

UNWANTED PREGNANCY: THE PERILS AND EFFECTIVE PREVENTION

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ABSTRACT

Unwanted pregnancies continue to be a serious public health concern with far-reaching effects on people, families, and society. The dangerous effects of unwanted pregnancies are examined in this essay, including increased health risks, psychological suffering, financial difficulties, and social stigmatization. These results highlight the critical necessity for efficient control and preventative measures. The study emphasizes the significance of comprehensive sexual education, fair access to contraception, and the advancement of gender equality programs that empower women. In addition to promoting healthier, more sustainable communities, we can lessen the negative impacts of unintended pregnancies by addressing the underlying reasons and offering strong support networks.

KEYWORDS: Unwanted Pregnancy, Control, Prevention, Causes and the Perils

INTRODUCTION

Unwanted pregnancy poses serious social, economic, and health issues and is a major global concern. Unwanted pregnancies are defined as either unplanned or unintentional pregnancies. These can arise for a number of reasons, such as socioeconomic constraints, a lack of access to effective contraception, and poor sexual education. Unwanted pregnancies have serious consequences that impact people's general well-being, financial security, and health. The dangers of unintended pregnancies, the efficacy of current control mechanisms, and preventative techniques are all covered in this introduction.

Unwanted pregnancies pose a variety of risks. Possible difficulties during pregnancy and labor are among the health dangers, especially for older or younger moms or those with underlying medical issues. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), complications related to unintended pregnancies are a leading cause of maternal mortality and morbidity worldwide (WHO, 2021). Unwanted pregnancies can also make socioeconomic disparities worse. Unwanted pregnancies frequently result in greater stress levels, financial hardship, and possible societal humiliation for the women involved. These factors contribute to the cycle of poverty, with long-term effects on both the individuals and their children (Guttmacher Institute, 2022).

A diversified strategy is needed to effectively control unwanted pregnancies. In this endeavor, contraceptive techniques play a key role. Unwanted pregnancy rates are directly impacted by the accessibility and availability of safe contraception. It has been demonstrated that the use of modern contraceptives, such as hormonal methods, barrier techniques, and intrauterine devices (IUDs), greatly lowers the incidence of unwanted pregnancies. However, limitations related to geography, culture, and economic status may restrict access to these techniques. For instance, in low-income regions, the lack of affordable and accessible contraceptive options remains a critical issue (UNFPA, 2020).

Family planning programs and comprehensive sexual education are also important components in the prevention of unwanted pregnancies. Programs that effectively teach sexuality provide people the information and abilities they need to make decisions about their reproductive health. Research indicates that comprehensive sex education, encompassing topics such as sexually transmitted diseases (STIs), healthy relationships, and contraception, is linked to lower incidence of unintended births. Incorporating family planning services into larger health care systems also guarantees that people get the assistance they require in taking control of their reproductive health.

Innovative strategies, such as the use of digital technology for sexual health education and access to contraception, are becoming more and more popular in addition to conventional means of control and prevention. Mobile health (mHealth) applications and telemedicine platforms offer new opportunities for reaching underserved populations with essential information and services (Gomez et al., 2021). These technological advancements can close accessibility gaps and offer individualized guidance to people making decisions about their reproductive health.

An international effort must be made to address unwanted pregnancies, combining extensive education, efficient contraceptive devices, and creative problem-solving to remove current obstacles. Societies may endeavor to improve reproductive health outcomes and promote fairness by developing control and preventive techniques and educating people about the dangers of unintended pregnancies. Governments, organizations, and communities must work together to address this urgent matter and guarantee a healthy future for all people. The study aims to investigate the relationship between the number of unintended pregnancies and induced abortions among female youths aged 15 to 24 and various factors such as knowledge and use of contraception, sociodemographic traits, sociocultural influences, and sexual factors.

