



HUMAN LIFE INTERNATIONAL'S

PRO-LIFE TALKING POINTS

Does Abortion Save Lives? Maternal Deaths

1. Abortion-on-demand has not saved women's lives:

Pro-abortion politicians and groups argue that without easy access to abortion, substantial numbers of women would die through illegal, unregulated, and unsafe "back-alley" abortions. They say that this number of deaths would be greater than the current number of deaths of women caused by the over 1 million legal abortions per year in the United States, and thus that the abortion-on-demand rules imposed by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 save women's lives. Yet the evidence shows death from abortion in the United States was very rare even before abortion was legalized.

2. The number of women who died from illegal abortions before *Roe* is greatly exaggerated:

Dr. Bernard Nathanson, one of the founders of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL) and a former abortionist who performed tens of thousands of abortions, said that he and other NARAL members used to claim that 5,000 to 10,000 women died each year from illegal abortions. He has since admitted that he knew the statistic to be "totally false.... But in the 'morality' of our revolution, it was a useful figure, widely accepted, so why go out of our way to correct it with honest statistics?" In 1972, the last year before *Roe v. Wade* was handed down, approximately 90 women died from abortions gone wrong, according to Lisa M. Koonin.¹

3. Positive trends in maternal health are due to advances in technology:

Progress in medical science in the last few decades, not the widespread practice of legal abortion, has produced declines in maternal deaths. Fortunately, prenatal care, anesthesia technology, an-

tibiotics, and OB-GYN training have all improved since 1972, as Nathanson discussed in "A Pro-Life Medical Response to ACOG's January 1990 Publication: Public Health Policy Implications of Abortion," presented by William F. Colliton, M.D., *et.al.* As early as the 1960s, progress in technology had led to the point where abortion was no longer needed to save women's lives, if it ever was. Even Dr. Alan Gutt-

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macher, who did more to promote and spread abortion on demand throughout the world than any other individual, commented in 1967, "Today it is possible for almost any patient to be brought through pregnancy alive, unless she suffers from a fatal disease such as cancer or leukemia, and if so, abortion would be unlikely to prolong, much less save the life." Former Surgeon General of the United States Dr. C. Everett Koop said, "The life-of-the-mother argument surfaces in every debate concerning abortion. The fact of the matter is that abortion as a necessity to save the life of the mother is so rare as to be non-existent."

4. Legal abortion has led to more maternal deaths by cultural means:

While total deaths due to abortionist incompetence have probably decreased in the United States thanks to better technology and training, maternal deaths due to other abortion-related causes have increased dramatically. At least three major studies have shown that the most common cause of fatalities

¹ Koonin, *et.al.* "Abortion Surveillance; United States, 1996," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, July 30, 1999.

among pregnant women is murder, and statistics show that almost one-third of these are due to men who kill their wives or girlfriends because they refuse to get an abortion. This amounts to 30 to 50 murders a year.² Following pro-abortion logic, these men believe that their partners are being selfish in choosing to have children that the men don't want, particularly if the child is a result of an adulterous affair. After all, to these men, if it's a choice, not a child, then it makes sense to blame the mother for making the choice to saddle an unwilling father with 18 years of responsibility.

5. Global abortion-related deaths are also exaggerated: Pro-abortion groups exaggerate the number of women who die of illegal abortion complications around the world. The most common figures used are 78,000; 200,000; and half a million annually. None of these figures have solid evidence behind them. The actual number is probably closer to 2,000 deaths worldwide annually due to illegal abortions.³

6. Maternal death rates are lower where abortion is outlawed: In fact, countries prohibiting abortion—and where laws against abortion are enforced—usually have much lower maternal mortality rates than those nations with legal and common abortion. According to the United Nations Population Division in its *The World Mortality Report: 2005*, Ireland has a maternal mortality rate of 5 per 100,000 births; Poland, where abortion is also illegal, has a rate of 13 per 100,000; the United States has a rate of 17 per 100,000; and Russia, with one of the world's highest abortion rates, has 67 per 100,000. Some countries where abortion is illegal have high maternal death rates due to poverty and other factors, so any claims of abortion lowering

maternal deaths are false or missing relevant support.⁴

7. Abortion is not safer for women than childbirth: The chances of dying from either abortion or childbirth in developed countries are vanishingly small for the average healthy woman. A woman's chances of dying in childbirth or abortion are equal to those of being killed in a car accident over a period of three months of average driving.

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8. Almost all abortions in America are abortions of convenience: A compilation of surveys on why abortions are performed has shown that about one-third of 1% of abortions are done to preserve the mother's mental or physical health and about the same number are done for rape, incest and birth defects. The total proportion of abortions done in the United States for social or convenience reasons, including for “psychological stress” or out of “financial concerns,” is 99.3%.⁵

⁴ <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/worldmortality/WMR2005.pdf>

⁵ Louisiana State Center for Health Statistics, *Louisiana Vital Statistics Report* annual reports, 1996-2000 and 1997-2001; Nebraska Health and Human Services System, “Nebraska 2001 Statistical Report of Abortions,” March 2002; Utah Department of Health. *Utah's Vital Statistics: Abortions*, annual reports, 1996-2003.

² Associated Press, April 25, 2003; “Violence Against Pregnant Women is Not Uncommon”.

³ (Clowes, Brian, *The Facts of Life*, Ch. 7 (Human Life International 2001).

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