

Premature Birth Rates in Mississippi Increase Second Year in a Row



By Lila Abassi — November 2, 2017



premature baby [1]

The March of Dimes recently released the [2017 Premature Birth Report Cards](#) [2] for every state, revealing preterm birth rates have risen the second year in a row in Mississippi from 13 percent preterm births last year to 13.6 percent this year. Mississippi also ranked the worst among the 50 states for preterm births.

Does this really surprise us though? While abortion is legal in the United States, the [erosion of access](#) [3] to abortion directly harms the health of women and children. The harsher the restrictions by state, the worse the outcomes in key benchmarks of child and maternal health. It is not just abortion that is the determinant of poor outcomes but restrictions in issues regarding women's healthcare.

According to 2015 [census data](#) [4], Mississippi is the poorest state in this country. About 22 percent of the population live in poverty and sadly, reproductive rights have taken a [particularly tough hit](#) [5]. According to a report released in the summer by the Center for Reproductive Rights and Ibis Reproductive Health, there were about [400 abortion restrictions](#) [3] introduced nationwide since 2010 and in states like Mississippi with over a dozen restrictions, there are higher rates of child mortality compared to national averages.

“Among states with 10 or more abortion restrictions, we see higher rates of maternal mortality, pre-term births, and low birth weight infants as compared with the national average,” stated Terri-Ann Thompson, an associate at Ibis Reproductive Health, and one of the report's authors.

The Governor of Mississippi, Phil Bryant, has been the biggest proponent of banning abortion in his state, solemnly vowing to end abortion in his state and subsequently signing a bill to defund

Planned Parenthood. Mississippi currently has one clinic, the Jackson Women's Health Organization, in the entire state that performs abortions and only one Planned Parenthood clinic. Women from across Mississippi travel between three to four hours to visit the Jackson clinic for their reproductive health needs.

[Lack of access](#) [6] to abortions and defunding of facilities that provide family planning, contraception, and abortion services serve to keep women in poverty. Women living in poverty are the ones most likely to carry an unwanted pregnancy. Who are these women? Many of these mothers are alone, teenage age, unemployed, living in crowded or polluted environments. The consequences of poverty and pregnancy set the stage for the newborn to face lifelong disparities in health outcomes - premature birth being the first.

When we see the report from March of Dimes, I wonder how surprising it really is. More preterm babies, increased stays in intensive care units, increased maternal mortality, cognitive challenges are but a few of the outcomes when we impose restrictive reproductive legislation. In the end, we are really hurting the most vulnerable among us.

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Links

[1] https://c1.staticflickr.com/1/114/304117210_c5ac8aa341.jpg

[2] <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/11/01/premature-birthrate-increases-mississippi-according-march-dimes/820499001/>

[3] <https://rewire.news/article/2017/08/02/study-eroding-abortion-access-goes-hand-hand-poor-maternal-health-outcomes/>

[4] <http://247wallst.com/economy/2016/09/17/mississippi-is-americas-poorest-state/>

[5] <https://www.thecut.com/2017/05/mississippi-last-abortion-clinic-reproductive-rights-center-for-pregnancy-choices.html>

[6] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2528810/>