

## **Pregnancy Unwantedness by Fathers and Child Behavior**

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The well-being of children stemming from unintended and unwanted pregnancies has become an issue of public concern and scholarly interest. A growing body of research reveals that pregnancy unwantedness is associated with a host of risk factors and negative outcomes for children. However, the number of unwanted or unintended pregnancies is difficult to establish. Mothers who retrospectively report that they considered an abortion are likely to be a subset of those who actually considered an abortion. By examining the reaction of fathers to the news of pregnancy, it may be possible to gain additional insight into pregnancy unwantedness and its subsequent effects on child well-being.

The perspective of fathers is important for several reasons. First, pregnancy unwantedness by fathers may be associated with different child outcomes than pregnancy unwantedness by mothers. Unwantedness by fathers may lead to less father involvement in the child's life – a risk factor for poor child outcomes. It is also possible that fathers' abortion suggestions are retrospectively underreported to a lesser degree than mothers' abortion considerations.

Children resulting from pregnancies unwanted by fathers may be at increased risk of negative outcomes due lower levels of father involvement, lower levels of parental relationship quality, and fewer resources – all factors negatively associated with child well-being. It may be the case that the pregnancy unwantedness by fathers is also driven by some of these factors. Fathers may perceive a pregnancy as unwanted and suggest an abortion if their relationship with the mother is unstable or if they are unable to support the child financially. This unwantedness may in turn cause fathers to play a less active role in the pregnancy and birth and be less active fathers after the arrival of the child compared with fathers who did not regard the pregnancy as unwanted. This lack of father involvement may contribute to poor child outcomes.

I use data from the first three waves of the Fragile Families Study (N=3,187) to examine aggressive behavior (Achenbach, 2000) of children at age three. I estimate seven ordinary least squares regression models. The first model examines the bivariate relationship between child behavior and suggested abortion. The second model controls for background characteristics of the mother and child. The third model accounts for differences in father involvement with the pregnancy and birth. The fourth model adds in relationship status and quality between parents at the time of birth. The fifth model adds in parental resources and human capital characteristics. The sixth model controls for mothers' health behaviors, depression, and considering abortion. The final model is the full model.

Results show that children whose fathers suggested aborting them have more aggressive behavior at age three than children whose fathers did not suggest an abortion. The differences are partially explained by differences in maternal age, parity, and multi-partner fertility and further reduced by differences in father involvement during the pregnancy and at the birth. Parental relationship status and quality appear to play the most important role in attenuating the association between suggested abortion and child behavior, but marginal differences in child behavior remain after accounting for parental relationship quality. Parental resources and human capital characteristics have only a small effect on child behavior net of background characteristics. Maternal health and health behaviors also account for some of the association between suggested abortion and child behavior, primarily due to differences in maternal depression and prenatal smoking.

The results imply that pregnancy unwantedness by fathers places children at increased risk of behavioral problems even if mothers report the pregnancy as wanted and have sufficient resources to care for the child. Furthermore, fathers and their relationships with children's mothers play an important role in promoting child well-being at a young age. Thus, policies aimed at supporting children stemming from unwanted pregnancies may need to include a greater emphasis on fathers.

<b>Table 1. Aggressive behavior by fathers' abortion suggestions.</b>		
	Father suggested abortion (n=320)	Father did not suggest abortion (n=2,867)
Aggressive behavior (unstandardized mean scores)	0.75**	0.63
**Differs from father did not suggest an abortion at the p<0.01 level Source: Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study.		

<b>Table 2. Aggressive behavior results from OLS regressions.</b>							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Father suggested abortion	0.292**	0.220**	0.195**	0.113+	0.225**	0.179**	0.116+
<b>Background characteristics</b>							
Maternal Race/Ethnicity (Mother White)							
Mother Black		0.0202	0.0184	-0.0276	-0.00515	0.0534	0.00709
Mother Hispanic		0.0612	0.06	0.0259	-0.00622	0.122*	0.0495
Mother Other		0.171+	0.173+	0.14	0.164+	0.207*	0.174+
Maternal age		-0.0233**	-0.0232**	-0.0192**	-0.0153**	-0.0216**	-0.0144**
Parity		0.0214	0.0227	0.0159	0.00123	0.0133	-0.00143
Child gender (female)		-0.0960**	-0.0949**	-0.0965**	-0.0941**	-0.103**	-0.0991**
Mother has child w/ other partner		0.133**	0.133**	0.105*	0.116**	0.111*	0.0897*
Father has child w/ other partner		0.156**	0.145**	0.107**	0.141**	0.123**	0.0866*
<b>Father involvement</b>							
Visited hospital			-0.0245				-0.000645
Gave money during pregnancy			0.024				0.0892
Said he would support baby			0.0114				0.0548
Provided help during pregnancy			-0.118+				-0.0519
<b>Parental relationship</b>							
Relationship quality at birth (1-3)				-0.353**			-0.323**

