

# Viewpoints

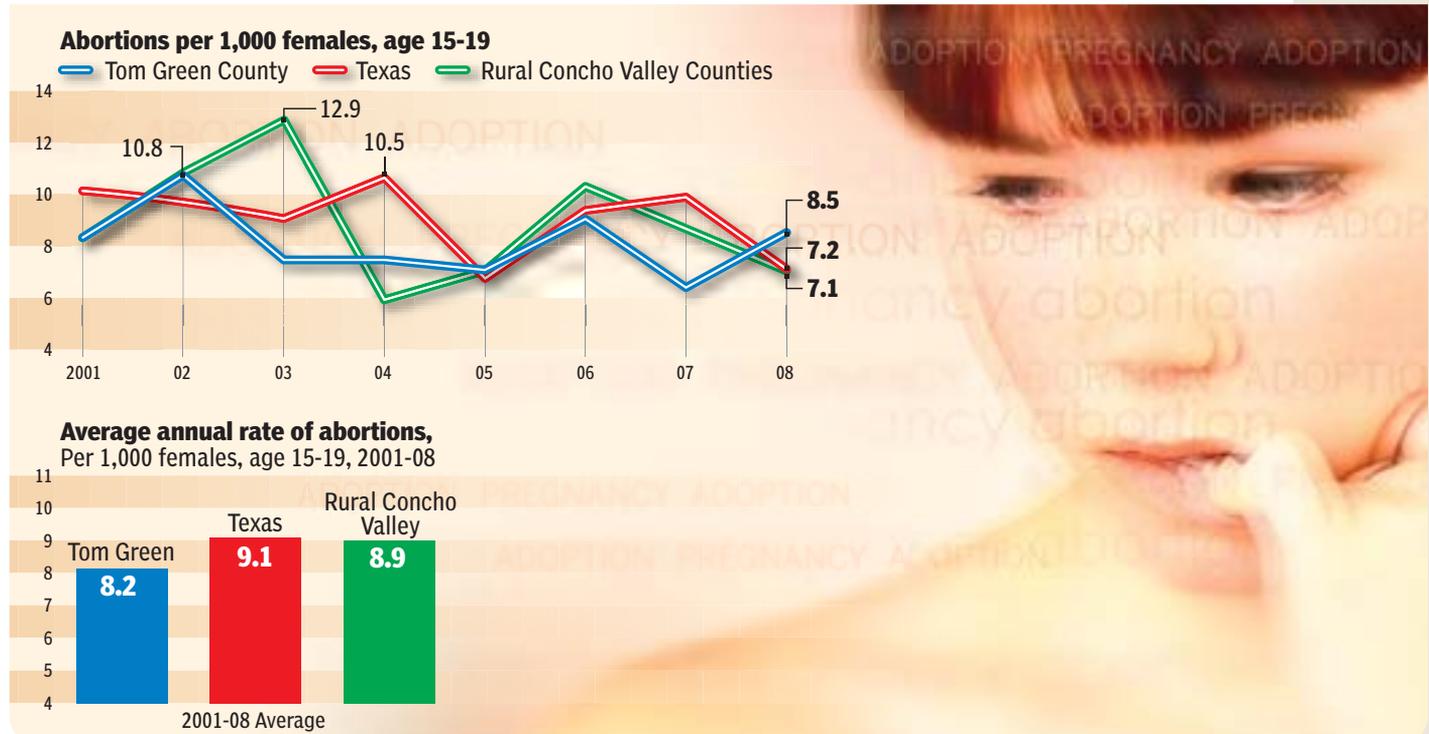
Section D

THURSDAY, APRIL 29, 2010

**INSIDE**  
**Dear Abby** advises  
 a reader how to  
 administer money  
 from a will to a drug-  
 addicted family  
 member. **2D**

**5 for**  
**DEAL**  
 FIVE jeans laundered  
**Holiday**  
 SAN ANGELO'S

## TEEN ABORTION



## A caring, concerted effort is needed for a community in Lowering teen abortion rate

Abortion ... the very word stirs thoughts of clashing protesters, intense political debate and deep emotional scars for family members.

