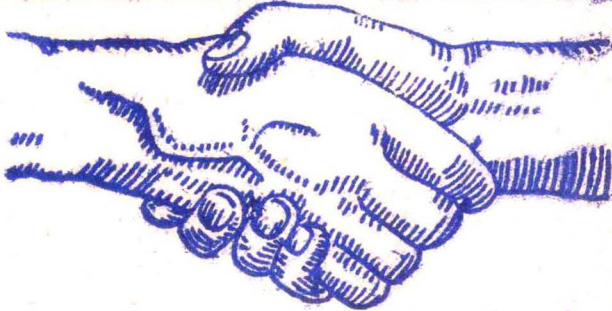


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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



THE ABORTION PROBLEM

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE
HELD UNDER THE AUSPICES
OF THE
NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON MATERNAL HEALTH, INC.
AT THE
NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE
June 19th and 20th, 1942



HOWARD C. TAYLOR, JR., M.D.
Conference Chairman

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INTRODUCTION

A few words need to be said in introduction about the purpose of a conference on Abortion. Some facts about the sponsoring organization must also be given so that the relation of this conference to the work which has gone before it may be understood.

The National Committee on Maternal Health is an organization with more than twenty years' experience. It was founded in 1923 in New York City by a group of progressive physicians who felt that medicine should play a larger part in studying the general field of sex and reproduction than it had been doing up to that date. In its early years the chief efforts of the Committee were directed to the collection and publication of what was then known about those aspects of human reproduction which had social as well as medical implications. During the next few years a number of books were published including "Control of Conception" by Robert L. Dickinson, works on marriage problems and on sterility, and recently a book on abortion by Frederick J. Taussig.

As the work of compilation proceeded it became more and more evident that the existing knowledge on these subjects was very incomplete and that the efforts of the Committee must be extended into the field of research. As a result research projects on the physiology of the reproductive process have been widely sponsored. Pioneer work, supported by the Committee, has been undertaken on the physiology of the ovary, with particular regard to ovulation and the time of this event in relation to other occurrences of the menstrual cycle. Studies have been made on sperm morphology and on the chemistry of the spermatid fluid. The Committee has also shared in the great advances of the last ten years in the knowledge of the sex hormones which control to such an extent the working of the reproductive process. The sponsorship of such purely physiologic subjects has been relatively simple, because their investigation fits well in the work of university departments of physiology, anatomy, gynecology and obstetrics.

Although not directly concerned with education in birth control, research has been undertaken on several aspects of contraception including a study of various technical procedures, the physiology of the safe period and the effects of birth control on individuals and communities.

The Committee has constantly held to the belief, however, that our work must not stop with these physiologic problems. Indeed it was felt that we had a special obligation to explore the neglected area which lies somewhere

between medicine and sociology. In this direction there has been a continuing interest in marriage problems, although the hopes of setting up a scientific marriage consultation clinic have not yet been realized.

Abortion is clearly a logical part of any program concerned with the social and medical aspects of reproduction. The problem of abortion separates itself naturally into two divisions which are quite dissimilar. The first concerns spontaneous abortion, in which the chief emphasis must be placed on physiological factors, where investigations can be fitted easily into established research programs of medical schools. The second aspect, that of induced abortion, is much more difficult. Here medicine certainly cannot carry on the work alone, but must have the support of people in many outside fields. In fact, it is possible that the brunt of the attack on induced abortion must be borne by workers other than physicians.

Attempts to solve the problem of illegally induced abortion present to date a record of failures. First of all, the medical profession has notably failed, for although the performing of abortions has been forbidden to physicians since the time of Hippocrates, nevertheless the abortionist is drawn principally from the ranks of this profession. The State has done little better for in spite of the fact that penalty has been piled upon penalty, abortion is a crime perhaps more frequently committed now than ever before. Finally, one may question whether the Church has had much more success in preventing this practice among its adherents. This conference has been called in the hope that suggestions may be made either for investigation of the problem or of actual measures for abortion control.

The program has been arranged to give a logical development of the subject. The first session is devoted to an evaluation of the problem in respect to the number of abortions, the loss of fetal life, the deaths of mothers and the damage to the individual which results from abortion. The second session is largely concerned with the physiological aspects of spontaneous abortion.

The third session is devoted to a consideration of the social and psychological factors which lead to abortion, and by implication, the factors which need to be regulated to control it. The final session, perhaps the most practical, is directed toward the possibilities of the prevention of abortion by legal measures, by public health efforts or by the economic support of the woman who finds herself in the position of weighing an induced abortion for financial reasons.

HOWARD C. TAYLOR, JR., M.D.

The Proceedings of the Conference on Abortion Problems sponsored by the National Committee on Maternal Health are presented in this volume. The Conference was held in New York City on June 19 and 20, 1942.

