

Pill abortions more common than surgery

Majority of women are taking the medical option for the first time, as overall number of pregnancy terminations drops slightly

By Daily Telegraph Reporter

MORE women now have abortions by taking a pill than by undergoing a surgical procedure.

Medical abortions accounted for just over half (51 per cent) of all terminations in England and Wales last year, according to the Department of Health.

This was slightly higher than in 2013, when the figure was 49 per cent, and far greater than in 2004 (20 per cent).

It is the first year that there have been more medical procedures than surgical

ones. The total number of abortions carried out in England and Wales last year was 184,571 – 0.4 per cent less than in 2013 (185,311) and 0.6 per cent less than in 2004 (185,713), the annual figures show.

As with the previous year, women aged 22 had the greatest number of abortions, and nearly two in five (37 per cent) were undertaken by women who had already had one or more terminations.

There was a further drop in both under-16s and under-18s having abortions, with the under-16 abortion rate at 2.5 per

1,000 women and the under-18 rate at 11.1 per 1,000 women.

In 2013, the figures were 2.6 and 11.7 per 1,000 women respectively, while in 2004 they stood at 3.7 and 17.8 per 1,000.

The vast majority (92 per cent) of abortions were carried out at under 13 weeks' gestation, with 80 per cent at less than 10 weeks, compared with 79 per cent in 2013 and 60 per cent in 2004.

Medical abortion is also known as early abortion and involves taking two sets of pills before nine weeks of pregnancy,

according to Marie Stopes, the contraception and family planning service.

The statistics also showed that more than half (54 per cent) of women undergoing abortions had one or more previous pregnancies, an increase from 47 per cent in 2004.

The British Pregnancy Advisory Services, which is Britain's largest single abortion provider, said more could be done to support women's contraceptive needs in the postnatal period, as they regularly see them experiencing unwanted pregnancy in the period after

giving birth. Ann Furedi, the chief executive, said: "No form of contraception is 100 per cent effective, and women will always need straightforward access to abortion services as a back-up if they are to plan their lives and families in the way they see fit.

"Having done so much to improve contraceptive services for younger women, we must also ensure the needs of older women are met.

"One in three women will have an abortion in her lifetime. It is a fundamental part of women's reproductive health-

care, as these statistics demonstrate. It makes no sense that abortion remains within the criminal law in this country, and that women still need the authorisation of two doctors before they can end their own pregnancy.

"It also remains a travesty that in 2015, women from Northern Ireland are unable to access the care they need at home.

The time really has come to decriminalise abortion across the UK and regulate it like every other women's health care procedure."