



# How Intentional Pregnancy Relates to Enjoyment of Motherhood and Fatherhood Among Diverse First-Time Parents?

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## Introduction

- Enjoyment of parenting can impact parenting practices and child outcomes (e.g., self-belief, sense of control, academic motivation)<sup>1</sup>
- Whether pregnancy is intended or not can affect mothers and fathers differently, including how they react to normal stresses of parenting<sup>2</sup>
- 1/3 of all pregnancies are unwanted, unintended<sup>1</sup> or occurred earlier than desired.<sup>2</sup> Unplanned pregnancies are related to greater parental mood disturbances<sup>3</sup> and poor child-outcomes<sup>4</sup>
- There has been little research on how intentional parenthood relates to men's and women's enjoyment of parenthood<sup>3</sup> Such research could offer insights into ways to support new parents<sup>5</sup>

## Research Aims

- 1) How does the intention to conceive relate to the enjoyment of parenthood?
- 2) Does this relationship differ between mothers and fathers?

## Method

**Data Source:** Baby Books 2 study, a bilingual (Spanish-English) parenting intervention. (NICHD grant #R01 HD078547)

**Sample:** ~124 low-income heterosexual couples who were first-time parents (n=247 caregivers)

- 48% married, 35% living as married
- 61% pregnancies planned
- 65% Latine, 16% Black, 9% White, 4.5% Asian, 6.5% Other/Multiracial

**Procedures:** Parents asked when their child was 18 months:

1. What does it mean to be a good mother and father?
2. What makes you want to be a good parent?
3. What are the costs of being a good parent?
4. What are the benefits of being a good parent?

**Analytic plan:**

- Interviews were transcribed and thematically coded using concepts identified a priori from the literature and inductively through iterative coding.
- Five coders with 95% reliability on double coding of 100%.

## Findings

### RQ1: Pregnancy Intention and Enjoyment of Parenthood

- Parents with unintended pregnancies talked about prioritizing a child's emotional support such as happiness, as a feature that makes them good parents.
- When these parents reported negative experiences with their own parents, they tended to describe good parenting as doing more than their own parents did.
- Parents who planned their pregnancy frequently described good parenting as meeting physical needs (e.g., housing, food).
- Those that had positive experiences with their own parents more often typically planned their pregnancies. Surprisingly, fathers, especially those who did not plan to become parents

### RQ2: Difference between Mothers and Father

| Codes  | Planned Mother | Not Planned Mother | Planned Father | Not Planned Father |
|--|----------------|--------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Basic Needs: Happiness                                       | 43.2%          | 58.5%              | 38.4%          | 61.3%              |
| Generational: Mimicking Positive Parent Relationship         | 66.7%          | 33.3%              | 64.2%          | 35.8.2%            |
| Parenting as Learning Experiences                            | N/A            | N/A                | 63.7%          | 36.3%              |
| Parenting is a Skill   | 66.7%          | 33.3%              | 25.5%          | 74.5%              |
| Generational: Providing More Than What Parent had Growing-up | 34.8%          | 65.2%              | 41.2%          | 58.8%              |
| Unexpected Joy   | 75%            | 25%                | 29.1%          | 70.9%              |

## Discussion

- Parents with planned pregnancies focused more on basic needs (housing, food) while those with unplanned pregnancies stressed emotional needs (happiness, security).
- Unlike other studies of unplanned fatherhood being stressful<sup>6</sup> our fathers explained unexpected parenthood as a "learning experience". These fathers also described their experience as an unexpected joy.
- Gender roles typically focus on fatherhood as a financial support, but our fathers focused more on the emotional over material aspects of parenthood.
- Mothers who planned their pregnancy explained this was their role in society, and therefore motherhood was viewed as wonderful and increased their joy.
- They likely created a positive relationship with the role of being a parent which they want to bring on to their children, and if they had a negative experience with their own parents, they are more likely to want to change the patterns.
- Additionally, parents who likely created a positive relationship with the role of being a parent which they want to bring on to their children, and if they had a negative experience with their own parents, they are more likely to want to change the patterns.

## Limitations & Implications

### Limitations

- More pregnancies were intended than not, providing unequal comparison groups.
- Parents were asked after 18 months of parenting. Responses might differ when having younger or older children.

### Implications

- Relationship between past experiences with parents and effect on planning pregnancy
- Societal norms affect how a parent views parenting (job, chore, a choice, ie.)
- Lack of research with fathers' points to a societal change regarding fathers' role

## References

<sup>1</sup>Martin, A. J. (2003). The Relationship Between Parents' Enjoyment of Parenting and Children's School Motivation. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 13(2), 115-132. <sup>2</sup>Clinton, & Kelber, (1993). Stress and coping in fathers of newborns: comparisons of planned versus unplanned pregnancy. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 30(5), 437-443. <sup>3</sup>Kost & Lindberg (2015). Pregnancy intentions, maternal behaviors, and infant health: investigating relationships with new measures and propensity score analysis. *Demography*, 52(1), 83-111. <sup>4</sup>Barret & Wellings (2002). What is a 'planned' pregnancy? Empirical data from a British study. *Social Science & Medicine*, 55(4), 545-557. <sup>5</sup>Clinton & Kelber, S. (1993). Stress and coping in fathers of newborns: comparisons of planned versus unplanned pregnancy. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 30(5), 437-443. <sup>6</sup>Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2013) Comparisons of levels and predictors of mothers' and fathers' engagement with their preschool aged children. *Early child development and care* 183(3-4), 498-514.

