

The couple's decision

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♂+ HAVING children at the desired and suitable moment is a couple's decision, as well as a right guaranteed by Cuban legislation and by the health system. Family planning is considered a fundamental human right and the state assumes the responsibility of creating the necessary health infrastructure and of training specialized personnel to offer correct information to the population.

During 1998—the most recent year covered by Cuban statistics—there were 64,900 legal marriages and the marriage rate was 5.8 per 1000 inhabitants.

In the same year, 39,798 divorces were reported, which is the equivalent of 3.6 legalized separations per 1000 inhabitants. Thus, according to the official statistics, there are more marriages than divorces.

ABORTIONS, HIGHER RATES THAN DESIRED

Since 1965, abortion has been legal and available in Cuban health institutions, but its current use is above desired levels. In the '80s abortions rose at an alarming rate, and in the '90s the tendency decreased due to educational and sex education programs directed toward young couples. In 1998, 22.8 abortions were performed for every 1000 women between the ages of 12 and 49. The numbers indicate that of every 100 pregnancies, 33 ended in abortion, with the highest incidence among women between the ages of 20 and 24, who stated that they chose not to have children for a variety of reasons, including the desire to continue studying, not wanting to be single mothers, or poor economic conditions.

Women still bear the burden of responsibility for avoiding unwanted pregnancies, even though there are diverse programs aimed at couples to educate men about contraceptive methods.

Young people learn about the use of contraceptives in sex education classes, which are provided free by the health system.

LOWER REPRODUCTION RATE

According to the latest Cuban Demographic Yearbook (1998), for every 1000 women of child-bearing age, 50 give birth. Viewed from another statistical angle, what specialists call the overall reproduction rate is currently at 0.78 daughters per woman, which means that less females are being born than the number they are supposed to replace.

The latest report of the birthrate is 13.6 for every 1000 inhabitant, indicating a decrease in the number of children born to Cuban women. In this respect, the island's indicators mirror those of developed countries.