The 1985 Texas Abortion Facility Reporting and Licensing Act requires all abortion facilities in our state to report information. From those reports the Texas Department of State Health Services produces annual vital statistics to give local communities a measured look at health in their community.

The most recent report for 2008 reminds us that teen abortions are a persistent challenge in local communities.

The latest national comparisons for teen abortions from the Guttmacher Institute show Texas ranking 13th out of the 50 states in the number of teen abortions per 1,000 women ages 15 to 19 in 2005. Yet the rate of teen abortions in Texas shows a trend downward since 2001. That year, the rate was slightly more than



10 abortions per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19. By 2008 the rate had declined to slightly more than seven abortions per 1,000 teens.

In Tom Green County since 2001, more than 18 percent of all abortions were to teens between the ages of 15 and 19. The local average annual rate of abortions for that teenage group between 2001 and 2008 was 8.2 per 1,000 females. This compares to a higher statewide average of 9.1.

Still, it cannot go without notice that the most recent local rate of 8.5 per 1,000 female teens in 2008 is higher than the 7.2 rate for Texas overall.

Despite yearly ups and downs in local teen abortions, the rate for 2008 (8.5 per 1,000 female teens) ended up essentially the same as it was in 2001 (8.4 per 1,000 teens). The rate reached a local high point in 2002 at nearly 11 abortions per 1,000 young women ages 15 to 19. The

lowest rate for Tom Green County was in 2007 at 6.4 abortions per 1,000 teen women.

Even with the jump back up to 8.5 per 1,000 in 2008, the local teen abortion rate is lower than surroundings areas such as Midland (9.8 per 1,000 teens) and Ector (9.9 per 1,000 teens) counties.

At first blush, one might think that the 12 rural counties forming the

Please see **ABORTION, 4D**

Perhaps, in time, competing individuals and agencies pulling to the left or right of the abortion issue can be replaced with a community of coordinated and collaborating services offering best practices and combinations of options that lift the quality of life for all teens.

## ABORTION *from* ID

Concho Valley with Tom Green show more progress toward lowering the teen abortion rate. It is true, of course, that fewer teen abortions occur every year in the region's rural counties in comparison to Tom Green. That, however, does not mean the rate of teen abortions, which accounts for differences in population size, is lower or declining.

In 2008, the rate of 7.1 abortions per 1,000 teen females for the 12 rural Concho Valley counties essentially was the same as Tom Green's rate of 7.2 per 1,000 teen women. Over the eight years from 2001 to '08, the rural counties also reached higher highs and lower lows compared to Tom Green County.

The average yearly teen abortion rate for the 2001-08 time period in

the rural Concho Valley counties was 8.9 per 1,000 teen women compared to the average of 8.2 for Tom Green County.

Despite strong and often divided viewpoints about abortion, it is surely the case that Tom Green County and the Concho Valley consistently show rates of teen abortion that are higher than wished for by our local communities. A similar pattern holds true for the Concho Valley when it comes to teen pregnancies as well as births to teen mothers.

What, then, are we

to take away from these results?

On one side of the issue, legal abortion opponents point to the need for more parental consent laws and the need to reinforce abstinence in sex education and counseling as ways to decrease teen abortions. On the other side, abortion rights advocates call for expanded access to contraception and more comprehensive sex education programs.

Each end of this spectrum pulls in opposite directions to the political "left" or "right," as if there were no other choice.

At the level of a teenage woman, her family and loved ones faced with anxiously painful circumstances, one must ask how effective choosing between the political right and left really is. It is doubtful, too, whether caring communities can make real progress toward lower levels of teen pregnancy, birth or abortion by choosing sides.

Perhaps, in time, competing individuals and agencies pulling to the left or right of the abortion issue can be replaced with a community of coordinated and collabo-

rating services offering best practices and combinations of options that lift the quality of life for all teens, their families and the community as a whole.

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Research for this article was conducted at Community Development Initiatives, a community engagement program at the Angelo State University Center for Community Wellness, Engagement and Development. Kenneth L. Stewart is director, Laurence F. Jones is program director and Courtney Snow is a physical therapy major and student assistant at Community Development Initiatives.

### Goren Bridge

by Tannah Hirsch

NICE AND EASY

won in the closed hand