Abortion and Violence: BY Henry Morgentaler

At a time when access to safe, medical abortion is being threatened by murderous attacks on doctors providing this service, it would be worthwhile to recapitulate the enormous benefits brought about by legal abortion. I think one of the most important consequences is the declining violent crime rate. This decline has lasted for six years in Canada and the United States.

Is there a relationship between the statistically proven decline in crime rates and access to abortion? For the last six years, in both the United States and Canada, the crime rate has steadily decreased—in particular for crimes of violence, such as assault, rape, and murder. Some demographers explain this by the fact that there are fewer young men around, and it is mostly you men who commit crimes. No doubt this is true, but what is even more important is that, among these young men likely to commit offenses, there are fewer who carry an inner rage and vengeance in their hearts from having been abused or cruelly treated as children.

Why is that? Because many women who a generation ago were obligated to carry any pregnancy to term now have the opportunity to choose medical abortion when they are not ready to assume the burden and obligation of motherhood. It is well documented that unwanted children are more likely to be abandoned, neglected, and abused. Such children inevitably develop an inner rage that in later years may result in violent behavior against people and society. Crimes of violence are very often perpetrated by persons who unconsciously want revenge for the wrongs they suffered as children. This need to satisfy an inner urge for vengeance results in violence against children, women, members of minority groups, or anyone who becomes a target of hate by the perpetrator.

Children who are given love and affection, good nurturing, and a nice supportive home atmosphere usually grow up to become caring, emotionally responsible members of the community. They care about others because they have been well cared for. Children who have been deprived of love and good care, who have been neglected or abused, suffer tremendous harm that may cause mental illness, difficulty in living, and an inner rage that eventually corrupts in violence when they become adolescents and adults.

Most serial killers were neglected and abused children, deprived of love. Both Hitler and Stalin were cruelly beaten by their fathers and carried so much hate in their hearts that, when they attained power, without remorse they caused millions of people to die. It is accepted wisdom that prevention is better than a cure. To prevent the birth of unwanted children through family planning, birth control, and abortion is preventive medicine, preventive psychiatry, and prevention of violent crime.

I predicted a decline in crime and mental illness thirty years ago when I started my campaign to make abortion in Canada legal and safe. It took a long time for this prediction to come true. I expect that things will get better as more and more children are born into families that want and desire them and receive them with joy and anticipation.

It is important that we continue as a society to safeguard the rights and access of women to safe, medical abortion. Not many people realize the enormous benefits to women’s health resulting from such good access:

- Disappearance of deaths due to illegal abortions.
- Reduced complication rate attending upon medical abortion, which has become one of the safest surgical procedures.
- Decreased mortality of women giving birth.
- Decreased mortality of babies during childbirth

And to this the decrease in crime rates and, most probably, although not statistically proven yet, a significant decrease in mental and emotional illness.

When Canada is rated first in the world by a United Nations agency as to quality of life, part of the rating is due to the increased safety of women due to good access to quality abortion care.

Dr. Henry Morgentaler is a prominent Canadian abortion provider and the 1975 Humanist of the Year. This column is adapted from an editorial that appeared in numerous Canadian newspapers on November 5, 1998. Reprinted by permission of the author.