CONCEPT OF UNWANTED PREGNANCY

An unwanted pregnancy is one that happens when a woman either didn't want to get pregnant then or at any point in the future, or it happened when she intended to get pregnant later but didn't at the time she became pregnant. Unwanted pregnancies, often referred to as unplanned pregnancies, are pregnancies that occur at an inappropriate time or that the mother does not desire. The main factor leading to unwanted pregnancies is sexual activity without the use of effective contraception, whether due to choice or pressure. Dalmijn (2024) affirmed that unwanted pregnancies are pregnancies that are mistimed, occurring too soon, or were not intended at any time. They speak about unplanned or unintended pregnancies, emphasizing the

intentions and actions of the individual conceiving as well as offering details about the circumstances surrounding the pregnancy.

Determining if a pregnancy is undesired does not tell us anything about how that pregnancy is felt, as this is not a constant experience that varies depending on the situation and time of year. It may also involve intensely conflicted thoughts towards the pregnancy. Unwanted pregnancies can be caused by mistimed or unintentional conceptions and it can lead to miscarriages or live births, while the primary cause of induced abortions is unintentional pregnancies. Santali, Rochat, Timajchy & Gilbert (2023) explained that, a concept related to unwanted pregnancy is unplanned pregnancy—one that occurred when the woman used a contraceptive method or when she did not desire to become pregnant but did not use a method. Pregnancies that result in an abortion are typically regarded as having been unintended; intentions are frequently only recorded or reported for pregnancies that terminate in live births as being pregnant is a deliberate choice.

The result of an unwanted pregnancy is frequently an induced abortion, which depletes social resources and has an impact on the physical and emotional health of the woman. Pregnancies that are unplanned, untimely, or both at the moment of conception are considered unwanted pregnancies. Unwanted pregnancy is a significant public health problem in both high-income and middle-income nations due to the implications for the mother's and the child's social and health outcomes. Because of the problems associated with unsafe abortion, miscarriage, and unexpected deliveries, unwanted pregnancy leads to maternal morbidity and death. The health and wellbeing of mothers and children are severely impacted by unwanted pregnancies. Unwanted pregnancies can lower the use of maternal and neonatal health services utilization, and worsen maternal health outcomes. (Aragaw, Amare, Teklu, Tegegne & Alem, 2023).

One of the primary causes of maternal death and morbidity worldwide, induced abortions are mostly brought on by unwanted pregnancies. Thousands of women unintentionally become pregnant, and many of them choose to have an abortion to stop the pregnancy. Because premarital sexual behavior is so prevalent and is reportedly on the increase worldwide, it seems sense that young people are more prone to unintended pregnancies. Belay, Alem & Zerihun (2020) asserted that, unwanted pregnancy is a mistimed, unplanned or unwanted at the time of conception. It is a significant matter for public health in both industrialized and developing nations. Unwanted pregnancies have a number of negative effects. Unsafe abortion is one of the most serious and detrimental effects, increasing the risk of infection, bleeding and perforation of the reproductive organs, infertility, and even death.

PREVALENCE OF UNWANTED PREGNANCY

Unwanted pregnancy is a serious global public health concern that affects both people and communities. The prevalence of unwanted pregnancy varies widely depending on several factors, including socio-economic conditions, access to healthcare services, cultural attitudes towards contraception, and education levels (World Health Organization, 2023). The following is a list of this prevalence's:

- **Global and Regional Variations**

Unwanted pregnancies happen all across the world, although their frequency varies greatly by location. Due to factors including restricted access to safe abortion services, lower levels of education, and limited access to contraception, the rate of unplanned pregnancy is greater in low- and middle-income nations. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that just in low- and middle-income nations, there are over 74 million unwanted pregnancies each year. Contrarily, high-income nations report reduced incidence of unintended births, which can be linked to improved access to sex education, reproductive health care, and effective contraception usage.

- **Impact of Socio-Economic Status**

An important factor in the occurrence of unintended pregnancies is socioeconomic status. Unwanted pregnancies are more common among women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds for a number of reasons, including healthcare inequities, restricted access to contraception, and poor sexual education. Research indicates that women from lower-income backgrounds are less likely to take contraception appropriately and regularly, which raises the possibility of unintended births. To make matters worse, financial limitations can also prevent them from accessing safe abortion procedures.

