

From Rep Whitsett

## Commentary: Why Are Black Abortion Rates So High?

**Black female teens are four times more likely to terminate their pregnancies.**

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A [recent study](#) about national [abortion](#) rates and African-American female teens has stirred a huge debate.

According to the [Guttmacher Institute](#), abortion rates among Black women are much higher than we thought: They are four times the rate of white women. The report found that on average, 41 in 1,000 pregnancies among Black women (ages 15-19) are terminated compared to 10 among white women and 20 among Latinas.

Other findings included:

—The highest abortion rates among Black teens occur in Texas (78 per 1,000), New York (76 per 1,000), Delaware (51 per 1,000), Michigan (45 per 1,000), Ohio (35 per 1,000) and Rhode Island (30 per 1,000).

—While Black women account for 13 percent of the female population, they accounted for 30 percent of all abortions. In 2008, 75,960 Black teens 15-19 had abortions, compared to 65,972 among white teens and 41,465 among Hispanic teens.

—Thirty-three percent of women obtaining abortions lacked health insurance, 30 percent had private health insurance, Medicaid covered 31 percent and 5 percent had some other type of health insurance.

Researchers do admit that these numbers might be flawed. They wrote in the report that most states don't have abortion rate data based on race/ethnicity, citing that only 27 states offer info on Black teens.

They also admit that this report doesn't answer why these rates are so high.

Rachel Jones, from the Guttmacher Institute, told The Daily Caller, "There's no definitive research that's actually been able to answer that question." She added, "We just do know that African-American women, including African-American teenagers, just have more pregnancies."

And naturally, these types of findings only help rile up the pro-life movement, who tend to use this type of information to try to convince us that abortion is genocide in our community and that Planned Parenthood is the devil. But before we jump on that bandwagon, let's take a step back. Yes, these high rates of abortions are alarming. But why are we so shocked? Yes it's complicated, but when it comes to the consequences of unprotected sex, Black women suffer the most.

Forty-eight percent of Black female teens have been diagnosed with an STD; Black women ages 15 to 19 had the highest rates of chlamydia and gonorrhea and we are also 20 times more likely to have HIV than our white female counterparts.

So it's pretty obvious that abortion rates would be disproportionately high as well.

And so if we want to lessen these racial reproductive health disparities, we have to stop thinking that abstinence-only is the answer.

We must do a better job at educating female *and* male teens about safe sex and the importance of using condoms *and* birth control together as a means to protect them from unwanted pregnancy, STDs and HIV/AIDS. We have to create a health care system that gives us access to affordable birth control, STD testing, counseling and treatment. Most important, we must address the gender inequality and violence that puts too many young women at risk for unprotected sex in the first place.

In the end, these recent abortion findings shouldn't spark outrage that Black women's wombs are dangerous places for babies. We should be livid because not enough is being done to protect our wombs and our reproductive health.

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56,000,000 abortions performed since 1973 is equivalent to the 2011 populations of the **80 largest cities** in the United States.

Oregon is the only state in the country that does not have any laws restricting abortion. Abortion is legal here for any reason throughout the entire 9 months of pregnancy.

### Number of abortion restrictions, by state and category of restriction

The bar chart below shows the total number of abortion regulations in each state, color-coded by the category into which each regulation falls. To view the specific regulations in place in a state, select the color-coded portion of the bar that corresponds to the category you would like to see detailed, and the specific regulations in that category will appear in the table in the lower right-hand corner of the visualization. Click outside of the bars to deselect the category.