Three papers which were delivered at the Conference are not included in this publication. Contributions by Dr. F. Bayard Carter, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Duke University, and by Dr. John Cooper, Department of Sociology, Catholic University of America are omitted by the request of the authors.

The report of Dr. A. A. Brill, New York City, was withdrawn to obtain earlier publication. (Medical Record, vol. 156, July, 1943.)

The passage of over two years between the conference and the publication of its proceedings can in no small part be attributed to the war and the extra responsibilities laid upon many of the participants. The final editorial work was accomplished during the summer of 1944 through the special efforts of Dr. Earl T. Engle.

Howard C. Taylor, Jr.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE MAGNITUDE OF THE ABORTION PROBLEM

INTRODUCTION. <i>Howard C. Taylor, Jr.</i>	vii
CHAPTER I. FREQUENCY OF ABORTION. ITS EFFECTS ON MATERNAL MORTALITY RATES. <i>Halbert L. Dunn, M.D.</i>	1
CHAPTER II. FREQUENCY OF ABORTION. ITS EFFECTS ON THE BIRTH RATES AND FUTURE POPULATION OF AMERICA. <i>P. K. Whelpton, B.S.</i>	15
DISCUSSION.....	28
CHAPTER III. EFFECTS OF ABORTION ON THE GENERAL HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE FUNCTIONS OF THE INDIVIDUAL. <i>Frederick J. Taussig, M.D.</i>	39
DISCUSSION.....	49

SPONTANEOUS ABORTION AND ITS PREVENTION

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS. <i>Fred Adair, M.D.</i>	58
CHAPTER IV. EMBRYOLOGICAL DEFECTS AND THEIR RELATION TO SPONTANEOUS ABORTION. <i>George L. Streeter, A.M., M.D., Sc.D.</i>	60
DISCUSSION.....	66
CHAPTER V. HORMONAL DISTURBANCES IN SPONTANEOUS ABORTION. <i>Earl T. Engle, Ph.D.</i>	70
CHAPTER VI. SEROLOGICAL FACTORS AS POSSIBLE CAUSES IN SPONTANEOUS ABORTIONS. <i>Philip Levine, A.M., M.D.</i>	74
CHAPTER VII. THE CONTROL OF ABORTION. <i>Philip F. Williams, M.D.</i>	89
DISCUSSION.....	94

SOCIAL, MORAL AND ECONOMIC CAUSES AND CONTROL OF ABORTION

CHAPTER VIII. INFLUENCE OF MORAL AND CULTURAL PATTERNS ON THE ABORTION PROBLEM. <i>Algernon D. Black, A.B.</i>	98
DISCUSSION.....	103
CHAPTER IX. THE ABORTION PROBLEMS SEEN IN CRIMINAL COURTS: <i>Anna Kross, LL.D.</i>	107
DISCUSSION.....	112
CHAPTER X. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF ABORTION. <i>Ernest W. Burgess, A.B., Ph.D.</i>	115
DISCUSSION.....	129

THE CONTROL OF THE ABORTION PROBLEM

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS. <i>George W. Kosmak, M.D.</i>	133
CHAPTER XI. SOME OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE LEGAL CONTROL OF CRIMINAL ABORTIONS. <i>John Harlan Amen, A.B., LL.D.</i>	134
DISCUSSION.....	143
CHAPTER XII. MOTHERHOOD AS AN INSURANCE RISK. <i>Louis H. Pink, A.B., LL.D., LL.B., L.H.D.</i>	148
DISCUSSION.....	153

CHAPTER XIII. SUGGESTED PUBLIC HEALTH PROCEDURE FOR THE CONTROL OF ABORTIONS. <i>Herman N. Bundesen, M.D., Sc.D.</i>	155
CHAPTER XIV. POSSIBILITIES OF A STATEWIDE PROGRAM ON ABORTION CONTROL. <i>George M. Cooper, M.D.</i>	163
DISCUSSION.....	170
CHAPTER XV. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION OF THE CONFERENCE. <i>Howard C. Taylor, Jr., M.D.</i>	174
GENERAL AND INFORMAL DISCUSSION.....	176