- **Education and Awareness**

The rate of unintended pregnancies is strongly influenced by awareness and education levels. Higher educated people—especially women—generally understand more about contraception, reproductive health, and the dangers of unprotected sex. Knowing this lowers the chance of unwanted pregnancies. In contrast, because of a lack of knowledge about sexual health and contraceptive options, lower education levels are frequently linked to greater rates of unintended births. Comprehensive sex education programs have been demonstrated to decrease the incidence of unwanted pregnancies by raising awareness and encouraging safe sex behaviours.

- **Contraceptive Use and Accessibility**

The prevalence of unintended pregnancy is significantly influenced by variables such as access to and usage of contraception. Unplanned pregnancies are more likely when there is inadequate access to contraceptive techniques because of lack of funding, cultural standards, or a lack of a strong healthcare system. Unwanted births can result from uneven or improper use of contraceptives, even in areas where they are readily available. For example, the Guttmacher Institute reported that nearly half of all unintended pregnancies in the United States result from contraceptive failure, either due to incorrect use or inconsistent adherence (Singh & Darroch, 2022).

- **Cultural and Social Influences**

Social and cultural standards have a big influence on how often unintended pregnancies are. There may be social pressures to avoid having an open conversation about sexual health, or there may be a stigma attached to using contraception in some countries. This may result in inaccurate information or a lack of understanding about safe sexual behaviour, which raises the possibility of unwanted pregnancies. Furthermore, early marriage and high fertility aspirations may be contributing factors to greater incidence of unintended births among young women in various communities.

- **Adolescent Pregnancy**

Unwanted pregnancies are common over the world in large part due to adolescent pregnancy. Young women are more likely to become pregnant unintentionally than they would otherwise be because of societal pressures, lack of sexual education, and restricted access to reproductive health treatments, especially in developing nations. According to data from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), every year in poor countries, some 21 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 become pregnant; a large percentage of these births are unplanned. Reducing the overall frequency of unintended births requires addressing the issue of adolescent pregnancy.

- **Impact of Gender Inequality**

Unwanted pregnancies are more common as a result of gender inequality. Because of patriarchal traditions, limited educational opportunities, and economic dependency on males, women in many nations have little control over their reproductive decisions. Pregnancies that are not expected and unprotected sex are common outcomes of this loss of agency. Reducing the frequency of unintended pregnancies requires efforts to empower women via economic opportunity, education, and gender equality.

- **Healthcare Access and Quality**

The frequency of unintended pregnancies is significantly influenced by the availability and calibre of healthcare services. Unwanted pregnancy rates may increase in areas with inadequate or subpar healthcare facilities because people may not have access to contraception or enough counselling. Reducing unintended pregnancies requires improved access to high-quality healthcare services, such as family planning and reproductive health services.

Perils of Unwanted Pregnancy

The physical, emotional, social, and financial well-being of people, families, and communities are all negatively impacted by unwanted pregnancies, which also pose a number of other serious issues. Developing successful solutions to help individuals and lessen the negative effects requires an understanding of these risks. The perils include the following:

- **Health Risks for Mother and Child**

Unwanted pregnancies frequently result in insufficient or delayed prenatal care, which raises the risk of illness and death in both mothers and infants. Preterm delivery, low birth weight, and other pregnancy-related issues are more likely to occur in women who have unwanted pregnancies because they are less likely to seek early prenatal care. Moreover, unwanted pregnancies are associated with a higher likelihood of unsafe abortions, which pose significant health risks, including severe bleeding, infections, and even death (Gutmacher Institute, 2020).

- **Psychological and Emotional Distress**

Unwanted pregnancies can have a profound psychological impact and can result in severe emotional pain. Women may experience anxiety, depression, and feelings of guilt or shame, particularly if the pregnancy conflicts with their life plans or societal expectations (Hall et al., 2015). The stigma attached to unwanted births can increase

the emotional toll, resulting in social isolation and worse mental health. The mother-child bond may suffer as a result of the psychological stress, which might have an effect on the child's emotional growth.

