

Until this century, it was natural for women to bear many children and it was necessary for women to take these risks to assure survival of the human race. It was also considered natural for many, many women to die in childbirth and it was natural for men and women both to have a life expectancy well under 50 years. Even today it is still common to see high mortality from childbirth and relatively low life expectancies in most of the world.

In the United States, and in other developed countries, people enjoy the unnatural but great benefits of potable drinking water, immunization, antibiotics, advanced medical care, nutritious diet, well-heated homes, and a variety of modern improvements which have unquestionably produced a greater life expectancy than any previous generation of human beings has ever enjoyed. If that longevity is in danger today, if it is threatened—as I believe it may be—by increasing pollution of air and water, the basic cause is rapid multiplication of the human race over the last half century.

And I would certainly commend the Chairman of this committee for the many statements he has made recognizing that challenge. He has indeed been a pioneer in that respect.

From a woman's point of view then, whether looking at the health and economic needs of her own family or the broader challenges to all of society, the argument that it is natural to have children and unnatural to take oral contraceptives does not seem very convincing. Actually, women have been looking for an orally administered contraceptive for thousands of years and there is no doubt at all that the present ones are safer and more effective than any previously available.²

I might add that the greatest biological experiment that most women undertake throughout their whole lives is not contraception but pregnancy itself, and the decision to seek pregnancy is usually made without any consultation with a physician at all.

Secondly, and again from a woman's point of view, I am glad to note the genuine and growing concern over female morbidity and mortality, especially during the years when women are most involved in having and raising a family. In this connection, it is appropriate to mention that, among the complications associated with pregnancy and childbearing, it is widely estimated that a major cause of death is abortion—either self-induced abortion or what is currently described as criminal abortion.

There may be as many as 1 million so-called criminal abortions every year in the United States—abortions undertaken by women who so desperately want to avoid childbirth that they seriously risk and often lose their lives. In Atlanta, a study showed that 22 percent of maternal mortality was associated with criminal abortion. Some cities had rates twice as high—the National Institute of Mental Health suggests—although official vital statistics reveal a

² B. E. Finch, H. Green, *"Contraception Through the Ages,"* Springfield, Ill., Charles C. Thomas, 1963, p. 88. "One of the earliest mentions of a metallic contraceptive originates from the Chinese *Book of Changes* which dates from 2736 B.C." See also N. Hines, *Medical History of Contraception*, New York, Gamut Press, 1963, p. 109.