

Fast Facts

Unplanned Pregnancy: Key Data

Defining the Problem:

- About one in two pregnancies in America are unplanned.⁽ⁱ⁾¹
- That is, over three million of the 6.4 million pregnancies in the United States annually are unplanned.¹ Moreover, about two-thirds of unplanned pregnancies—two million—are unwanted.⁽ⁱⁱ⁾² In other words, about one in three pregnancies are unwanted.
- The rate of unplanned pregnancy remained constant between 1994 and 2001 at 51 unplanned pregnancies per 1,000 women age 15-44.¹ During the same time period, the rate of unwanted pregnancy increased slightly (4%)—from 31.9 to 33.2 unwanted pregnancies per 1,000 women age 15-44.³
- Over three-quarters (76%) of all unplanned pregnancies occur to women in their teens and twenties.^{1,2} While the majority of all teen pregnancies are unplanned (more than half a million unplanned pregnancies to teens each year), there are also more than one and a half million unplanned pregnancies to women in their twenties each year.
- The extent of unplanned pregnancy is ever more serious when taking into account pregnancy intentions of the male partner, although it is difficult to reflect male intentions in counts of unplanned pregnancies due to data limitations.

Why It Matters:

- Increasing the proportion of pregnancies that are wanted and welcomed by both parents helps reduce child poverty and income disparities, improve overall family well-being, and reduce taxpayers' costs.⁴
- Women experiencing an unplanned pregnancy are less likely than women who have an intended pregnancy to obtain early prenatal care^{5,6} and their babies are at increased risk of both low birthweight and preterm birth.^{5,7-9}
- At the age of two, children born as the result of unplanned pregnancy have significantly lower cognitive test scores when compared to children born as the result of an intended pregnancy.⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾¹⁰
- The majority of children from an unplanned pregnancy are born to unmarried women.¹¹ Children born outside of two-parent married families are more likely to be poor, drop out of high school, have lower grade-point averages, lower college aspirations, and poorer school attendance records.¹²⁻¹⁴
- One of the most obvious, additional consequences of unplanned pregnancy is abortion—in 2001 there were approximately 1.3 million abortions in the United States.¹⁵
- Both mothers and fathers who have an unplanned birth report less happiness and more conflict in their relationship compared to similar women and men who have a planned birth.¹⁶

ⁱ Unplanned pregnancies include those reported by woman to be unwanted or mistimed (also known as “unintended”) in 2001, the most recent year for which adequate data are available.

ⁱⁱ This figure includes (1) pregnancies that end in abortion (about 1.3 million); (2) births resulting from pregnancies that women themselves say they did not want at the time of conception or ever in the future (about 567,000); and (3) a smaller number of miscarriages that were also from unwanted pregnancies (179,000).

ⁱⁱⁱ Cognitive test scores include direct assessment of a variety of skills, including listening, vocabulary, problem solving, memory, communication, as well as a child's mental ability relative to other children in his or her age group.

What the American Public Believes:

- Americans strongly support the goal of reducing unplanned, and in particular unwanted, pregnancies in the United States—69% favor the goal of reducing unwanted pregnancies.¹⁷
- Americans underestimate the extent of the unplanned pregnancy problem—only one in five (19%) Americans know that women in their 20s have the largest number of unplanned pregnancies.¹

Sources

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