- **Economic Hardship**

Unwanted pregnancies can cause families and individuals to suffer significant financial hardships. For many, an unintended pregnancy can lead to increased financial strain due to the costs of healthcare, childcare, and lost income opportunities, particularly if the pregnancy disrupts education or career plans (Finer & Zolna, 2016). Women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who may already be experiencing financial instability typically experience an exacerbation of this economic burden. Reduced earning capacity and a greater reliance on social support networks are two possible long-term financial effects.

- **Educational and Career Disruptions**

Unwanted pregnancies, especially in young women, can seriously interfere with career and educational paths. Pregnancy and the subsequent responsibilities of parenthood can lead to interrupted education, reduced career opportunities, and a lower likelihood of achieving economic independence (Herd et al., 2016). These upheavals may have long-term repercussions, reducing opportunities for the future and extending cycles of disadvantage and poverty. The effects are more severe in situations where there is less institutional and social assistance for expectant mothers and young moms.

- **Social Stigma and Marginalization**

Particularly in countries where family planning and sexual behavior are strongly regulated by cultural or religious standards, the social stigma attached to unintended pregnancies can result in marginalization and discrimination. Women who experience unintended pregnancies may face judgment, ostracism, or rejection from family, friends, and the broader community (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2017). Isolation, a decline in social support, and a higher susceptibility to mental health problems might result from this societal stigma. Discussions on reproductive health are frowned upon in conservative countries, where the impacts of stigma are frequently more severe.

- **Impact on Family Dynamics**

Unwanted pregnancies can cause friction and disturbances in the home by straining family ties. The unexpected addition of a child may place emotional and financial pressure on the family unit, potentially leading to relationship breakdowns, particularly in cases where the pregnancy was not consensually planned (Cohen et al., 2019). Unwanted pregnancy survivors may also find it difficult to provide their children with appropriate parental care and attention, which can have an adverse effect on their growth and wellbeing.

CAUSES OF UNWANTED PREGNANCY

Unwanted pregnancy is a global issue that has an impact on women, families, and society at large. Unwanted pregnancy can be caused by rape, non-use of contraceptive services, and, less frequently, contraceptive failure. Unwanted pregnancies frequently

result in abortions, which can have major, long-term negative health repercussions, such as infertility and maternal mortality, in impoverished nations. The main causes for unintended pregnancies are listed below:

- **Lack of Comprehensive Sexual Education**

A major contributing factor to unwanted pregnancies is a lack of sexual education. In many areas, youth are given erroneous or partial information regarding reproductive rights, contraception, and sexual health. When individuals are not well-informed about how to prevent pregnancy, they are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors that lead to unintended pregnancies (Santelli et al., 2017). In order to reduce this risk, comprehensive sexual education that covers topics like consent, contraception, and healthy relationships is crucial.

- **Limited Access to Contraception**

One essential element in preventing unwanted pregnancy is having access to contraception. Nonetheless, access to and use of reliable contraceptive techniques are hindered for both men and women in many regions of the world. These barriers include financial constraints, lack of availability in rural areas, cultural or religious opposition, and lack of awareness about different contraceptive options (Sedgh et al., 2016). People who lack consistent access to contraception are more likely to become pregnant without their will.

- **Socioeconomic Factors**

The frequency of unwanted pregnancies is significantly influenced by socioeconomic circumstances. Increased incidence of unwanted pregnancies can be attributed to a number of factors, including poverty, low educational attainment, and a lack of work prospects. Lower socioeconomic group members frequently lack the means or support necessary to make educated decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, as well as limited access to family planning and reproductive health services.

