

**Desire to Get Pregnant, Desire to Avoid Pregnancy, and Consistency between
Them during the Transition to Adulthood**

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This study focuses on women's attitudes toward pregnancy during the transition to adulthood because this stage in life is when unintended pregnancy rates are highest. The rate per thousand for ages 15-17 is 42; whereas for ages 18-19 it is 105, and decreases from there (Finer and Zolna, 2011). In addition to having the highest unintended pregnancy rates, this period—described by developmental psychologists as “emerging adulthood,” is particularly important for the density of decisions with substantial future consequences—for example, decisions about college, careers, relationships, and contraception (Arnett, 2000; R. R. Rindfuss, Morgan, & Swicegood, 1988). Further, it is a time of great residential instability during which life trajectories diverge sharply (R. Rindfuss, 1991).

The Relationship Dynamics and Social Life (RDSL) study, which we use here, is based on 1.5 years of longitudinal data from a sample of 18 and 19 year old women. With the use of this rich data, we build upon the vast literature suggesting that existing measurement and conceptualization of pregnancy intentions suffer from grave limitations that undermine our ability to understand the psychosocial processes linking intention to behavior (Koenig, Acharya, Singh, & Roy, 2006; Miller, Barber, & Gatny, 2012). In particular, we concentrate on two key problems described in greater detail below: ambivalence and retrospective measurement. A series of papers, including a groundbreaking paper by Zabin (1993), have suggested that women's pregnancy intentions may not be as straightforward as our measurement strategies—women may simultaneously feel both the desire to avoid pregnancy and the desire to become pregnant. In addition, the common strategy of retrospectively assessing pregnancy intentions may be inadequate

if women's attitudes toward pregnancy change with their experience of gestation or motherhood (Koenig et al., 2006; Williams, Abma, & Piccinino, 1999).

We use one year of weekly information about pregnancy desires among emergent adult women, collected by the Relationship Dynamics and Social Life (RDSL) study. In addition to theoretically and empirically addressing an important but unanswered research question, this unique dataset includes measures of pregnancy desires that overcome two issues with prior measurement. First, the weekly collection of *prospective* pregnancy desires in the RDSL allows us to isolate pre-pregnancy factors that influence the desire to have a baby, rather than conflating pre-pregnancy desires with gestational and early post-natal experiences. Second, the RDSL includes measures of both the desire to *get pregnant* and the desire to *avoid pregnancy*. This allows us to recognize the complexity of fertility intentions and directly examine the different predictors of these two aspects of pregnancy desire.

In this study we provide an overview of the most commonly used (retrospective) measures of pregnancy intention. Then we draw on existing scholarship about teenage pregnancy to propose a conceptual framework of the determinants of emergent adult women's near-term desire for pregnancy. Following, we use a comprehensive baseline survey and subsequent weekly accounts of pregnancy intentions to predict respondents' *desire for pregnancy* and *desire to avoid pregnancy*. This reveals that women who received public assistance, are in an intimate relationship, and who are depressed are most likely to express desire for a pregnancy. Women who are highly religious or who are enrolled in post-secondary school are most likely to express strong desires to avoid pregnancy.

