

## Chapter 15 Summary: Premature or preterm births after abortion

The link between prematurity and abortion is strongly supported by research. Women who have had one or more induced abortions have a significantly higher rate of prematurity or preterm birth and low birth weight in subsequent pregnancies. One meta-analysis found that the adjusted risk of prematurity (meaning under 37 weeks gestation) increased by 27 per cent after one abortion, and 62 per cent after two or more abortions.<sup>1</sup> Another meta-analysis yielded similar increased risks, and also found that the risk of having a very premature delivery (meaning under 32 weeks gestation) increased by 64 per cent after an abortion.<sup>2</sup> This link remained even after controlling for factors such as income. Other studies have yielded even higher risks of bearing a preterm child.<sup>3</sup> This increase in risk is usually due to a weakened cervix or infections resulting from abortion.

There are various health risks associated with premature birth. Infants who do not reach a gestation age of 37 weeks have a much lower chance of reaching adulthood.<sup>4</sup> Prematurity increases the risk of disabilities such as cerebral palsy, mental retardation, psychological and behavioural disorders, and epilepsy.<sup>5</sup> In addition, a premature baby whose mother has had any prior abortions has a 60 per cent higher risk of cerebral palsy than a premature baby whose mother has had no prior abortions.<sup>6</sup> Prematurity is also a major risk factor for autism. One study reported that 25 per cent of children born prematurely met autism criteria, which is five to ten times higher than the general autism rate in North America.<sup>7</sup> A few studies have looked directly at the abortion-autism link. Burd and colleagues found that the children of mothers who had experienced one or more induced abortions had a 236 per cent increased risk of giving birth to a child with autism.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shah PS, Zao J. Induced termination of pregnancy and low birth weight and preterm birth: a systematic review and meta-analyses. *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology* May 2009; 116(11): 1425-42, p. 1439.

<sup>2</sup> Swingle HM, Colaizy TT, Zimmerman MB, Morriss FH. Abortion and the risk of subsequent preterm birth. *The Journal of Reproductive Medicine* 2009 February; 54(2): pp. 95-108.

<sup>3</sup> Hardy G, Benjamin A, Abenhaim HA. Effect of induced abortions on early preterm births and adverse perinatal outcomes. *JOGC* 2013 February; 35(2): 138-43, Table 2, p. 141.

<sup>4</sup> Moster C, Lie RT, Markestad T. Long-term medical and social consequences of preterm birth. *NEJM* July 2008; 359(3): 262-73, p. 262.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Jacobsson B, Hagberg G, Hagberg B, Ladfors L, Niklasson A, Hagberg H. Cerebral palsy in preterm infants : a population-based case-control study of antenatal and intrapartal risk factors. *Acta Paediatrica* 2002; 91: 946-51, Table 2, p. 948.

<sup>7</sup> Limperopoulos C, Bassan H, Sullivan NR, Soul JS, Robertson RL, Moore M, Ringer SA, Volpe JJ, du Plessis AJ. Positive screening for autism in ex-preterm infants: prevalence and risk factors. *Pediatrics* 2008 April; 121(4): 758-65, p. 758.

<sup>8</sup> Burd L, Severud R, Kerbeshian J, Klug MG. Prenatal and perinatal risk factors for Autism. *Journal of Perinatal Medicine* 1999; 27(6): pp. 441-50, p. 447.