

Chapter 12 Summary: Physical complications: maternal mortality from abortion

How likely is a woman to die after an induced abortion? This is difficult to answer since maternal deaths are underreported in the US and Canada. Due to the politicization of abortion in North America, many abortion-related deaths are attributed to other causes. Death certificates do not note the cause of death as abortion complications if the death occurred more than 42 days after the abortion. The greatest errors in death classification occur for post-abortive deaths.¹

Nevertheless, four large-scale, data-linkage studies have found a significantly higher maternal mortality rate from induced abortion than from childbirth. Researchers in Finland discovered that the maternal death rate after abortion was nearly four times greater than after childbirth. They further noted that 73 per cent of all pregnancy-associated deaths could not have been identified from death certificates alone and that the suicide rate after childbirth was six times lower than the suicide rate after abortion.² These findings are supported by studies conducted in Denmark and the United Kingdom, as well as a methodologically rigorous study from California.³

¹Jacob S et al. Maternal mortality in Utah. *Obstetrics & Gynecology* 1998 February; 91(2): pp. 187-91.

²Gissler M, Hemminki E, Lonnqvist J. Suicides after pregnancy in Finland, 1987-94: register linkage study. *British Medical Journal* 1996 December; 313(7070): pp. 1431-4.

³Coleman PK, Reardon DC and Calhoun BC. Reproductive history patterns and long-term mortality rates: a Danish, population-based record linkage study. *The European Journal of Public Health* 2013; 23(4): pp. 569-74; Reardon DC and Coleman PK. Short and long term mortality rates associated with first pregnancy outcome: population register based study for Denmark 1980-2004. *Medical Science Monitor* 2012; 18(9): pp. PH71-76.; Morgan CL, Evans M and Peters JR. Suicides after pregnancy: mental health may deteriorate as a direct effect of induced abortion. *BMJ* 1997 March; 314(7084): pp. 902-3.; Reardon DC, Ney PG, Scheurer FJ, Congle JR, Coleman PK. Suicide deaths associated with pregnancy outcome: A record linkage study of 172,279 low income American women. *Archives of Women's Mental Health* 2001; 3(4 Supplement 2): p. 104.