

Russia parliament adopts law restricting abortions

October 22 2011

(AP) -- Russia's parliament adopted a law Friday limiting abortions but rejected even tougher restrictions backed by the country's conservative Orthodox Church.

Health officials say Russia's abortion rates are among the world's highest, contributing to a [fertility rate](#) of only 1.4 children per woman - far below the 2.1 needed to maintain the existing population. The country's [birth rate](#) has become a serious concern for Russia as it fights to stem a steep [population decline](#).

The [Health Ministry](#) says more than a million pregnancies are terminated in Russia annually, although abortion critics say the statistics don't include private clinics and the real number amounts to six million a year.

The law passed Friday limits abortions to 12 weeks of pregnancy, except for women who say they can't afford a child, who may have an abortion up to 22 weeks. The law also stipulates a mandatory waiting period of two to seven days before the procedure to allow a woman to reconsider her decision.

The law does not include restrictions proposed by the Russian Orthodox Church, such as a requiring a husband's consent for married women, parents' consent for [teenage girls](#) or for a doctor's right to refuse an abortion.

During the Soviet era, [abortion laws](#) were liberal and unrestricted

abortions became virtually the only effective method of family planning, as condoms were unreliable and seldom used.

The abortion debate in Russia has not become as divisive and heated as the abortion debate in the United States, but the effort to restrict them has strong backing from the Russian Orthodox Church, which has sought a more muscular role in society.

Russia's population, now at 143 million, has shrunk by 5.7 million since the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union, a plunge blamed on rampant alcoholism, bad diets and lack of exercise.

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Citation: Russia parliament adopts law restricting abortions (2011, October 22) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-10-russia-parliament-law-restricting-abortion.html>

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