

MEDICINE

Abortion Facts Reported

The medical director of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Inc., charges that illegal abortion is a disease of society, recommends solutions.

ILLEGAL ABORTION is a "disease of society," a New York doctor charges. The only way to cure the disease is to bring it out of hiding and look at it with a view to correcting this social illness.

Almost every illegal abortion is preceded by a visit of the woman to some doctor with a request for a legal abortion, Dr. Mary Steichen Calderone, medical director of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Inc., New York, believes. Such requests are almost always turned down and the woman turns to an illegal abortionist.

Although officials will probably never find out how many illegal abortions have been performed, they might get some idea if doctors reported every request for legal abortion to their local public health officers, and Dr. Calderone is urging that this procedure be given a try.

A number of facts about abortion have been unearthed by a study panel of 43 experts in medicine, law, sociology and demography.

In 46 states, legal abortion is permitted to preserve the life of the mother. Three states also allow it to preserve the mother's health. In the other states therapeutic abortions are performed when a psychiatrist believes that the unwilling mother will otherwise commit suicide.

Interpretation varies from city to city, from hospital to hospital within the city, and from service to service in the same hospital. The border zone between legal and illegal abortion is narrow and shifts frequently. One expert studying the problem defined the difference between the two as "\$300 and knowing the right person."

"What we have to admit," Dr. Calderone reports, "is that most therapeutic abortions are in the strictest sense of the law actually illegal."

Abortion is no longer a dangerous procedure, whether legal or illegal. An estimated 90% of the illegal ones are performed by physicians, using sterile procedures. The trouble usually comes from those who attempt self-induced abortion or go to a non-medical abortionist.

Reputable physicians refer their patients to colleagues whom they know are willing to perform illegal abortions, or send them to a foreign country where abortion is performed under sanitary conditions, she said.

In the United States the frequency of illegally induced abortions may be between 200,000 and 1,200,000 annually. In 1957, 260 deaths were recorded from all types of abortion in the U. S.

Requests for therapeutic or legal abortions come from married and unmarried women in about equal proportions.

There are three ways to begin alleviating the problem, Dr. Calderone reports in the American Journal of Public Health, 50:948, 1960.

First, prevent the need for abortions by providing contraceptive means to any woman who wants it, each according to her own religious beliefs.

Second, encourage a higher standard of sex conduct and responsibility toward pregnancy by early, continued and realistic sex education.

Third, have doctors report requested abortions to local health officials who might then get a better idea of the problem. The patient's name should, of course, be withheld.

The foreign countries have their problems too. In France, a Catholic country, the law requires that every pregnancy be reported to the police. Abortions and contraceptive measures are illegal. The abortion rate is estimated as one for every live birth.

In Japan, where a strong governmental contraceptive program is in operation, and where legal abortion can be performed by almost any physician for two or three dollars, the over-all abortion rate is about the same as in France.

In the Scandinavian countries abortion applications are considered by medical boards operating under government auspices. Medical, psychiatric and sociological aspects are considered. Contraception is widely available. Yet even these countries admit to some illegal abortions.

These situations in the various foreign countries point up the fact that an unwilling pregnant woman will obtain an abortion, whether legally or illegally.

• Science News Letter, 78:86 August 6, 1960

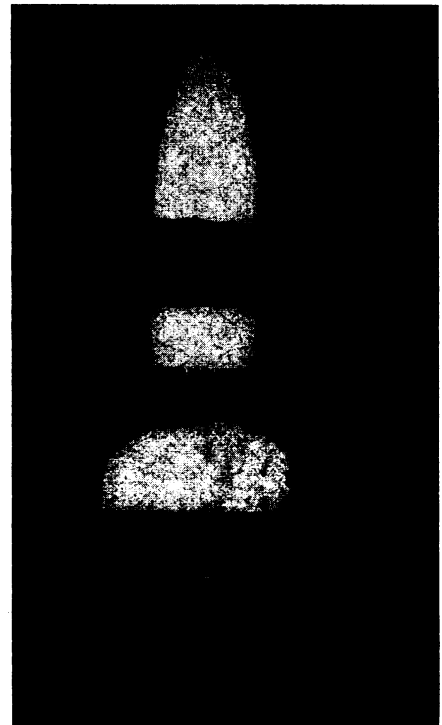
AERONAUTICS

FAA Developing Light Beacon Transponders

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS will be afforded a method of positive identification of business and private planes with small, inexpensive radar beacon transponders, being developed for the Federal Aviation Agency. Transponders are now being used in all jet and some large transport planes.

The instrument permits an aircraft to send a coded message that is displayed on a radar screen, definitely identifying it to the controller. The development of a small, light, inexpensive and low-power-drain transponder would permit use of the equipment by general purpose aircraft, making traffic control by radar faster and safer.

• Science News Letter, 78:86 August 6, 1960



MISSILE MODEL EXITS — *The high-speed photo of missile-shaped body after passage through water-air boundary shows that considerable water exits with missile, although there is only slight effect on speed or direction. Tests made at the University of Illinois.*

RADIO ASTRONOMY

No Messages to Space From Radio Telescope

THE LARGEST RADIO TELESCOPE in the world will not be used either to send or try to receive radio messages from intelligent beings on planets of other suns, Prof. A. C. B. Lovell, director of the University of Manchester's Jodrell Bank Experimental Station, told SCIENCE SERVICE.

A program of listening for possible radio messages from other intelligent life, called Project Ozma, was attempted this spring with the 85-foot radio telescope at Green Bank, W. Va.

Prof. Lovell said in London that no such program is planned for the 250-foot radio telescope at Jodrell Bank. The 250-foot disc is now being used both for space-tracking and astronomical studies, Prof. Lovell said. The space-tracking takes up about ten percent of the radio telescope's time.

The remaining 90% of its time is divided between cosmological studies of unidentified radio sources in the universe and a survey of some galaxies in the neighborhood of the Milky Way galaxy, in which the sun and planets are located.

Dr. Lovell said that the radio astronomers at Jodrell recently tracked a radio source six billion light years away, or 36 million million billion miles. He said it was moving away with about half the speed of light.

• Science News Letter, 78:86 August 6, 1960