



Department
of Health

The Use of Abortion Statistics

This document provides a description of the different groups of people who use abortion statistics and the purposes to which they put the information. It also explains how the Department of Health engages with users to ensure that abortion statistics products and services take account of their needs; and summarises what we know about users' experience of our service.

Users and uses of abortion statistics

Abortion is a sensitive issue and many users hold strong views. Statistics on abortions are used by a wide range of people, for a variety of purposes:

Special interest groups, media organisations and the public use the information to inform understanding and debate about abortion and related matters.

Parliamentarians use the information to scrutinise the application of existing abortion legislation, to assess the effectiveness of sexual health services and government policies both nationally and in their constituencies, and in the development of new legislation.

Academics use the information to undertake research related to abortion, pregnancy and fertility - often by combining statistics with other information such as demographics or health outcomes to draw conclusions about causes and effects.

Local commissioners use the information to plan, develop and evaluate local services. Similarly, *Sexual Health Regional Leads* use the information to monitor and improve sexual health services within their region. They are assisted by *Public Health Observatories* who undertake secondary analysis and produce supporting tools.

Providers of abortion and other sexual health services in the NHS and independent sector also use the information to plan, develop and deliver their work.

Officials within the *Department of Health and Welsh Government* use the information to:

- monitor compliance with abortion legislation, including that clinics are adhering to their registration authorisation;
- to improve the delivery of sexual health and maternity services – for example, the percentage of abortions taking place within 10 weeks gestation;
- to develop and evaluate policies;
- to respond to parliamentary and other requests for information;
- to confirm there has not been an increase in the prevalence of rubella and that there is no need to alert the National Congenital Rubella Surveillance Programme.

Officials within the *Department for Education* use the information to monitor and improve services and policies for young people, including teenage conceptions.

The *Office for National Statistics* uses the information to construct conception statistics.

The *Chief Medical Officers* for England and Wales use the data to provide medical advice to the Government relating to sexual health and maternity policy and services.

Government Ministers use the information to make decisions about sexual health and maternity policy and services, to inform parliamentary business, and in reporting on the effectiveness of services and policies.

Engagement with users

Effective engagement with users is fundamental in deriving maximum value from the statistics. We will consult formally with users before making changes that affect the statistics (for example, to definitions or methods) or the annual report. Formal consultations take place only infrequently because the notification form is defined within secondary legislation. Outside of formal consultations, we seek feedback from users on their experiences of the statistical products and services they receive through:

- Requests placed on the web site
- Contacts made when responding to ad hoc requests for information
- Contacts with provider organisations – often opportunistically following discussions about data submission
- Regular meetings with the Office for National Statistics, Welsh Government and Department for Education
- The Sexual Health Regional Leads Group
- The Sexual Health Stakeholder Forum - which includes parliamentary, NHS, third sector, academic, educational, local government and special interest group representatives
- Ongoing contact with members of the policy teams within the Department of Health covering sexual health and maternity
- Conferences relating to abortions and sexual health

For example, as a result of feedback, we have included more information on the number of previous abortions and information on abortions carried out within 10 weeks within the annual report.

Users' experience of our statistical products and services

There were almost 7,000 unique page views of the abortions pages during the twelve months between June 2012 and May 2013.

The 2012 annual report can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-health/series/abortion-statistics-for-england-and-wales>

In 2012-13, there were 11 parliamentary questions relating to abortion statistics, 14 FOIs/Departmental Enquiries, 56 other requests for bespoke tables, and a handful of requests for micro-data for research purposes.

We have not always been able to supply all of the information requested by users because of our responsibilities to patients, doctors and providers under the Data Protection Act.

We formally consulted users of abortion statistics between 15 April 2013 and 10 June 2013 to ensure the abortion statistics reports remain as relevant and as useful to users as possible within resource constraints. Responses showed the publication has a wide range of uses, from commissioning and planning services to informing public debate, from education and marketing material to monitoring trends and creating indicators. Generally the whole publication was found to be useful, with some respondents citing specific tables of interest. Many valuable suggestions were made for additional information to be included in the annual report. The 2012 statistics bulletin (published July 2013) includes some additional tables and information compared to previous years based on these suggestions from users.

The full consultation response document is available on the government consultations webpage :

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-publication-of-abortion-statistics-in-england-and-wales>.

Contacting us

We welcome feedback on our publications and service. If you have any comments please email abortion.statistics@dh.gsi.gov.uk.

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