

C. Intra-uterine Abuse

21. It used to be thought that the placental barrier protected the fetus from noxious influences in the system of the mother. It is now known that whatever the mother consumes is likely to affect her unborn child. Her indulgence in habits of smoking, drinking alcohol or taking drugs and chemicals will effect the development of the child. The more extreme the habit, the more drastic its effect can be.

22. It is now known that the smoking habits of the mother during pregnancy have a detrimental effect on the child's birth weight. A Perinatal Mortality Study was carried out in ten university teaching hospitals in Ontario in 1960. Its Committee reported that the percentage of premature births by weight rose in direct proportion to cigarette consumption. Among non-smokers 4.7% of births were premature; among those who smoked less than a package a day, 7.4% were premature; and among those who smoked a package or more, 11.6% of births were premature.

23. A similar relationship has been observed between smoking and immaturity.³⁷ As long ago as 1968 a study found the birth weight of infants of mothers who smoked to be less than normal in spite of diet supplements of calories and proteins. "As the level of smoking increased the birth weight was reduced."³⁸ Low birth-weight places a child in a position of risk for future development. There is also evidence that smoking during pregnancy increases the chances that the child will be hyperactive.³⁹

24. Alcohol consumption and drug abuse during pregnancy may be expected to have a harmful effect on the unborn child in a number of ways, in particular by increasing the risk of brain damage.⁴⁰ "Alcohol and drugs go straight to the fetus. The fetus can be damaged by even over-the-counter drugs."⁴¹ Obviously, caution must be exercised about the use of drugs and alcohol during pregnancy.

25. Children of mothers who are alcoholics or heavy drinkers may be born with the "fetal alcohol syndrome."⁴² Babies born with this syndrome are shorter and lighter in weight than normal. They tend not to catch up with extra post-natal care. A group of such infants studied was described as having "abnormally small heads, several facial irregularities, joint and limb abnormalities, heart defects, and poor coordination. Most also were mentally retarded and showed a number of behavioural problems, including hyperactivity, extreme nervousness, and poor attention spans."⁴³

26. Being born with an abnormality makes the life of a developing child difficult. Even minor physical abnormalities have been found to be associated with repeated delinquency in adolescence.⁴⁴ Studies of younger children have shown that "the more minor anomalies a child