

The Silent Genocide: Down Syndrome Babies and Abortion



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What is Down Syndrome?

- Caused by an error in cell division where the 21st chromosome fails to divide, typically known as Trisomy 21, the variety afflicting 95% of Down syndrome babies.
- At conception, the individual has 3 chromosomes 21, resulting in 47 chromosomes in the body rather than the normal complement of 46.
- Creates severe metabolic disturbance resulting in mild to moderate intellectual disability, distinctive physical traits, and several other medical conditions , e.g., heart defects, leukemia, G.I. issues, autoimmune disorders, et al.

Source: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, *“What conditions or disorders are commonly associated with Down syndrome?”*



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Common Traits of Down Syndrome

- Mildly-to-moderately low IQ.
- Slower to speak.
- Flattened face, especially bridge of the nose.
- Almond-shaped eyes that slant up.
- Short neck.
- Tongue that tends to stick out of the mouth.
- The most common chromosomal condition diagnosed in the U.S., with approximately 6,000 babies born each year with Down syndrome, or 1 out of every 700 babies.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *"Facts About Down Syndrome"*



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Brief History of Down Syndrome

- First genetic description of Down syndrome developed in Paris by Dr. Jerome Lejeune in 1958.
- Made possible by introduction of a new technique that allowed the observation of individual chromosomes under a microscope.
- Prior to that, it was commonly believed that Down syndrome was caused by the fault of the parents or venereal disease and that it was contagious.
- Few lived to adulthood.
- Children were institutionalized and kept hidden, out of shame.
- Life expectancy was 9 years in 1929, 12 in 1949, presently over 60 due to antibiotics and advances in treatment of heart defects, which afflict 50% of Down syndrome babies.

Source: Charlotte Lozier Institute, American Report Series, *“Improving Joyful Lives: Society’s Response to Difference and Disability,”* (June 2014)



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According to National Down Syndrome Society:

Milestone	Range for Children with Down Syndrome	Typical Range
GROSS MOTOR		
Sits Alone	6 - 30 Months	5 - 9 Months
Crawls	8 - 22 Months	6 - 12 Months
Stands	1 - 3.25 Years	8 - 17 Months
Walks Alone	1 - 4 Years	9 - 18 Months
LANGUAGE		
First Word	1 - 4 Years	1 - 3 Years
Two-Word Phrases	2 - 7.5 Years	15 - 32 Months
SOCIAL/SELF-HELP		
Responsive Smile	1.5 - 5 Months	1 - 3 Months
Finger Feeds	10 - 24 Months	7 - 14 Months
Drinks From Cup Unassisted	12 - 32 Months	9 - 17 Months
Uses Spoon	13 - 39 Months	12 - 20 Months
Bowel Control	2 - 7 Years	16 - 42 Months
Dresses Self Unassisted	3.5 - 8.5 Years	3.25 - 5 Years



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Down Syndrome and Abortion

- Prior to 2012, a 92% termination rate following prenatal diagnosis was most commonly accepted.
- In 2012, a new review of abortion literature showed termination rates varied according to factors such as maternal age, race and ethnicity, and gestational age, with range from 67% to 85%.

Source: Jaime L. Natoli, et al., "Prenatal Diagnosis of Down Syndrome: A Systematic Review of Termination Rates (1995-2011)." *Prenatal Diagnosis* 32 (2012): 142-153



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Down Syndrome and Abortion

- Hospital-based studies showed higher termination rates associated with earlier gestational age.
- 93% termination rate at 16 weeks gestation or less
- 85% termination rate at 17 weeks or greater.
- Despite great advances in medical and cognitive therapies that have greatly extended life expectancies, an overwhelming majority of women having received a positive diagnosis of Down syndrome choose to terminate.

Source: Charlotte Lozier Institute, American Report Series, *“Improving Joyful Lives: Society’s Response to Difference and Disability,”* (June 2014): 13, 14



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Down Syndrome and Abortion

Dr. Brian Skotko, co-director of the Down Syndrome Program at Massachusetts General Hospital, reported in 2011 that:

- 99% of people with Down syndrome are happy with their lives.
- 97% of people with Down syndrome like who they are.
- 99% of parents said they love their child with Down syndrome.
- 5% of parents felt embarrassed by their child.
- 97% of brothers/sisters, ages 9-11, said they love their sibling.

Source: Brian G. Skotko, Susan P. Levine, Richard Goldstein, "Self Perceptions from People with Down Syndrome." *American Journal of Medical Genetics Part A* 155 (2011) 2360-2369



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Down Syndrome and Abortion

Despite the aforementioned statistics and the fact that individuals and families living with Down syndrome overwhelmingly report satisfaction with their lives, a huge majority of families continue to choose “disability-selective abortion” for their pre-born children once a positive diagnosis of Down syndrome has been delivered.

BUT WHY THE DISCONNECT?

More and more, **HOW** the diagnosis is delivered by the doctor appears to be pivotal, as well as the prevailing negative societal attitudes towards Down syndrome.



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Wrongful Birth?

The prevalence of such negative attitudes, leading to a throwaway mentality, culminated in March of 2012 with a "wrongful birth" decision in favor of Oregon parents. The court awarded \$2.9 million after doctors misdiagnosed their baby daughter as not having the condition during a prenatal screening. The parents had filed the suit against the doctors claiming that they would have terminated the pregnancy had they known they would have a special-needs child. The \$2.9 million award would cover the estimated extra lifetime costs of caring for someone with Down syndrome.



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A Hopeful Future

Newly-enacted and pending legislation that bans disability-selective abortions across the U.S. have raised hopes:

- North Dakota enacted a ban in 2013.
- South Dakota and Indiana attempted such legislation. However, Indiana's failed to make it out of committee in 2013 and South Dakota's attempted ban was defeated in 2014. South Dakota did, however, pass a sex-selective abortion ban.
- Education is being addressed in several states. Informed consent legislation that would ensure that families are made aware of the liabilities and benefits of prenatal testing prior to termination, as well as to give parents an opportunity to look upon their child as an individual person living with a disability, and not as a person who will be consumed with a disability, has been passed in six states. Now pending here in Ohio, introduced on May 19, 2014



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Conclusion

Attitudes are gradually changing towards people with Down syndrome. More and more, society is beginning to accept them as full, contributing members of the community, entitled to the same respect and dignity as everyone else.

THE KEY: EDUCATION

Education for both society in general and families who have received positive diagnoses of Down syndrome. New legislation to prohibit disability-selective abortions, couple with effective informed consent laws, will further advance the cause. **Thank you!**

Q & A