

be available to work with it, and less mistakes in investment are likely because a larger share of investment will be duplication of the old. But these factors certainly will not weigh heavily, especially since the differences in growth in the labor force will not be great. The differential population increase will be largely in the younger ages. The Hoover-Coale conclusions are not affected by this refinement.

These selected statements do not indicate the scope of the topics covered, which is broad. The style is bland, rather than sparkling. But it is clear. Both persons interested in economic growth and those interested in demography will find the book of value.

E. E. HAGEN

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SIMPLE METHODS OF CONTRACEPTION¹

IN October, 1957, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America brought together in New York some thirty medical investigators and "students of human behavior and values" for a full day's symposium on the results of some current tests of simple contraceptive methods and their implications. The essence of the proceedings has now been published in a small book of attractive format for distribution to groups and individuals whose professional fields are related to the subject matter. The cover letter sent with complimentary copies to doctors calls it "the most comprehensive work available in the field. . ." The table of contents indicates that the symposium certainly covered a lot of ground; the size of the volume indicates that the reader will get but a fleeting view of that ground. What was said at the symposium is compressed into less than fifty uncrowded printed pages.

Part I deals with The Emerging Variety of Effective Methods. Three progress reports on clinical tests of simple vaginal

¹ SIMPLE METHODS OF CONTRACEPTION: AN ASSESSMENT OF THEIR MEDICAL, MORAL AND SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS, edited by Winfield Best and Frederick S. Jaffe, with a Foreword by R. Gordon Douglas, President of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, New York, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, 1958. 64 pp., no price given.

inserts (a foaming vaginal tablet, and cream or gel alone) and a report on the test of an oral contraceptive in Puerto Rico take only three to five pages each, including statistical tables and footnotes which incorporate data on effectiveness in two of the tests during the 6 months after the meeting. All tests were begun in 1953 or later and are still continuing.² The medical evaluation of these tests in group discussion covers the next eleven pages.

Part II, contrary to the broad promise of the book's subtitle, is a discussion of the potential impact of these simple contraceptives on *American* life, in 4 parts: the outlook for the family (5 pp.), the question of distribution (3 pp.), cultural changes and moral values (6 pp.), and the need for education in responsible family living (6 pp.). A bibliography of thirty-seven selected articles on contraceptive research and clinical testing since 1949 gives "references to many of the most important contraceptive studies of the last decade." The articles are mainly in medical journals, but a few are papers delivered at recent International Planned Parenthood Conferences and articles in science periodicals. There are very few references to basic research in physiology and endocrinology, and none on moral and social implications of contraception.

The preliminary results of the four research projects may be summarized very briefly. Simple chemical contraceptives (spermicides) such as a foaming vaginal tablet, and gel, cream, or jelly without diaphragm seem to show considerable promise of effectiveness when used by well-motivated persons after intensive education in the particular technique selected (Los Angeles Planned Parenthood Clinic study), but are rather ineffective when used by poorly-motivated persons of low socio-economic status (Sinai Hospital Contraceptive Clinic, Baltimore study). Compared with the more conventional method of diaphragm plus jelly or cream, the simple methods appear very slightly more effective (Mt. Sinai Hospital, New York study), probably because their greater convenience makes for more consistent use. However, all investigators agree that the findings, and particularly the calculated "failure" rates, must be re-

² No data from the test of oral steroid pills in Los Angeles, begun in 1956, are given.

garded as extremely tentative because of the relatively short periods of use so far, the small numbers of patients in the samples, and the heavy drop out of cases unknown as to selectivity. The oral contraceptive pill, a synthetic steroid, appears to be quite effective, even for women of the lowest economic and educational level, but the occurrence of undesirable side reactions caused about one in seven cases to withdraw. The same cautions as with the tests of vaginal methods are necessary with respect to length of time used, sample size, and high rate of patient withdrawal from the study. In addition, the possible effects on the ovaries of prolonged steroid medication are not yet known. About half of the medical evaluation section is devoted to the problem of these undesirable possible side effects, and the conclusion is reached that steroid medication should be restricted to short-term use under close medical supervision for child-spacing purposes. Evidently oral pills of the type developed so far cannot be recommended for general distribution.

In spite of the brevity and incomplete nature of the research progress reports and the non-exhaustiveness of the bibliography, this technical section on simple contraceptive methods should prove informative and useful to the many doctors who are unable to keep fully abreast of the current technical literature, and to lay persons concerned with the problems of family planning and means of control of population growth. For the statistician it serves as one more illustration of the poor quality of so much of medical statistics: crude measures of poorly defined variables on small samples for which the composition and selectivity are largely uncontrolled and/or unknown. Some of the defects can be attributed to the nature of the subjects, especially in a relatively free society; others are at present unavoidable, even by investigators who recognize and appreciate them, because of the primitive state of basic knowledge and research techniques in this area. The sociologist, however, could demonstrate that some of the difficulties can be attributed to certain features of the traditional organization of medical practice which impede ready adaptation to medical research of techniques for collecting, recording, pooling, and analyzing data found invaluable in other fields. This is not the place to

analyze the problem, but it may be suggested that lack of funds is not the principal obstacle to medical evaluation of the effectiveness of various contraceptive techniques. There is urgent need for investigation of how medical statistics can be improved both within the traditional structure of medical practice, and by exploiting fully the advantages for research of the new institutional forms emerging from the expansion of prepaid medical care plans and public health programs.

The section of this book devoted to the assessment of the moral and social implications of simple contraceptives seemed to this reviewer at first reading to be superficial and platitudinous. Later, closer reading revealed that on the contrary every page contained several interesting and worthwhile observations or raised provocative questions. However, there are few data here, almost no mention of research completed or in progress, and none explicitly proposed as necessary or desirable. There are ideas, but none is developed. The material is so condensed that its chief usefulness is likely to be as a source of suggestions for discussion and expression of opinion among other groups. The doctor as such is likely to find it irrelevant. There was no challenge to the statement in the symposium that the responsibility for proper use of contraceptives is individual and personal, and therefore moral; that it is not the job of the medical profession to develop moral restraints and controls among patients, but the job of church and family.

RUTH RIEMER

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THE FERTILITY OF AMERICAN WOMEN¹

WHILE the United States has lagged behind other countries in developing a nationwide and well-functioning system of birth registration, information on children ever born and on children under five years of age living with their mothers was obtained and published in considerable detail as early as the census of 1910, followed by the censuses of 1940 and 1950.

¹ Grabill, Wilson H.; Kiser, Clyde V.; and Whelpton, Pascal K.: *THE FERTILITY OF AMERICAN WOMEN*. New York, John Wiley & Sons; London, Chapman & Hall, 1958, 448 pp., \$9.50.