

Health, wealth and social differences for adults born premature, low-birth-weight

May 23 2016

Fewer adults who were born prematurely at low-birth weights were employed or had children and they were more likely to have lower incomes, be single and report more chronic health conditions than their normal-birth-weight-term counterparts, according to an article published online by *JAMA Pediatrics*.

The first generation of extremely low-birth-weight (ELBW) premature infants (less than 1,000 grams) who were born after the introduction of neonatal intensive care has now survived into their fourth decade.

Saroj Saigal, M.D., F.R.C.P.C., of McMaster University, Ontario, Canada, and coauthors compared the functioning of adults (ages 29 to 36) who were ELBW with adults who are born at normal weight at term. The study included 100 ELBW survivors and 89 normal-[birth-weight](#) control participants for comparison.

While the groups did not differ on the highest educational level achieved or in family and partner relationships, there were differences in other areas. For example, ELBW survivors as adults were:

- Less likely to be employed
- More likely to earn less money
- More likely to remain single, have not had sex, and fewer had children
- More likely to report more chronic health conditions
- More likely to have lower self esteem

They ELBW survivors also were less likely to have current drug abuse or dependence or lifetime alcohol abuse or dependence. A higher proportion of the adults born prematurely without neurosensory impairments also were likely to identify as bisexual or homosexual.

The authors note study limitations that include the small sample size.

"Overall, the majority of extremely premature adults are living independently and contributing well to society. ... It is difficult to predict what the future will hold for these ELBW adults as they reach middle age in terms of their employment, income, family and partner relationships, and quality of life. ... It is therefore essential that these individuals receive necessary support and continued monitoring," the authors conclude.

More information: *JAMA Pediatr.* Published online May 23, 2016.
[DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.0289](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.0289)

Provided by The JAMA Network Journals

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