

Women's Experiences of Unintended Childbearing

Author: Karen Benjamin Guzzo

Although we know the majority of births in recent years are intended (FP-17-08), less is known about how many women experience unintended childbearing. In this profile, we examine the proportion of mothers aged 40-44 who have ever experienced unintended childbearing (having any births that are not 'on-time') using the 2011-15 cycle of the National Survey of Family Growth. Unintended births were identified from a series of questions in which women were asked to characterize each birth as on time, mistimed (wanted but occurring earlier than desired), or unwanted (the respondent did not want any births at all, or no additional births). When births were reported as too early, women were asked how much earlier than desired the birth occurred, and we categorize mistimed births into two groups: slightly mistimed (less than two years earlier than desired) or seriously mistimed (two or more years too early). This Profile is the third in a series of three examining the intendedness of births. Check out the other two Profiles in the series:

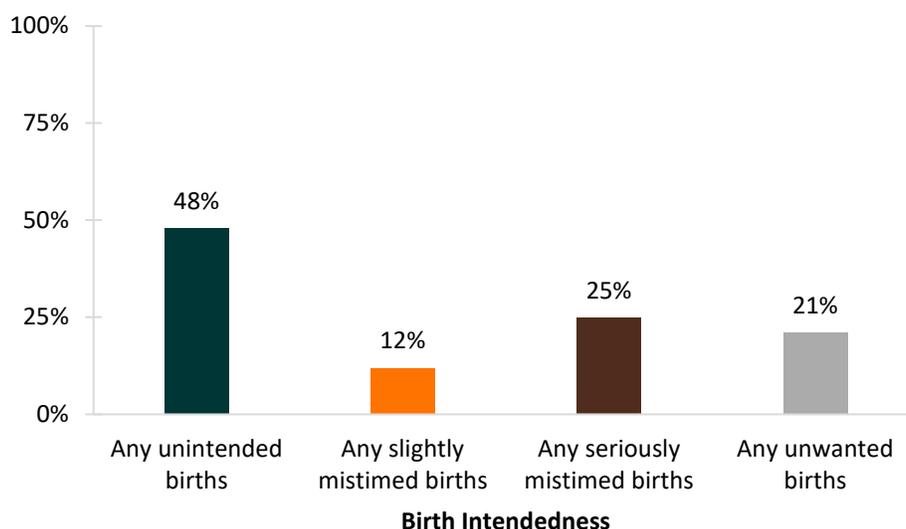
- [A Quarter Century of Change in Unintended Births \(FP-17-08\)](#)
- [Unintended Births: Variation across Social and Demographic Characteristics \(FP-17-09\)](#)

Nearly half of all mothers aged 40-44 had at least one unintended birth.

Unintended Childbearing

- Nearly half of all mothers aged 40-44 had at least one unintended birth, while the other half of mothers had only intended births.
- Seriously mistimed births were the most common type of unintended birth, with one-quarter of mothers having had at least one such birth.
- About one-fifth of mothers (21%) have had an unwanted birth.

Figure 1. Experiences of Unintended Births Among Mothers Aged 40-44



Source: NCFMR analyses of NSFG 2011-2013 and NSFG 2013-2015

Age and Unintended Childbearing

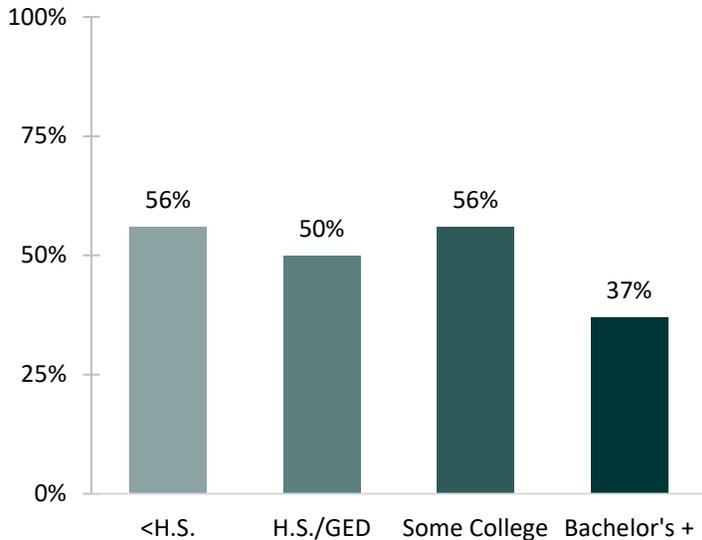
Experiences of unintended childbearing were also reflected in the timing of parenthood. Mothers with only intended births entered parenthood substantially older than mothers with any unintended births.

