

ESTIMATING THE NEED AND UNMET NEED FOR INFERTILITY SERVICES

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Introduction

Estimating the number of women in need of infertility services and those with unmet need for infertility in the US is important for formulating social policy.

There is no scholarly consensus concerning how to best measure infertility.

Few definitions of infertility consider intent to have a child, yet some women classified as “infertile” may not intend to have a child.

Estimates that ignore an attitudinal variable like intent are likely to overestimate the prevalence of infertility and the unmet need for treatment.

What if only women who are trying to conceive are counted as infertile? These measure could underestimate the need for fertility services, because they exclude women who are “ok either way” rather than trying to become pregnant.

OUR SOLUTION: We include all infertile women who say they have been trying to become pregnant OR who say they would like to have a(nother) child.

We use Wave 1 of the National Survey of Fertility Barriers (NSFB) to illustrate the utility of this approach.



The NSFB is a nationally representative random-digit-dialing telephone survey of 4,712 US women ages 25-45 designed to study infertility and other reproductive barriers. This dataset is available at:

<http://sodapop.pop.psu.edu/data-collections/nsfb>.

Measures

INFERTILE=no pregnancy after trying for at least a year to get pregnant or after ever having regular unprotected sex for at least a year. We include women with a recent episode (< 5 years).

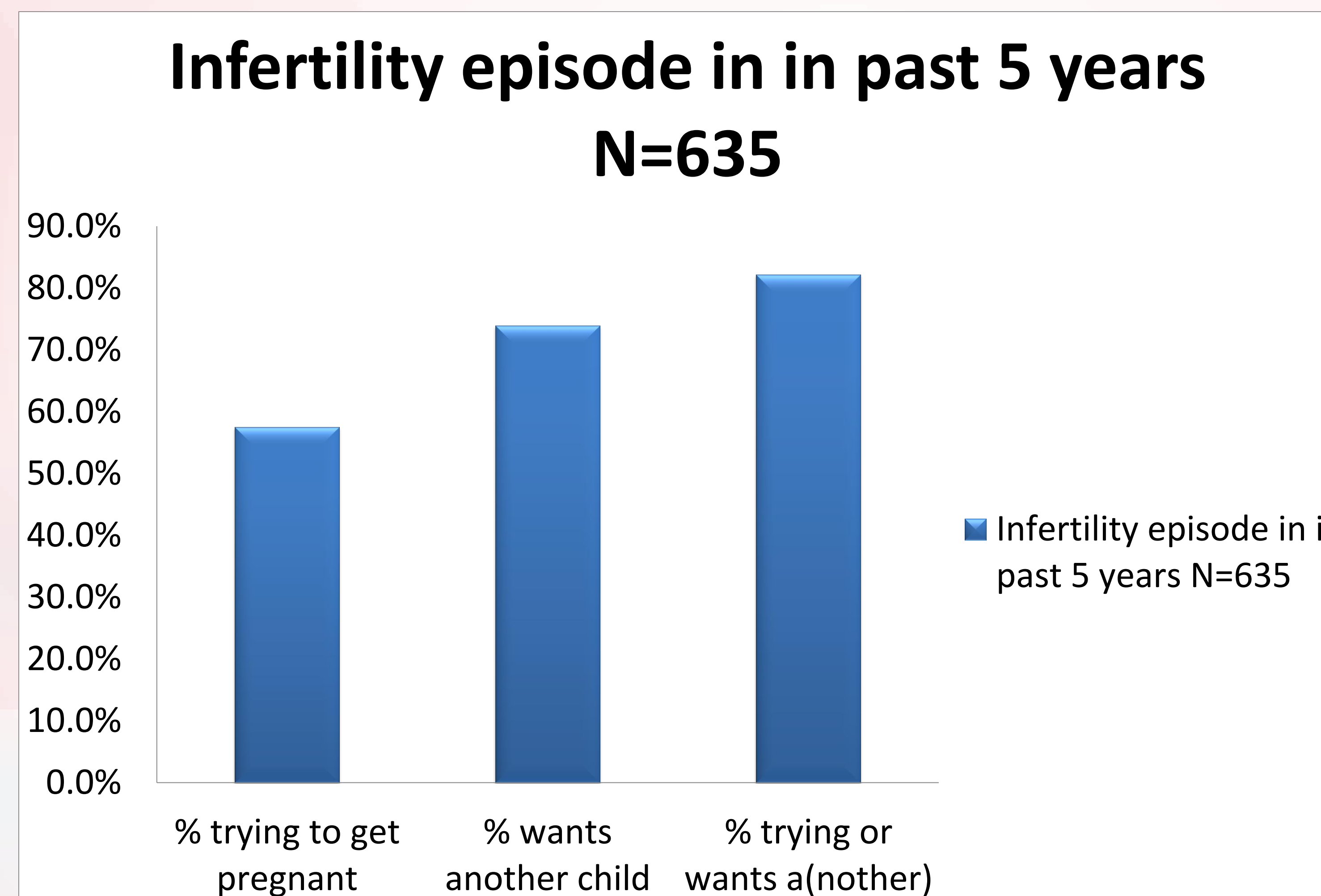
“Wants another child” = “Would you, yourself, like to have a(nother) baby?” (1=yes, 0=no).

