

lion living Americans of childbearing age have obtained sterilization, and that each year at least another 100,000 use this method of birth control. (That figure of 100,000, by the way, we consider very conservative; it may be as high as 200,000 per year.) Not only is voluntary sterilization legal in all 50 states, but it is the most appropriate method of birth control for those couples who are sure they want no more children. Properly performed, the operation is virtually 100% reliable, is medically accepted, safe, and has no negative after-effects, either physical or mental. The sexual harmony of couples is often enhanced as a result of complete freedom from worry about unwanted pregnancies, when the sterilization method is used.

Studies in the U.S. as well as other countries, have repeatedly shown that a significant proportion of couples *do not want any more children*. This is as true of the black community as of the white community. It also includes persons of a much younger age than might be expected. For example, a woman in her twenties who already has two children may have twenty years of fertility stretching ahead of her. She and her husband may both be sure that they want no more children, and may be urgently seeking completely reliable birth control. The AVS receives applications for help from many such women who are dissatisfied with temporary methods of birth control and fearful of some of them. It seems clear that many such women would be better off with a sterilization operation than with any other method. It remains for government and private agencies to make the operation far more readily available than at present. Every hospital, whether tax-supported or not, should have a voluntary sterilization clinic or service for both men and women. The operation should be done at low cost or no cost, both for the obvious benefit of the patient and as a sound national policy. Whatever the government spends on providing sterilizations would be returned twice over through decreased need for basic children's services such as education, avoidance of costly environmental pollution, and lower welfare costs in the Aid to Dependent Children areas. Let me emphasize, however, that we do not suggest sterilization merely as a method for the poor. On the contrary, it should be made freely available to all adult citizens, regardless of income, age, number of children or marital status.

The male operation (vasectomy) has been called by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* "safe, quick, effective and legal." It is more simple than that for the woman, and can be done in less than ½ hour in a doctor's office. Although possibly 100,000 male sterilization operations are done in the U.S. each year, probably 10 times that number would be performed if wide and favorable publicity and government encouragement in the areas of education and direct service were brought into play.

In terms of cost, sterilization for the average person is not expensive compared to other methods of birth control, when one considers the cost of the pill or the condom over a number of years, and when the lower rates of reliability of other methods are brought into the equation. In broad economic terms, there is evidence that vasectomies would cost the government considerably less than some other birth control methods promoted through government programs.

Voluntary sterilization is acceptable to Americans of all religious faiths. The files of AVS show that among people we help to obtain the operation, one or both spouses in a family are Roman Catholic in about 30% of cases. A recent Gallup Poll showed that 64% of the American people approve of voluntary sterilization for socio-economic reasons.

Contrary to common belief, the operation is reversible, in the hands of experienced surgeons, in up to 80% of cases in men and up to 65% of cases in women. Furthermore, the coming use of sperm banks promises a new means of assuring a couple that they can have a child at some future time, even though the man may be sterilized.

In relation to the Pill, and the IUD, it must be acknowledged that sterilization is more reliable than both. Furthermore, it does not interfere with the hormonal system of either the woman or the man, and is a simple operation with a very low degree of medical risk. In a sense, therefore, it can be considered not only more reliable, but less dangerous than some other commonly used methods. You already are well aware of possible dangers of the Pill. You may also know that recent studies reveal the possibility of perforation of the womb, peritonitis, or intestinal obstruction resulting from the use of the