- Mothers who had only intended births had a median age at first birth of 28.4 years.
- Mothers with any unintended births began childbearing much earlier, with a median age of 21.1 years.

Education and Unintended Childbearing

- Unintended childbearing varied by educational attainment. The lowest levels of unintended childbearing existed among mothers with at least a Bachelor's degree.
- There was little variation in having ever had an unintended birth among mothers who do not have a Bachelor's degree, as about half of women without a Bachelor's degree had at least one unintended birth.

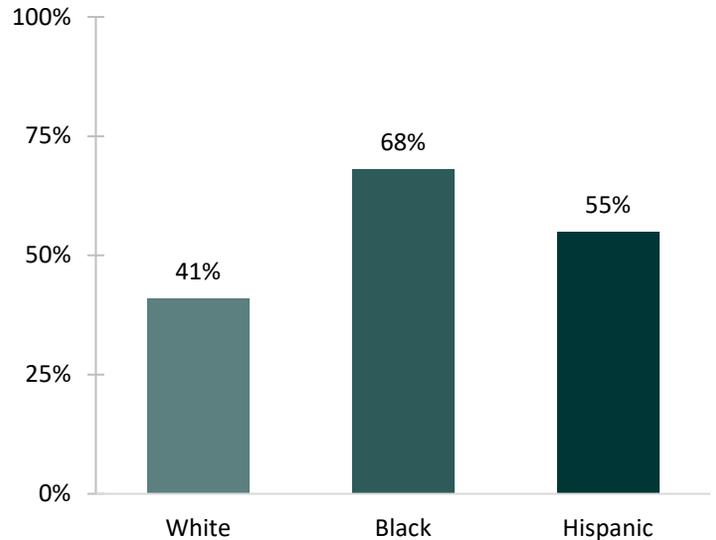
Figure 2. Educational Differences in Experiencing Any Unintended Births among Mothers Aged 40-44



Race, Ethnicity, and Unintended Childbearing

- Unintended childbearing was least common among White mothers aged 40-44. Two out of five (41 %) White mothers had at least one unintended birth.
- Unintended childbearing was most common among Black mothers. Nearly 70% of Black mothers had at least one unintended birth.
- About half of Hispanic mothers had at least one unintended birth.

Figure 3. Racial and Ethnic Differences in Experiencing Any Unintended Births among Mothers Aged 40-44



Source: NCFMR analyses of NSFG 2011-2013 and NSFG 2013-2015

References:

- Guzzo, K. B. (2017). A quarter century of change in unintended births. *Family Profiles*, FP-17-08. Bowling Green, OH: National Center for Family & Marriage Research. <http://www.bgsu.edu/ncfmr/resources/data/family-profiles/guzzo-quarter-century-change-unintended-births-fp-17-08.html>
- Guzzo, K. B. (2017). Unintended births: Variation across social and demographic characteristics. *Family Profiles*, FP-17-09. Bowling Green, OH: National Center for Family & Marriage Research. <http://www.bgsu.edu/ncfmr/resources/data/family-profiles/guzzo-unintended-births-variation-social-dem-char-fp-17-09.html>

Suggested Citation:

Guzzo, K. B. (2017). Women's experiences of unintended childbearing. *Family Profiles*, FP-17-10. Bowling Green, OH: National Center for Family & Marriage Research. <https://doi.org/10.25035/ncfmr/fp-17-10>