

Wanted Births: His and Hers

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Introduction

Unintended pregnancy affects many Americans and is associated with a variety of poor health outcomes for parents, their relationships, and their children[1]. Since men are usually expected to make financial and social contributions as fathers, unintended pregnancy typically affects both women and men. Yet major research analyses on unintended pregnancy in the U.S. have only analyzed statistics for women. Moreover, conventional measures of unintended pregnancy only use information from women, occasionally employing women's reports of their male partners' perceptions of the pregnancy. In order to fill this gap, this paper provides an overview of men's experience of unintended pregnancy--highlighting men's unintended fatherhood--and also compares these results to statistics for women.

The lack of studies regarding men's experience with unintended pregnancy is not in keeping with current trends in the study of fertility and family life. Due to extensive criticism [2, 3], the last twenty years have witnessed a slow shift in these studies from a nearly exclusive focus on the reports of women to broader analyses of the reports of men *and* women or male-female couples. In particular, studies of fertility in developing countries have focused heavily on the contributions of men to fertility and contraceptive decision-making [4-7]. These studies have demonstrated that reports of "unmet need" for contraception may be drastically overestimated in many developing countries when only women's reports are considered[8]. Recent analyses of couple data suggest that American men are major contributors to contraceptive decision-making in relationships, suggesting that men are seriously concerned with and involved in the prevention of unintended pregnancy[9]. However, analyses of fertility in general--and unintended pregnancy in particular--in the U.S. and most developed contexts continue to rely primarily on the reports of women, rather than assessing the reports of women and men. This reliance on women is presumably based on the assumption that women may be able to report their own unintended pregnancies which they never told their male partners about--especially if the pregnancy was aborted. Though reasonable, to the best of our knowledge, this assumption has never been tested. Moreover, while women's reports might be more reliable for trying to estimate the breadth of unintended pregnancy, men still share in the experience and consequences of unintended pregnancy when they know about it [10]. Qualitative studies have shown that men often recount unintentional fatherhood as completely altering their lives [11]. Thus there is value in estimating the scale of men's experience with unintended pregnancy. To determine the extent to which men's reports of unintended pregnancy match women's, we plan to compare both sexes to evaluate similarities and differences between them.

The neglect of men's reports of and experiences with unintended pregnancy is surprising given the extensive academic evaluation of the concept and measurement of "unintended pregnancy" over the last ten years [12-15]. The tentative consensus of this debate has been the categorical distinction between "mistimed pregnancies"—defined as pregnancies which were too early by two years or less—and "unplanned pregnancies"—defined as pregnancies which were more seriously mistimed or pregnancies which occurred when no other children were wanted [16]. The reduction of unintended pregnancy is an important policy goal, but without accurate measurement of unintended pregnancy, it is difficult to know if those goals have been achieved [12]. We suggest that a more accurate evaluation of the rate of unintended pregnancy should

consider both men's *and* women's reports of unintended pregnancy, even if men's reports are incomplete.

Previous literature on unintended pregnancy has rarely distinguished between the experiences and risk factors associated with unintended *pregnancy* from those associated with unintended *births*. Given that abortions are legal and frequently obtained in the U.S., it is possible that the risk factors for unintended pregnancy and unintended birth (as opposed to abortion) might be distinct. Although we would ideally wish to study the factors associated with men's unintended pregnancies *and* births, data limitations largely constrain us to men's unintended births. To keep our analysis comparable for women, we primarily focus on women's unintended births.

When analyzing data from men on unintended pregnancies and births, it is important to remember that men can only report unintended pregnancies that they know about. Thus it is possible that apparent risk factors for unintended pregnancy among men may be the result of a reporting bias based on men's lack of awareness of an unintended birth's occurrence. Previous research on women has identified several risk factors for experiencing unintended pregnancy. These include being aged 18-24, having less education, being Black or Hispanic, being in a cohabiting relationship, living below the poverty line [17]. We hypothesize the following for men:

H1: The unintended pregnancy rate among single men will appear lower than among single women because single men will be less likely to know about an unintended pregnancy.

H2: There will be no apparent statistical difference in the reports of abortion between men and women, because women who do not report their abortions on a survey are unlikely to tell their male partners either.

H3: Men ages 20-26 will be the highest age risk category for unintended pregnancy, since men tend to partner with women about two years younger than themselves.

H4: All other risk factors among men will remain the same as those among women. Men who are in poverty, have less education, who are Black or Hispanic, and who are in cohabiting relationships will be more likely to experience unintended pregnancy.

Methods

In order to test our hypotheses, we use the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), which contains data from a nationally representative survey of American men and women ages 15-44 which were collected from 2006-2008. The NSFG employs a multistage stratified sampling design, so we employ sample weights and appropriate statistical analyses for complex surveys in both descriptive and regression reports.

We utilize data from both sexes. The NSFG is not ideal for comparing men's and women's experiences with unintended pregnancy because it does not contain any male-female couples, and--as on virtually all nationally representative surveys--abortion underreporting for women is extremely high [18]. In addition, the NSFG asked women, but not men, about the wantedness of reported miscarried pregnancies, and about how much they believe their partner wanted the pregnancy. However, the NSFG is reasonably well-suited for analyzing retrospective birth intentions and wantedness for births, which is the primary focus of this analysis. Our analysis also includes a comparison of men's and women's reported abortions and miscarriages, and women's reports of their male partner's pregnancy desires, primarily for methodological purposes.

Statistical Analysis

The NSFG contains retrospective reports of men's and women's desires for a birth at the time they learned they were pregnant. This question was only asked for men if they had had a birth in the last 5 years, so we restrict our analysis for women also to births in the last 5 years. In keeping with recent work suggesting that mistimed pregnancies are distinct from unwanted pregnancies, we conducted multinomial logistic regressions with the possible outcomes of wanted, mistimed, or unwanted. We also conducted binomial logistic regressions which collapsed mistimed and unwanted births into a single outcome and compared those to wanted births.

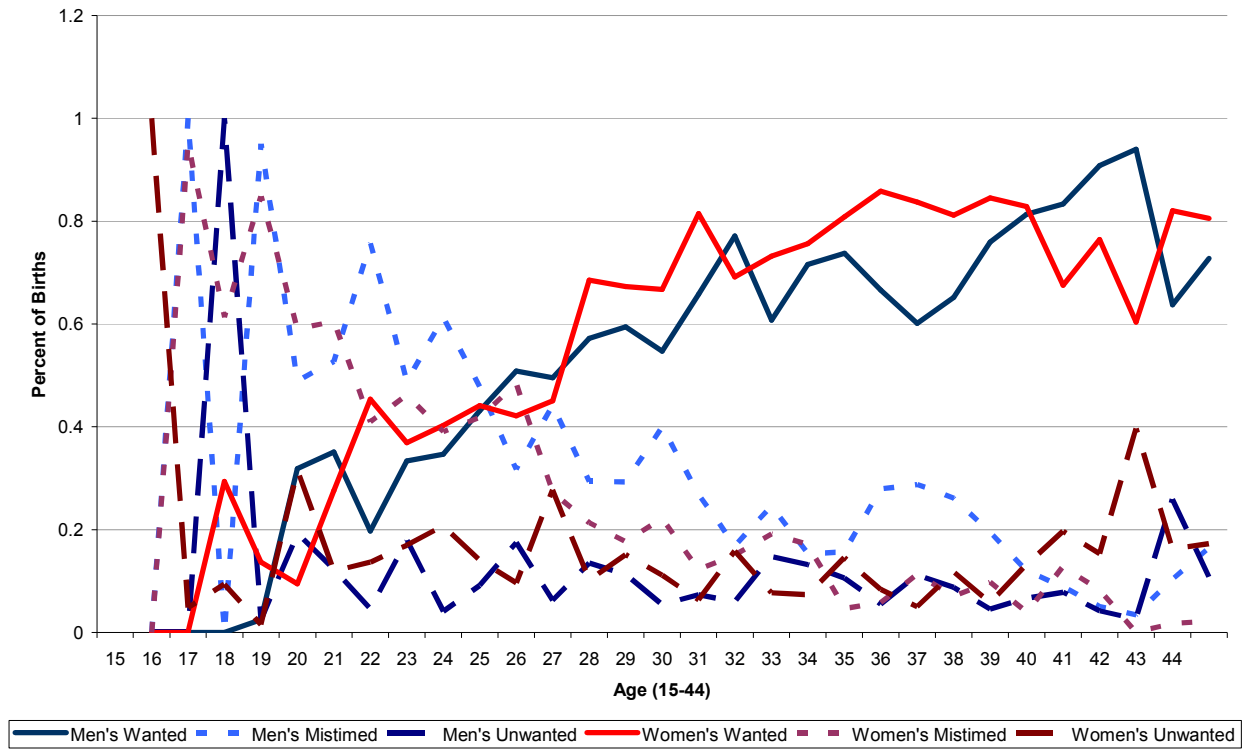
We coded births which the respondent described as "late or overdue" and births that were described as being at the "right time" as "wanted"; births that the respondents described as "too soon" as "mistimed"; and births that the respondent described as "unwanted" as unwanted. A very few respondents said they were unsure or were indifferent about their pregnancies, and we excluded those births from our analysis. We also excluded the very few men who said they did not know about a pregnancy before the birth.

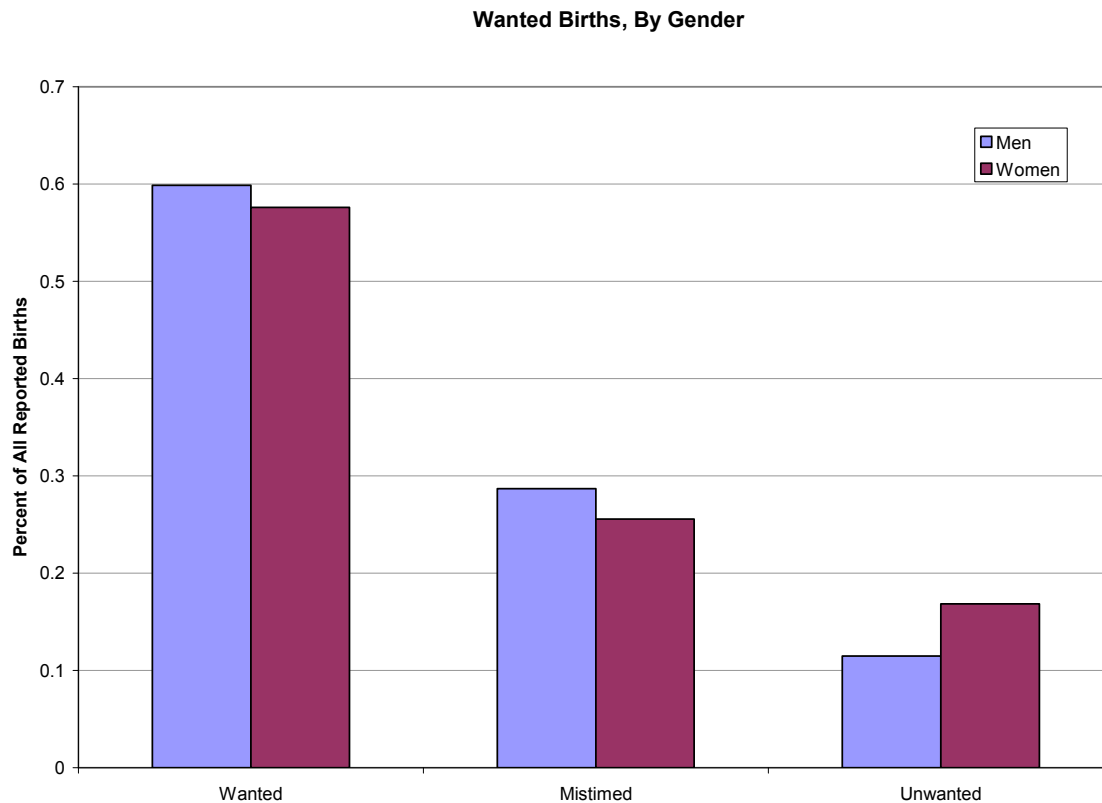
Our analysis uses education and percent of the poverty level as measures of socioeconomic status. We also include race and whether the respondent lived in city, suburb, or rural area as other controls. None of these are time-varying covariates however, and may only represent the respondent's educational level, financial level, or urban residence at the time survey, not of the pregnancy. However, we have time-varying covariates for age, parity, and relationship status at the time the pregnancy was discovered.

Preliminary Results

Our results indicate that, contrary to our hypothesis, men report significantly fewer abortions than women on the NSFG. Among men who have ever had sex, the mean number of abortions is 0.13, with 10.03% ever having any abortions, and 2.92% having had more than one. Among women who have ever had sex, the mean number of abortions is 0.21, with 15.3% ever having any abortions, and 4.43% having had more than one.

Men's and Women's Wanted Births, by Age





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