Pregnancy Intendedness

Pregnancy intendedness influences a woman’s pregnancy experience and can affect the health of the infant. In North Dakota in 2002, more than one in three mothers whose pregnancies resulted in live births reported that their pregnancies were unintended (36%); 30 percent said they wanted to be pregnant later (i.e., mistimed) and 6 percent said they did not want to be pregnant then or in the future (i.e., unwanted) (see Figure 1).

The nearly two-thirds of mothers whose pregnancies were intended included 46 percent who wanted to be pregnant then and 18 percent who wanted to be pregnant sooner. However, even mothers who said their pregnancies were intended were not necessarily trying to get pregnant; only 55 percent of mothers with intended pregnancies said they were trying.

Among the mothers who were not trying to get pregnant, less than half (45%) were doing something to keep from getting pregnant. Reasons for not using birth control included that they didn’t mind if they got pregnant (43%), they thought they couldn’t get pregnant at that time (19%), the husband/partner didn’t want to use anything (17%), and they had side effects from the birth control methods they were using (11%).

These findings apply to the pregnancy intendedness of mothers who had live births, so do not include women who became pregnant and experienced fetal deaths or had induced terminations. In North Dakota, there were 9,443 pregnancies in 2006 (see Figure 2). The total number of pregnancies was composed of 8,616 live births, 50 fetal deaths, and 776 induced terminations.

Greater Risk Among Women With Unintended Pregnancies

Pregnancy intendedness impacts the health of the infant because there is greater risk associated with women whose pregnancy is unintended. Risk factors for North Dakota women with mistimed or unwanted pregnancies in 2002 included (see Fast Facts at left for detailed data):

- Not taking folic acid or having health insurance before becoming pregnant, not starting prenatal care in the first trimester, and not still breastfeeding at the time of the survey.
- Using alcohol and binge drinking in the three months before becoming pregnant, being smokers before becoming pregnant, and being economically disadvantaged (i.e., recipients of the Medicaid program and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program).

Major Stress Affecting Women With Unintended Pregnancies

More than four in five women with unintended pregnancies in North Dakota in 2002 experienced at least one of 13 major stressful events in the 12 months before the baby was born (83% compared to 66% of intended and 72% overall); 43 percent experienced three or more stresses (compared to 21% of intended and 28% overall). The most common stressful events were (see Figure 4):

- Moving (50% compared to 29% of intended and 36% overall).
- Arguing more with the husband/partner (38% compared to 20% of intended and 26% overall).
- Having bills they couldn’t pay (35% compared to 18% of intended and 24% overall).
- Having someone close who had a bad problem with drinking or drugs (24% compared to 10% of intended and 15% overall).
- Having a husband/partner who didn’t want the pregnancy (18% compared to 3% of intended and 8% overall).
- Getting a divorce (16% compared to 3% of intended and 8% overall).

Figure 4. Percentage of Mothers Who Experienced Stressful Events in the 12 Months Before the Birth, by Intendedness of Pregnancy, in North Dakota: 2002


FAST FACTS

About Risk Factors

Among women with unintended pregnancies, smaller proportions:

- Took folic acid (34% compared to 65% of intended).
- Had health insurance before the pregnancy (60% compared to 84% of intended).
- Started prenatal care on time (68% started in the first trimester compared to 85% of intended).
- Were breastfeeding at the time of the survey (29% compared to 44% of intended).

Among women with unintended pregnancies, larger proportions:

- Were using alcohol (73% compared to 61% of intended) and binge drinking (54% drank five or more drinks in one sitting compared to 29% of intended) in the three months before becoming pregnant.
- Were smokers in the three months before becoming pregnant (40% compared to 19% of intended).
- Were recipients of the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program during pregnancy (56% compared to 25% of intended).
- Were Medicaid recipients before or during the pregnancy (46% compared to 17% of intended).