

Study of Pregnancy Intentions and Mental Health

Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health are conducting a study to understand and document the mental health consequences of unintended pregnancy. This study explores the experiences and outcomes of women who suspect pregnancy and seek a pregnancy test. We will follow women who have a positive pregnancy test as well as those who have a negative result to examine the effect of pregnancy and pregnancy intentions on women's mood, mental health, and decision-making. Although our primary focus is on women's experiences, we will also gather information about the health and wellbeing of children born to women who have a positive test result and continue their pregnancies.

The Study of Pregnancy Intentions and Mental Health has four major aims:

1. To understand the effects of women's mental health, including mood, anxiety and depression, on their desire for and ability to make decisions about pregnancy and contraception.
2. To assess the impact of unintended pregnancy on women's mental health.
3. To evaluate the relationship, if any, between mental health status and decisions to continue or terminate unintended pregnancies.
4. To document the physical and psychological responses to abortion compared to carrying an unintended pregnancy to term.

Why is this study important?

Approximately half of pregnancies and a fifth of pregnancies leading to birth were unintended at the time of conception. Although there is a substantial literature on psychological responses to pregnancy and abortion, there are few studies which examine the effect of pregnancy intentions on gestational and postpartum mental health and pregnancy outcomes. The National Institute of Health has announced the availability of R21 grant money to study *Women's Mental Health in Pregnancy and the Postpartum Period*. This is an excellent opportunity to design a study to examine the effects of unintended pregnancy on mental health.

A pregnancy test at a clinic or center is an opportunity to examine women's reproductive intentions and mental health. Many women experience a 'pregnancy scare' when their menstrual period is late and they believe that they could be pregnant. The full effect of unintended pregnancy on mental health can be ascertained by comparing women who have a positive test result with women with negative test results. Since fertilization and implantation are complex events, largely unrelated to women's characteristics, the result may be similar to randomization to unintended pregnancy and control groups.

A 1989 study by Zabin followed 360 teenage African American women seeking pregnancy tests and followed three groups – those with a negative test result, those with a positive result who sought an abortion and those with a positive result who chose to carry the pregnancy to term. This study found that teenagers who obtained an abortion experienced similar levels of psychological stress compared to the two other groups over the two year period. This study, now two decades old, only followed teenagers. This R21 is a great opportunity to test the feasibility of repeating this study with a diverse population of women including both teenagers and adults.

How will the study be carried out?

We will work collaboratively with six recruitment sites – one public health clinic, one crisis pregnancy centers and one family planning clinic in each of two cities – Little Rock, Arkansas and Fresno, California. We aim to recruit and enroll 600 women into the study. Enrollment at each clinical recruitment site will occur over a period of approximately four

months. Eligible individuals will include English and Spanish speaking women seeking pregnancy tests who are thirteen years old and older.

In the recruitment site, clinic or center point person will identify prospective participants as they present for services. The point person will ask women if they are willing to discuss a study while they wait for their appointment. If the woman consents to hear more about the study, the point person will give the woman a study cell phone and a packet of recruitment materials. The woman will speak by phone with UCSF researchers who will inform them of the study purpose, risks and benefits, obtain informed consent and contact information as well as schedule a confidential telephone interview to take place one to two weeks later. Women who choose to participate will be asked a few questions about their pregnancy intentions and mental health. Participants will record their answers on an answer sheet and place the answer sheet and the signature page of the informed consent form in a pre-stamped, pre-addressed United States Postal Service Priority mail envelope. No identifying information will be included on the initial survey. Participants will receive a \$10 gift card for a large retail store such as Target or Safeway in the mail after receipt of the initial survey.

Participants will be interviewed over the phone (at their home or cell number) every four months for a period of two years. Interviews will elicit information about changes in their mental and physical health, education, employment, economic situation, social support, and family relationships. For women who are pregnant and carry their pregnancies to term, interviews will also contain questions about their infant's health, his or her place of residence, parenting issues, and the use of social services. After each telephone interview, participants will receive a gift card valuing \$40 via mail.

Data analysis will be ongoing over the course of the study. Preliminary and final results will be shared with participating clinical sites directly and with the public health community through presentations at conferences and meetings and through articles published in peer reviewed journals.

What does the recruiting site have to do?

Collaborating recruitment sites designate a study point person to serve as a liaison between prospective participants and UCSF research staff. This point person approaches eligible patients, gives them an informational handout about the study, and facilitates a phone call between interested patients and UCSF research staff. Research staff in San Francisco will explain the study to patients, conduct an eligibility screening, and invite eligible patients to participate. The point person will also keep track of the number of eligible women, the number of women approached for participation and the number who decline to participate. Each clinic will receive a quarterly stipend for their participation in the study.

Who are we?

The Pregnancy Intentions and Mental Health Study is one of several studies being conducted by the Bixby Center for Global Reproductive Health. The Bixby Center is housed within the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences of the University of California, San Francisco. The mission of The Bixby Center is to promote reproductive health, family planning and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, worldwide through research, training and policy analysis.

Diana Greene Foster, PhD, is the Principal Investigator for the project. Dr. Foster received her doctorate from Princeton University in a joint program in Demography and Public and International Affairs. She has worked in the University of California, San Francisco Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences since 1997 and has been active in the evaluation of public family planning programs, cost effectiveness studies and population-based surveys. Dr. Foster is working with colleagues from different disciplines, including medical sociologist Tracy Weitz, PhD, MPA, anthropologist Kira Foster, PhD and psychologist Julia Steinberg. Study staff includes Project Manager Kate Cosby, MPH, Research Coordinator Heather Gould, MPH, and a team of trained interviewers.

This study will be approved by the Committee for Human Research at UCSF.

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