Correspondence

Abortion and Preterm Birth

In his 2008 article, Brent Rooney asserts that the high preterm birth rate suffered by African-American women is, in large part, caused by the high abortion rate of that race. Do other races or groups in the U.S. or other countries also suffer the same effect?

Babette Francis
Toorak, Victoria, Australia

Author Reply: The first-ever systematic reviews and meta-analyses (SRMAs) of the abortion-preterm birth (APB) risk appeared in 2009, with both finding significantly higher preterm delivery (PTB) risk for women with prior induced abortions (IAs).

Prakash Shah of the University of Toronto, using data from 37 prior APB studies, reported that one prior IA nearly doubles PTB odds (OR 1.93; 95% CI, 1.28-2.71). There are no SRMAs reporting that prior IAs do not raise PTB risk. Some of the countries included in the Shah meta-analysis are Australia, Scotland, France, Italy, Germany, Denmark, Israel, Taiwan, Greece, U.S., Finland, Sweden, and Russia.

Swingle et al. reported that women with prior IAs have 64% higher odds of very preterm birth (<32.0 weeks’ gestation) than women with no prior IAs.

Extremely preterm newborns (<28 weeks’ gestation) have an autism risk of 25% and a cerebral palsy (CP) risk of 14.6%. Between 1989 and 1993, Poland’s IA rate per 1,000 births plunged by 98%. Between 1995 and 1997, Poland’s rate of extremely preterm newborns decreased by 21%. Between 1989 and 2006, Poland’s mortality rate for children under age 5 years with CP plummeted by 71%, according to data I received by email from Poland’s Central Statistical Office on Jun 12, 2008. This trend suggests a dramatic drop in the incidence of severe brain injury, a major cause of both autism and CP, in Polish newborns.

The total lifetime cost of autism for a U.S. resident, including medical and nonmedical expenses and lost income, is an estimated $3.2 million, according to Harvard researcher Michael Ganz. The approximately 39,000 cases of autism presenting in the U.S. each year represent a future drain of approximately $125 billion on the U.S. economy.

The first-ever systematic review and meta-analysis of autism (SRMA) of the association of IAs with autism was published in 2009. The SRMA found that 1,096 preterm births were attributable to prior IAs, and that 1,096 cases of CP in newborns under 1,500 grams were attributable to prior IAs.

In August 2010 Ohio State University professor Dr. Jay Iams wrote the following in the American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology: “Contrary to common belief, population-based studies…have found that elective pregnancy terminations in the first and second trimesters are associated with a very small but apparently real increase in the risk of subsequent spontaneous preterm birth (PTB).” For this statement, he referenced Shah and Zao.

Brent Rooney, M.Sc.
Vancouver, B.C., Canada

References: