

CHAPTER 28

ILLEGAL ABORTIONS

Will dangerous back-alley abortions return if abortions are forbidden?

To answer this, first we must look back to what the actual situation was prior to legalization. Two questions are relevant:

- 1) How many illegal abortions were there?
- 2) How many women died from illegal abortions?

The head of one of the major pro-abortion organizations in the U.S. said: "*In 1972 there were 1,000,000 illegal abortions and 5,000 to 10,000 women died from them.*"

True? Or False?

How many illegal abortions were there?

No one knows. Why? For the obvious reason that illegal abortions are not reported. No one reports the illegal actions that they have done. In this case, neither the abortionist nor the woman report the deed. Because of this, there are no records. There are no statistics, no

numbers anywhere to report.

No one knows! Therefore, if anyone tells you that there were X numbers of illegal abortions somewhere in a certain time, they are guessing.

The pro-abortion leader may guess 1,000,000. Your pro-life spokesman may guess 100,000, but both are guessing.

No clues?

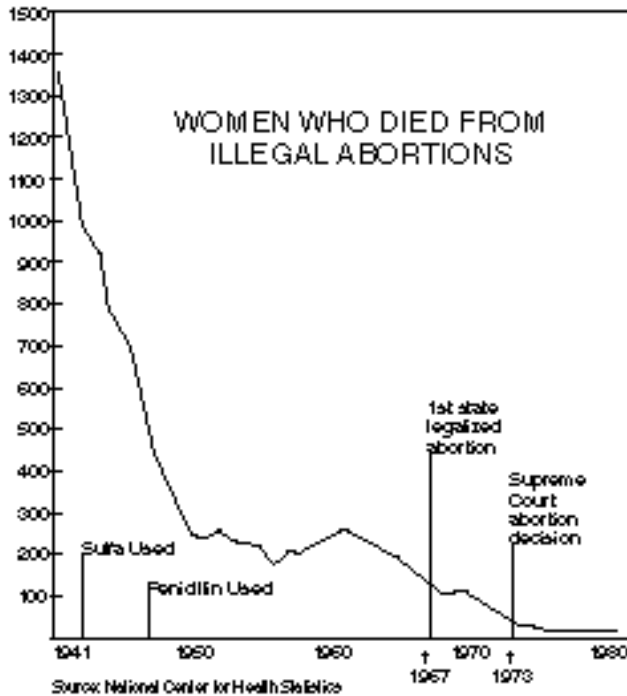
There is only one reported figure that can lead us to some degree of accurate estimate of the numbers of illegal abortions and that is the number of women who died from illegal abortions.

Many nations report only one figure for women who die. They clump together women's deaths from spontaneous abortion (miscarriage), legally induced abortion and illegally induced abortion. Such statistics are no help.

The United States, since the 1940s, has reported such deaths separately, so we know the number of deaths from illegal abortions. Good! Now if we knew how many illegal abortions it took to cause one death, we could easily calculate the total number of illegal abortions. The problem is, no one has the slightest idea how many it took, and so we're back to where we started from.

How many women died?

Let's look. The following chart was used on the floor of the U.S. Senate during the tumultuous debate on abortion in 1981. It was compiled from official U.S. statistics and was not challenged by the pro-abortion forces.



Why the early sharp drop?

Largely because Penicillin became available. Note that after Penicillin became available to control infections, the number of deaths stabilized during the 1950s at about 250/year.

e.g., 1956 = 250

Note that by 1966, with abortion still illegal in all states, the number of deaths had dropped steadily to half that number.

1966 = 120

Why the drop after 1960?

The reasons were new and better antibiotics, better

surgery and the establishment of intensive care units in hospitals. This was in the face of a rising population.

Between 1967 and 1970, sixteen states legalized abortion. In most it was limited only for rape, incest and severe fetal handicap (life of mother was legal in all states). There were two big exceptions — California in 1967, and New York in 1970 allowed abortion-on-demand. Now look at the chart carefully.

This legalization reduced the deaths?

In these two large states, legalization should have substituted “safe” for unsafe abortions. It should have saved many women’s lives.

Actually, there was no sharp drop in the number of women dying. Let’s look further.

By the year before the U.S. Supreme Court decision which allowed legal abortion-on-demand in all fifty states, the death rate for illegal abortions had fallen to:

1972 = 39

(With 25 additional deaths that year due to legal abortions.)

Now abortion was legal in 50 states. Now back alley abortions should have been eliminated with their alleged toll of maternal deaths.

In 1973 there should have been a really sharp drop in women dying. The chart, however, shows that there was no such drop. The line didn’t even blip. The previous rate of decline actually slowed, to flatten out in the late 70s and 80s. According to the U.S. Vital Statistics, as anyone can see, legalization of abortion did not save almost any women’s lives.

Canada had a similar record. Its deaths from illegal abortions were:

1957 = 32

1963 = 25

1966 = 13

1969 = 11 (Year abortion
legalized.)

But we've been told the opposite.

