



HUMAN LIFE INTERNATIONAL'S

PRO-LIFE TALKING POINTS

Does Legal Abortion Save Lives?

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 that death from abortion in the United States was very rare before abortion was legalized, and since it has been legalized, maternal mortality rates that had been dropping steadily for decades have leveled out, with the latest reports showing rates higher than any since 1977.¹

2. The number of women who died from illegal abortions before *Roe* is greatly exaggerated: Dr. Bernard Nathanson, a former abortionist who performed tens of thousands of abortions and one of the founders of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), admitted 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.²

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, antibiotics, 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,

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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 Guttmacher, 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. **Legalized 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 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.³

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. A review of the sources for these figures reveals that they do not have solid evidence behind them. The actual number is probably closer to 2,000 deaths worldwide annually due to illegal abortions.⁴

6. Maternal death rates are lower where abortion is outlawed: In fact, countries have strict limits on 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 World Mortality Report: 2005, Ireland and Poland, countries where abortion is highly restricted, have rates of 5 per 100,000 and 13 per 100,000 births, respectively; the United States has a rate of 17 per 100,000; and Russia, with one of the world's highest abortion rates, has 67 deaths per 100,000 births.⁵ Many developing countries where abortion is illegal have high maternal death rates due to poverty, lack of education, grossly inadequate medical facilities and other factors. When international development tries to address these factors, they enjoy support from pro-life groups, but claims that

legalized abortion actually improves women's health are specious at best once evidence is considered closely. Further, Chile, which is considered a developing nation and has heavily restricted abortion since the 1980's, has actually seen a dramatic decrease in maternal mortality. The primary author of a study released in early 2010 attributes the better health outcomes for mothers who give birth to improvements such as "highly trained personnel, the construction of many primary health centers and the increase of schooling of the population."⁶

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1 http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_03/sr03_033.pdf

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

3 Associated Press, April 25, 2003; "Violence Against Pregnant Women is Not Uncommon".

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

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

6 <http://www.c-fam.org/fridayfax/volume-13/chilean-maternal-mortality-study-undercuts-proabortion-claims.html>

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