

## *The nature of unintended pregnancy in the occupied Palestinian territory*

Weeam S Hammoudeh  
Niveen ME. Abu-Rmeileh

### **Introduction:**

Unintended pregnancy has been the focus of concern in developed and developing countries from both a human rights and a health perspective. Despite, the increased availability and awareness of contraceptive methods, significant proportions of pregnancies are ‘mistimed’ or ‘unwanted’ in developed and developing countries. Based on data from the 2006 Palestinian Family Health Survey, about 40% of pregnant women reported that their pregnancy was either ‘mistimed’ or ‘unwanted’.

Many studies have stressed the negative effects of unwanted pregnancies on maternal and child health; oftentimes stressing the need for modern contraception and emergency abortion services. Although the ability to decide if and when to have a child should be the right of every couple, research in various parts of the world has pointed to the shortcomings of current measures of pregnancy intention and wanted-ness, particularly where it has been transformed into a technical issue of ‘unmet need’ or ‘contraceptive failure’. Various studies have affirmed that unwanted pregnancies should be understood within women’s contexts in order to better understand the factors affecting the occurrence of unwanted pregnancies as well as the changes in women’s perceptions of pregnancy over time, despite their pregnancy intentions prior to pregnancy.

This paper utilizes data from a survey of the women that reported pregnant in the 2006 PFHS in order to draw some light on pregnancy wanted-ness in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Various factors associated with unintended pregnancies (mistimed and unwanted) will be explored. The paper will also try to estimate the proportion of these pregnancies that may be classified as contraceptive failures or may be related to other factors like 'unmet need' and social factors (e.g. social pressure, husband disagreement, etc). Some questions pointing to the shortcomings of pregnancy intention measures will be alluded to.

**Methodology:**

The data set that will be used for this study is based on a postpartum survey of women that reported pregnant in the 2006 PFHS. The final study sample consisted of 1020 women between the ages of 15 and 46 who are in their first year postpartum.

The study will use two different measures for pregnancy intended-ness: wanted-ness of pregnancy as reported through a standard question common in international DHS surveys regarding women's feelings towards their last pregnancy (whether they wanted to be pregnant at the time, preferred to wait, or didn't want the pregnancy at all); and pregnancy intention as measured by whether women were using any form of family planning directly prior to pregnancy.

Separate bi-variate and multi-variate analyses will be conducted in order to identify the risk factors for each measure. Further analyses will be conducted to point to the cases of

‘contraceptive failures’ (based on use of family planning, with an overview of the types of contraception used by women) as well as cases of ‘unmet need’ (women that reported that their pregnancy was either unwanted or mistimed and were not using any form of contraception prior to pregnancy with an overview of these women’s stated reasons for not using contraception).

Finally, an analysis pointing to the discrepancies in women’s intention to become pregnant (as measured by use of contraception) and women’s stated desire of the pregnancy (through the question on the wanted-ness of pregnancy) will also be conducted in order to allude to possible shortcomings of these measures.

**Preliminary results:**

Preliminary results indicate that about 37% percent of women in the sample classified their pregnancy as either mistimed (25%) or unwanted. Furthermore, about 28% of women reported using some form of family planning at the time they found out they were pregnant. The use of family planning directly prior to pregnancy was highest amongst women reporting an unwanted pregnancy (63.9%) and lowest among women reporting a wanted pregnancy (12.1%). Age, parity, low education, and low socioeconomic status were directly related to both unwanted and unintended pregnancies.

Over half of the women reporting an unwanted or mistimed pregnancy were using a modern contraceptive method, indicating that for these women the need for contraception was technically met but was not effective in preventing pregnancy. Roughly 40% of the

women reporting an unwanted or mistimed pregnancy were not using any form of family planning, indicating 'unmet need.' A further analysis of these women's reasons for not using contraception, less than 5% indicated that they did not use contraceptives due to access or cost issues. The main reasons cited included husbands' disagreement with the use of contraception, pressure from in-laws, and other reasons that include fear of side effects.

These preliminary results indicate that while a portion of unintended/unwanted pregnancies may be explained through 'contraceptive failures' or 'unmet need,' the issue of unmet need is not merely a technical issue but rather one entrenched in the context of social norms and beliefs. The 'contraceptive failures' call for further inquiry into the quality of services provided to these women, especially since many of these women were using 'reliable' modern methods. The use of contraceptives by about 12% of women reporting that they wanted to be pregnant at the time they found out about the pregnancy point to shortcomings of a technical definition of pregnancy intention (i.e. one that relies only on women's contraceptive behavior prior to pregnancy).