INDEX

- A factor, isoimmunization by, 80, 82**
group offspring, incidence of, 84
- Abortion as secondary cause of death, 6, 7**
control of, 89
 public health procedure and, 155
 statewide program and, 163
- criminal, 92**
 legal control of, obstacles to, 134
 definition of, 2, 3
 economic causes of, 98, 115
 effect on health, 39
 effect on reproductive function, 39
 habitual, 92
 international list classification, 12
 moral causes, 98
 mortality rates, United States, 13
 physical causes of, 90
 problem, control of, 134
 seen in criminal courts, 107
 rate, 1, 15, 18
 method of obtaining, 21
 social causes, 98, 115
 spontaneous, and its prevention, 58
 causes, 89
 hormonal disturbances in, 70
 serological factors in, 74
 therapeutic, 92
 unintentional, by cause, 21
- Abortions per 100 pregnancies, 24**
- Agglutinins, anti-Rh, in Rh- mothers, 77**
atypical, specificity of, 76
- Associated Hospital Service of New York, 150**
- B factor, isoimmunization by, 80, 82**
- Birth rates, effect of frequency of abortion on, 15**
registration, maternal mortality rates, 13
- Births, number of, by religious faiths, 119**
- Blood group matings, 81**
- Cardiac lesions and spontaneous abortions, 91**
- Catholics, family size of, 119**
- Chicago Health Department, abortion control in, 156**
- Children, number desired, by education level, 123**
desired by husbands, 122
desired by Wisconsin co-eds, 121
desired by wives, 122
in family, by community size, 124
in family, by income, 125
- Chorio-epithelioma, result of abortion, 41**
- Coitus, unrestrained, factor in abortion, 91**
- Community, size of, family size by, 124**
- Contraceptives, abortion rates and, 25, 116**
- Courts, criminal, abortion problems seen in, 107**
- Death, fetal, isoimmunization and, 80**
isoimmunization and, evidences of, 85
from abortion, distribution of, 11
- Earnings, pregnancy termination and, 20**
- Ectopic gestation following abortion, 43**
- Education Law, of New York, governing criminal abortion, 136**
level, family size desired, by, 123
- Egg, cytoplasmic deficiencies, 61**
rôle in spontaneous abortion, 60
- Embryological defects, relation to spontaneous abortion, 60**
- Endocrine disturbances following abortion, 42**
- Erythroblastosis fetalis, 76**
heredity of, 78
- Evidence, legal, difficulty of obtaining, 135**
- Examination, for tendency to abort, 90**
- Exercise, abortion and, 91**
- Fatality rate in abortions, 5**
- Fetal death from isoimmunization, evidence of, 85**
isoimmunization and, 80

- Fetus, isoimmunization by, and the Rh factor, 75
- Glandular system, imbalance of, as cause of abortion, 90
- Health, effects of abortion on, 39
- Hemorrhages, as result of abortion, 41
- Heredity, of erythroblastosis fetalis, 78
- Hormonal disturbances in spontaneous abortion, 70
- Illegitimacy, attitude concerning, 163
- Implantation, mechanism of, 64
- Income, family size, by, 125
- Indianapolis study, 15
- Insurance, group, maternity and, 150
risk, maternity as an, 148
- Isoglutininins, maternal, specific increase of, 83
- Isoimmunization, by factor A, 80, 82
by factor B, 80, 82
by the fetus, the Rh factor, 75
evidence of fetal death from, 85
Rh factor in, 74
- Jews, family size of, 119
- Labor, prolonged, following abortion, 43
- Laws, criminal abortion, difficulty of enforcement of, 135
- Maternity, as an insurance risk, 148
- Menstrual disturbances following abortion, 44
- Mortality rates, abortion, United States, 13
maternal, effect of abortion on, 1
- Myometrium, pathologic changes, following abortion, 45
- New York, laws governing criminal abortion in, 136
method of making professional misconduct charge in, 138
- Pelvic infections, chronic, following abortion, 44
- Penal Law, of New York, governing criminal abortions, 136
- Placental complications following abortion, 43
- Population, future, effect of frequency of abortion on, 15
- Pregnancies, abortions per 100, 24
number of, pregnancy termination, and, 19
termination of, 8
- Pregnancy termination, earnings and, 20
in Indianapolis study, 19
number of pregnancies and, 19
tubal, following abortion, 43
- Prégnandiol, in pregnancy process, 70
- Progesterone, rôle in spontaneous abortions, 70
therapy in spontaneous abortion, 71
- Protestants, family size of, 119
- Psychic trauma following abortion, 45
- Public health procedure, abortion control and, 155
- Religion, abortion and, 117
family size and, 119
- Renal lesions, spontaneous abortions and, 91
- Reproduction function, effect of abortion on, 39
- Rh factor, heredity of, 79
in pregnancy, 74
isoimmunization by the fetus, 75
- Rickets, embryo deficiency as cause of, 61
- Russian experiment, after effects of, 40
- Salpingitis, following abortion, 44
- Septic infection, following abortion, 40
- Serological factors in spontaneous abortions, 74
- Sex instruction, need for, 99, 160
- Shock, mental, abortion and, 92
- Sterilization law, 164
- Sterility, following abortion, 41
- Syphilis, abortion and, 90
- Tubal patency following abortion, 42
- United States abortion estimates for, 10
abortion mortality rates, 13