Correct, but let's recap:

Pro-abortionists claim that in 1972, the year before the Supreme Court legalized abortion, there were 1,000,000 illegal abortions and 5,000 to 10,000 women died.

Actually only 39 women died — less than one per state per year.

But they can't have it both ways.

- Either there were not many illegal abortions
- or
- Illegal abortions were all extremely safe.

Since we assume that all illegal abortions were not extremely safe, it seems obvious that

THERE WERE NOT MANY
ILLEGAL ABORTIONS

One other comparison is relevant here. The pro-abortion claim was 1,000,000 illegal abortions in 1972. But with abortions legal without restriction in all states, the total reported for all of 1973 was about 750,000. This climbed to 1,500,000 by 1979 and plateaued there.

But why, then, have I heard time and again that between 5,000 and 10,000 women died annually from illegal abortions?

Those were the figures publicized. Another comment about them is the statement from Dr. Bernard Nathanson, a co-founder of the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) — a man who once ran the largest abortion facility in the Western world and is now pro-life. He stated:

“How many deaths were we talking about when abortion was illegal? In NARAL, we generally emphasized the frame of the individual case, not the mass statistics, but when we spoke of the latter it was always ‘5,000 to 10,000 deaths a year.’”

I confess that I knew the figures were *totally false*, [italics added] and I suppose the others did too, if they stopped to think of it. But in the ‘morality’ of our revolution, it was a *useful* [Nathanson’s italics] figure, widely accepted, so why go out of our way to correct it with honest statistics? The overriding concern was to get the laws eliminated, and anything within reason that had to be done was permissible.”

B. Nathanson, *Aborting America*,
Doubleday, 1979, p. 193

Then, actually, how many illegal abortions were there?

One study quoted in the U.S. Senate debate was authored by Dr. T. Hilgers from Creighton University, who estimated the figure probably was at or somewhere near 100,000 abortions annually in the U.S. prior to legalization.

But were illegal abortion deaths reported accurately? Before legalization?

Almost certainly they were! Back then it was a felony to do an abortion. When a woman was seriously injured by an abortion, she went to another doctor for care. The abortionist was nowhere to be seen. The new doctor tried to save her life, but she died anyway. Was this new, ethical physician going to deliberately falsify the death certificate (which was a felony itself), to protect the abortionist? Not likely! Therefore, prior to legalization, deaths from illegal abortion were seldom covered up.

Are deaths from legal abortions reported accurately? Since legalization?

No, they frequently are not. As an example, let us use the State of Maryland in the year of 1991. There were four women who died in Maryland from induced

abortions that year. None of the four were reported to the Federal Center for Disease Control. It receives its information from examination of death certificates. But, just for instance, one of the Maryland deaths above was listed as — “Cause of death = therapeutic misadventure.” There is substantial evidence to suggest that the CDC does not report all the abortion-related deaths reported to it (see Chapter 21). But, even if it did operate honestly, the CDC only has the information to work with that is given to it. There are many deaths that are never reported to it.

Why is this?

One reason is that, prior to legalization, a second doctor almost always was the one who tried to save her life. In today’s age, however, it can be the same doctor. Since this abortionist does not want to have a reputation for having mothers die from his work, he or she has strong motivation to list some other cause of death. Since abortion is no longer a crime, this can be done with relative impunity.

Another reason has to do with a substantial bias in reporting by the staff at the Center for Disease Control. As exhaustively documented by Mark Crutcher’s book, *Lime 5*, the CDC seems to have had an ongoing unspoken policy of under-reporting and minimizing induced abortion mortality and morbidity and maximizing that of full term pregnancy.

M. Crutcher, *Lime 5*, 1996
Pub. by Life Dynamics, Inc., Denton, TX

It is the opinion of all pro-life leaders in the United States that an accurate estimate of women dying from induced abortions is many times the number that is actually reported.

Then there is a difference between illegal abortions and back alley abortions?

Yes! Doctors who did illegal abortions would let a woman in the back door, take her money, and do the abortion. Today, the same abortionist lets her in the front door, takes her money, and does the abortion in the same way. Abortions from untrained “butchers” are increasingly rare and would be in the future.

But isn't abortion safer than childbirth?

Pro-abortion people commonly say that it is. “Maternal mortality” is listed as deaths of women per 100,000 pregnancies. This figure has been commonly listed as eleven, compared to deaths from induced abortion, which are listed as one or two. Therefore, they say abortion is seven times safer. Not so! Maternal mortality, in recent years, has dropped to six and one-half, not eleven.

But more important is the fact that, included in maternal mortality, are all deaths from induced abortions and ectopic pregnancies. Included also in maternal mortality are all women who die while pregnant from almost any cause that is in any way related to pregnancy. Different states require longer or shorter lengths of post-partum time, but, typically, maternal mortality also includes any related death within one year after delivery.

Maternal mortality also includes deaths from caesarean section. To compare comparable risks, one would have to compare the risk of being pregnant in the first three months with the risk of having an abortion within the first three months. When compared in this fashion, abortion is many times more dangerous. Actually, it is probable that induced abortion is more dangerous than carrying a baby to term.

