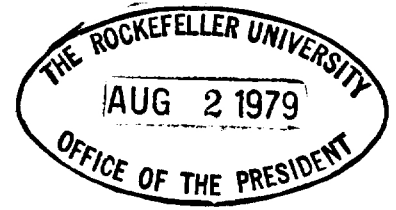


THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
MEDICAL SCHOOL

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN GENETICS
1137 E. CATHERINE STREET
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN
48109

July 27, 1979

TELEPHONE:
ANN ARBOR, 764-3490



Mrs. Eppie Lederer
The Chicago Sun-Times
401 North Wabash
Chicago, Illinois 60611

Dear Mrs. Lederer:

Dr. Joshua Lederberg has forwarded to me your recent correspondence regarding the enclosure, with a request that I respond to you directly. Accurate data concerning the characteristics of children born of incest (brother-sister, father-daughter) are difficult to come by; I presume the reason Josh sent me the letter was a little study which we did here some years back (reprint enclosed). As you can see, in what is really a rather small experience, because such cases are quite difficult to document, we found that approximately one third of the children had a significant problem of some type or the other. This is of course well above the expectation for the usual couple, although the odds are still in favor of having a normal child. Incidentally, we here have also done a very extensive study (in Japan) of the children of first cousin marriages, and the results mentioned above are quite in keeping with this study.

As you are well aware, one of the accepted indications for abortion is pregnancy resulting from rape or incest. This position is probably based as much on sociological as on biological grounds. At any rate, should the person in question desire an abortion, it would probably be performed by most obstetricians, assuming the pregnancy has not gone beyond the period during which an abortion can in fact be performed. However, the letter indicates no interest whatsoever in an abortion. Under these circumstances, as a physician (and human being), I have difficulty seeing what useful purpose is served by laying on this already guilt-stricken woman the additional information given above, i.e., the increased probability of an abnormal outcome.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "JVN", written over a horizontal line.

James V. Neel, M.D.
Lee R. Dice University Professor
of Human Genetics

JVN:mlw

Enc.

CC: Dr. J. Lederberg