5364 - ZI/MH/10).

**Overestimating the scale of abortion underground**

Severe overestimations of the scale of abortion underground have taken place many times in the history. This pro-abortionists method is used as means to legalise abortion. Some of the examples are listed below.

## The USA

The organisation called NARAL acted in the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century in the United States, promoting the legalisation of abortion. Dr Bernard Nathanson (one of its founders, who diverted his views and became a life defendant) revealed NARAL's activities: „We faked the data about the number of illegal abortions, carried each year in the US. We gave to mass media and public opinion the information, that about one million of abortions are carried yearly in the US, although we knew that in fact there occurred about 100 thousands annually. 200 - 250 women died annually during the illegal abortions, but we still repeated that mortality is significantly higher and it gives 10 thousand a year. These numbers started to create the public opinion in the USA and were the best way to make the society conscious of the need to change the abortion law. The falsified abortion data influenced on legalisation of abortion by the Highest Court.”<sup>9</sup>

## The Great Britain

Similar situation has taken place during the campaign for legalisation of abortion in the Great Britain. British pro-abortion organisations informed in years 1960-65, that in the Great Britain and Wales 250 thousands of abortions occurs each year. It was untruth. The Council of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in 1966 made a statement: „Repeatedly informed, that the number of illegal abortions amounts 100 thousand a year, the newest estimates say even about 250 thousands. These numbers - similarly to estimates saying about 50 000 illegal abortions - has no realistic bases.”<sup>10</sup>. Having legalised abortion in the Great Britain in 1968, there were 23,6 thousands of abortions in 1968 and 54,8 thousands in 1969. From legalisation of abortion, the number of surgeries have not reached 250 000.<sup>11</sup>

## Germany

In Germany (RFN) abortion was legalised in 1976. Before then pro-abortionists gave the reputed number of surgeries, estimated at even 3 millions of abortions a year<sup>12</sup>. After legalising abortion it accounted for 54 309 in 1977, 73 548 in 1978<sup>13</sup>. It is worth reminding of a significant absurd: the German pro-abortion agitators (from RFN) informed that 10 000 to 40 000 women in Germany died annually due to illegal abortion. However, in Germany, on average 13 000 women in reproduction age died annually of any causes.<sup>14</sup>

## Poland

The situation in the fifties in Poland seemed similar. The press, preparing the public opinion, in the day

before legalising the abortion, published totally false data. It was written: „According to the Ministry of Health, the number of abortions, carried out unlawfully, has reached 300 thousands or more annually.”<sup>15</sup> However, after the legalisation in 1956, the number of legal abortions was 36 368 in 1956, 44 233 in 1958.<sup>16</sup>

## Conclusions

The number of illegal acts, dangerous for health or even life and expensive is certainly lower than the number of the same acts after their legalisation, carried in good sanitary conditions and free of charge.

Providing overestimated data about the scale of illegal abortions, as it could be seen from the abovementioned facts, is a permanent element of pro-abortion campaign. Its aim is to impose on the society the view that such a matter of fact should be accepted, and later - legalised.

It has been shown, that the estimates (80 -200 000 illegal abortions) disclosed recently by pro-abortionists, are completely inconsistent with reality. Reliable analyses say, that number of so-called abortion underground amounts to 7 - 14 thousands abortions annually.

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## Footnotes:

1. Sprawozdania Rady Ministrów z wykonania Ustawy z dnia 7 stycznia 1993 roku za lata 1997-2009
2. The law legalising abortion on demand was passed on 30<sup>th</sup> August, 1996. It was operating since 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1997 till 23<sup>th</sup> December, 1997, when the Polish Constitutional Tribunal pronounced that this law was unconstitutional.
3. Okólski M., Zapobieganie i przerywanie ciąży w Polsce, *Studia Demograficzne*, PAN, nr 2/76 rocznik 1984.
4. Meissner K., Częstość poronień, *Słowo Powszechne*, XVI (1991), 85-86 (12-13-14 IV).
5. Józwiak J., Paradysz J., Demograficzny wymiar aborcji, *Studia Demograficzne* nr 1 (111) 193 s. 37.
6. [http://www.waw.pdi.net/~polfedwo/publikacje/raporty/aborcja-2000/aborcja2000\\_2.htm](http://www.waw.pdi.net/~polfedwo/publikacje/raporty/aborcja-2000/aborcja2000_2.htm).
7. prof. dr hab.n. med. Bogdan Chazan, Raport wyssany z palca, „Głos dla Życia”, nr 5/2003.
8. TNS OBOP 064/03 „Polacy o aborcji i ustawie antyaborcyjnej”.
9. „Służba Życiu. Zeszyty Problemowe”, nr 2/3/1999.
10. Legalised Abortion: Report by the Council of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, „British Medical Journal”, 1966; 1: 9850-854.
11. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/ssdataset.asp?vlnk=5777>
12. Beckemann, Rainer, Abtreibung in der Diskussion - Fünfzig Behauptungen und ihre Widerlegung, Sinus Verlag 1998.
13. <http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/policy/abortion/ab-frgermany.html>
14. Beckemann, Rainer, Abtreibung in der Diskussion - Fünfzig Behauptungen und ihre Widerlegung, Sinus Verlag 1998.
15. „Trybuna Ludu” nr 116 z 26 kwietnia 1956 r. s. 4.
16. Biuletyn Statystyczny za rok 1960, nr 2, PZWL, Warszawa 1962, s. 38.