Abortion in Recession

In economic terms, abortion is an “inferior good.” With a decline in household income, more women with unintended pregnancies seek abortion. According to a recent survey, 42 percent of women obtaining abortions have incomes below the federal poverty level (e.g., $10,830 for a single woman with no children). Nearly three-fourths of women interviewed said they could not afford having (more) children.

During financially difficult years of 1973-1981, the abortion rate (i.e., number of abortions per 1,000 women ages 15-44 years) climbed from 16.3 to 29.3. In the ensuing years of economic expansion, the abortion rate gradually declined to 19.4 in 2005. Along the way, however, the abortion rate rose twice; once in 1990 just prior to the short-lived recession of 1991 and another time in 2006 before the recession of December 2007-June 2009. Recently published data show the abortion rate increased to 19.6 in 2008.

With publication of more data and with regard to the on-going financial difficulties of many low- and middle-income families, we would see if the recent rise in the abortion rate were strong enough to ignite an ascending trend, or if it were going to be another bump on the path of long-term decline.

Source: