tion risk, the abortion risk and the abortion ratio by fitting respective regression models with time elapsed since the index birth and age. We transformed relative risks and odds ratios obtained from the models to absolute risks and ratios, using as the reference the unstandardized rate or ratio in the interval 19–24 months from the index birth.

When investigating the differences in the shape of the postpartum abortion curve, we fitted interactions of time elapsed from the birth with the other variables. For the study of temporal change, we selected a postpartum spell of eight months, on the basis of the curve of the postpartum abortion ratio.

RESULTS

The postpartum conception risk rose quickly during the first year after the index birth and started to decrease thereafter (Figure 1). This curve is heavily influenced by pregnancies that ended in delivery, as these represent the large majority of all pregnancies in Finland.

The curve of the postpartum abortion risk had a somewhat different pattern, increasing from the third month to the seventh month postpartum and decreasing thereafter (Figure 2). The curve of the postpartum abortion risk flattened considerably after we controlled for age. However, its shape did not change further when we also controlled for marital status at birth and parity, even though the level of abortion risk varied across these variables (Table 2, page 85). From six months to 18 months postpartum, and particularly from six to eight months, the abortion risk was higher than after 18 months postpartum; there was very little variation in the abortion risk after 18 months postpartum.

Teenage mothers had a higher abortion risk than those aged 20–24 (relative risk, 2.0), and the relative risk declined significantly with age, from 0.5 at ages 25–29 to 0.2 at ages 40–44. The postpartum abortion risk of unmarried women was higher than that of married women (relative risks, 2.2–3.8). Notably, women cohabiting at the time of childbirth had an abortion risk closer to that of never-married women than to that of married women. Starting from parity one, abortion risk increased with parity: The relative risk rose from 1.5 among those with two births to 2.3 among those with four or more.

The shape of the curve of postpartum abortion risk over time varied according to age, marital status and parity (Figure 3). Unmarried women and higher-parity women had a greater abortion risk in the first 18 months postpartum than at longer durations; the abortion risk among unmarried women appears to peak at 6–8 months postpartum. Among teenagers, the level of risk was highest at 3–8 months postpartum and dropped considerably thereafter. In the other age-groups, the variation in the abortion risk by time elapsed since birth was small. Abortion risks were not elevated among married mothers and first-time mothers in the months after the index birth.

Overall, the abortion ratio (i.e., the ratio of conceptions leading to abortions to conceptions leading to births) was...