“Sought help” = ever talked to a doctor about problems getting pregnant.

“Trying” = tried to become pregnant vs. “ok either way.”

Results

Need for infertility services =infertile women who said they want another child OR they were trying to get pregnant during the infertility episode.

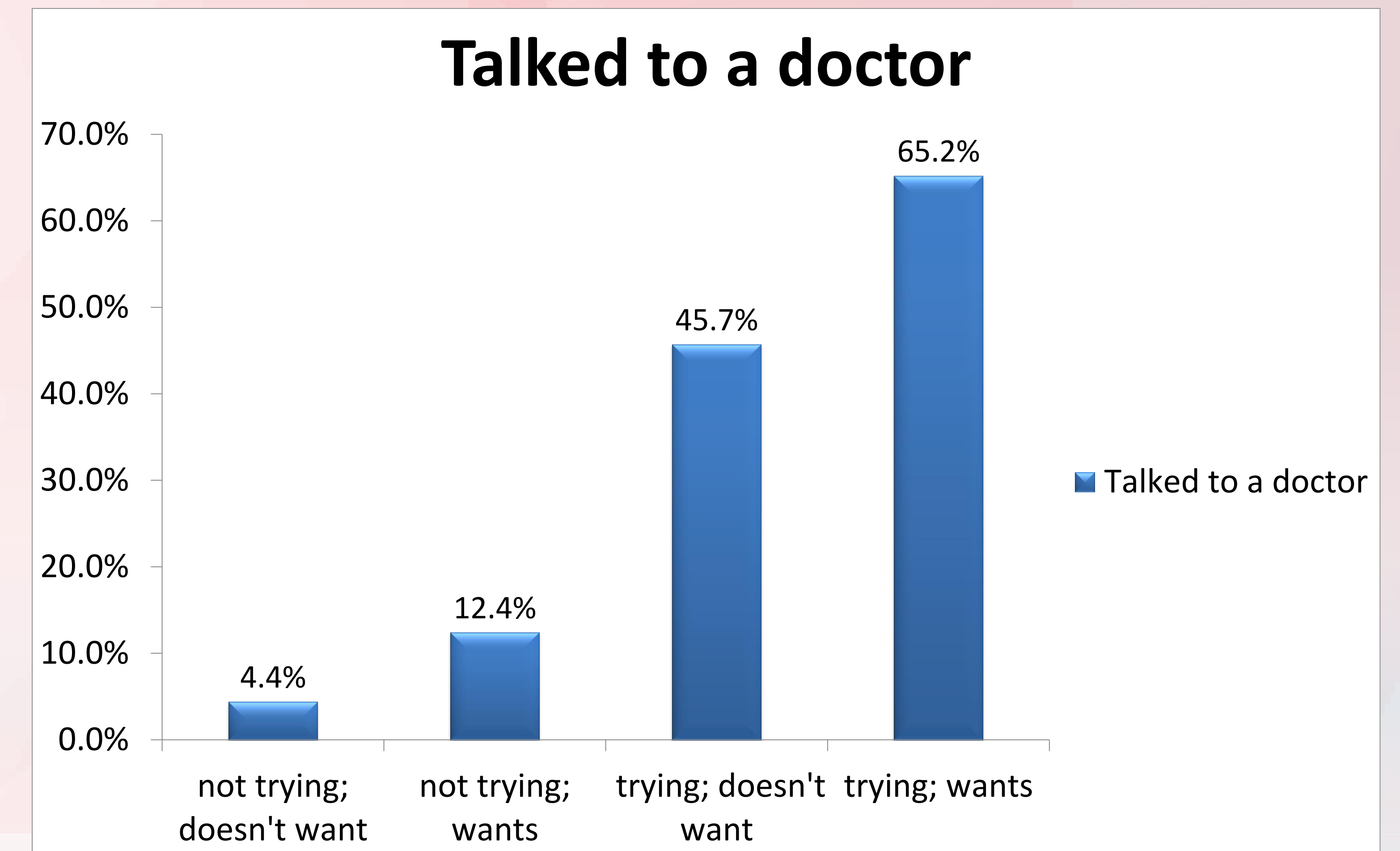


Wanting a child and trying to become pregnant are not the same:

	Wants a(nother) child	Trying	Not Trying	Total
Yes		104	94	198
Row percentage		52.5%	47.5%	100.0%
Column percentage		39.2%	26.0%	31.6%
No		161	267	428
Row percentage		37.6%	62.4%	100.0%
Column percentage		60.8%	74.0%	68.4%
Total		265	361	626
Row percentage		42.3%	57.7%	100.0%
Column percentage		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi square=12.5***

Only 4.4% of people who neither wanted another child nor tried to become pregnant talked to a doctor:



Therefore, some women who seem to be in need of treatment according to behavioral criteria do not appear to need treatment when attitudinal measures are included.

Conclusion: Using our measure, 82.2% of infertile women were in need of services. This represents 8.8% of US women aged 25-45. 44.4% of these did not talk to a doctor and thus have unmet need. This is 10-15% lower than NSFG estimates.