Maternal Mortality Surveillance '82-'96, Center for Disease Control, M&M, 1998, Vol. 47, pp. 705-707

How about further proof?

Let's look at the late 1950s. Those were the supposed bad old days. All abortions were illegal, and illegal abortionists were alleged to be busy.

In the July 1960 edition of *The American Journal of Public Health*, there was an article by Dr. Mary Calderone, founder of SIECUS and medical director of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. She stated:

“90% of illegal abortions are being done by physicians. Call them what you will, abortionists or anything else, they are still physicians, trained as such; . . . They must do a pretty good job, if the death rate is as low as it is . . . Abortion, whether therapeutic or illegal, is in the main no longer dangerous, because it is being done well by physicians.”

But what about coat hanger abortions?

Your authors have lectured nationwide on abortion on an average of one city a week for over three decades. We frequently ask the audience to provide documented proof of a self-induced coat hanger abortion. In all this time no one has given us a single case. It may well be — *there never were any coat hanger abortions.*

I've heard of large numbers of women dying from illegal abortions in other countries.

On June 18, 1989, CNN World Report, in an hour-long documentary, stated that in Brazil there are 6 million illegal abortions each year and 400,000 women die. But the U.N. Demographic Yearbook of 1988 lists only 40,000 women, age 15-44, dying each year of *all* causes.

Pop. Research Inst. Review, Jan. 1991, p. 12

In Portugal, the claimed figure was 2,000 deaths. The actual number of deaths of females between the ages of

15-46 was 2,106 in the same year from all natural causes, accidents and illness. There were only 97 listed in the “complications of pregnancy” of which 12 were due to abortion, including spontaneous and induced, legal and illegal.

Portuguese Anuario Estatístico, Tables 11, 16, 111

In Italy, the claimed figure before their abortion referendum was 20,000. In the age group 15-45, there were actually only 11,500 female deaths from all causes.

Primum Non Nocere, vol. IV, no. 1, 1983

In Germany, the claim was that 15,000 women died annually. In fact, only 13,000 women of reproductive age died annually in West Germany, and less than 100 died of complications of abortion, legal and illegal.

Kurchoff, *Deutsches Arzteblatt*, vol. 69, no. 27, Oct. 26, 1972

At the United Nations Habitat meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, in June 1996, the following “fact” was given wide publicity: The UNICEF suddenly claimed that 585,000 women die each year from causes related to pregnancy and birth.

The pro-life NGO’s for the family immediately answered, “This is wild. According to the U.N. Demographic Year Book for 1990, the total known maternal deaths worldwide for 1986 and 1987 numbered 11,924 (around 6,000 per year). This figure encompasses countries covering 35% of the world’s population.”

U.N. Conference, Istanbul, June 1996

POLAND

A Definitive Answer to a Basic Pro-Abortion Argument

For 44 years under Nazi and then Communist rule, abortion was legal for three months, state paid. In 1960, there were 150,400 abortions. In 1970, 148,000. In 1980, 138,000. By 1990, under the influence of Solidarity, the numbers declined.

In 1993, the new freely elected Parliament passed a law forbidding abortion. The media and liberals screamed: "You now have the legal power to do this, but you won't stop abortions. They will just go underground, and women will be injured and die. They will be instrumented in the back alley and then, bleeding and infected, they will flood into your hospitals as 'miscarriages.'"

The law was passed and the number of abortions dropped precipitously.

1980 = 138,000

2000 = 138

Were the ominous predictions realized?

• Miscarriages 1990 = 59,076

1999 = 41,568

• Deaths due to "Pregnancy, Birth & Confinement"

1991 = 70

1997 = 24

• Neonatal deaths/1,000 live births

1990 = 19

1998 = 9

• Illegal Abortions

1999 = 99

And total gynecological admissions also dropped. Not only did none of the dire predictions materialize but, instead, Polish women are healthier and have fewer gynecological problems than when abortion was legal and common. Three separate government agencies report annually and agree on these statistics. In the face of this, IPPF claimed that there are 190,000 illegal abortions yearly. When publicly challenged, it was silent.

CONCLUSION

Since the abortion controversy began, we have heard the argument used above that if abortion is ever forbidden by law, it will first “drive women back to the back alley.”

Here we have a modern western nation of 40 million people that did forbid it by law. The result there shatters and completely destroys this long-standing pro-abortion argument. In a manner of speaking, this has been a “test market.”

*"How the Law Protects Life — the situation in Poland;
P. Wosicka, June 2001, Fundacja Głos dla Żywoia
Report of the Council of Ministers on the Implementation in 1999,
of the law of Jan. 7, 1993, Warsaw, 2000 Croatia*

CROATIA

This country is walking in Poland’s footsteps. The number of abortions:

1987 = 48,608

1988 = 8,907

Why? They credit this to continuing massive distribution of pro-life literature, to the clarity and consistency of the Catholic Bishops addressing the issue and to the visits of Pope John Paul II in 1994 and 1998.