- **Gender Inequality and Power Dynamics**

Unwanted pregnancies can also be caused by power imbalances in relationships and gender inequality. Because of violence, pressure, or cultural standards, women may not have complete autonomy over their reproductive decisions in many nations. This lack of control can result in women being unable to negotiate contraceptive use or avoid unwanted sexual encounters, leading to higher rates of unintended pregnancy (Higgins et al., 2014). Therefore, addressing gender inequity is essential to lowering the number of unwanted pregnancies.

- **Lack of Supportive Health Services**

Unwanted pregnancies are more common in health systems that lack the resources to offer appropriate reproductive health treatments. Inadequate health infrastructure, a lack of qualified healthcare professionals, and restricted access to reproductive health treatments are all present in some areas. People find it difficult to get the treatment they require to avoid unwanted pregnancies as a result of these obstacles. In order to address this issue, health systems must be strengthened in order to offer complete reproductive health treatments.

- **Cultural and Religious Influences**

Cultural and religious beliefs have a big impact on views towards reproductive health and contraception, which frequently results in unintended births. Large families are strongly preferred in some societies, and contraception may be seen unfavorably because of religious views. These cultural norms can lead to resistance to using contraception and result in higher rates of unintended pregnancy (Sedgh et al., 2016). Encouraging culturally aware teaching and communication methods is crucial to breaking down these obstacles.

- **Psychosocial Factors**

Unintentional pregnancy rates are also linked to psychosocial problems such drug misuse, intimate relationship violence, and mental health disorders. People who are mentally ill or in abusive relationships may take sexual risks or have less control over their reproductive processes, which can result in unwanted pregnancies. Contraceptive rate can be decreased by addressing these underlying concerns through education, support services, and counselling.

STRATEGIC CONTROL AND PREVENTION OF UNWANTED PREGNANCY

Unwanted pregnancies are those that are not intended at the time of conception or that occur at an inappropriate period. However, there are certain important controls to prevent an unplanned pregnancy, and these controls may be implemented in a variety of ways. These include:

- **Comprehensive Sexual Education**

Preventing unplanned pregnancies requires comprehensive sexual education in communities and schools. Information on safe sex practices, contraceptive alternatives, reproductive health, and the dangers of unprotected sex should all be part of this education. Comprehensive sexual education, according to studies, lowers the incidence of unwanted pregnancies by giving people—especially teenagers—the information and skills they need to make responsible decisions about their sexual health.

- **Barrier Methods**

These methods physically block the sperm's access to a woman's uterus (Casey, 2023). Certain barrier techniques offer protection against STIs, or sexually transmitted illnesses. Among these methods are condoms, which are the only contraceptives made of latex that offer protection against all common sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including those caused by viruses and bacteria, such as the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and gonorrhea, the diaphragm is a rubber cup with a flexible rim that has a dome shape and is placed over the cervix in the vagina to stop sperm from entering the uterus, the cervical cap, a silicone cup fashioned like a hat that is placed over the cervix in the vagina to keep sperm from entering and the spermicides, which are used to destroy sperm on contact, and contraceptive sponges, which are round, pillow-shaped polyurethane sponges with a diameter of about 1 1/2 in (4 cm), are always moistened with water, folded, and put deeply into the vagina. They are inserted into the vagina before to a pair engaging in sexual activity and come in the form of suppositories, lotions, gels, and foams.

- **Hormonal methods**

Progestins, which are drugs that mimic the hormone progesterone, and oestrogen are the two hormones used to delay pregnancy. The primary hormones involved in the menstrual cycle are progestins and oestrogens. Hormonal contraceptive techniques mostly work by inhibiting the release of eggs from the ovaries (ovulation) or by maintaining a thick layer of mucus in the cervix, which prevents sperm from passing through and into the uterus. Hormonal approaches, therefore, stop the egg from fertilising. Vaginal rings, patches, and tablets are some of them.

- **Permanent methods**

Vasectomy and tubal ligation are surgical methods used to avoid conception. Another name for the tubal ligation is female sterilization. Permanent birth control is achieved by tubal ligation. In contrast, a vasectomy involves cutting or blocking the tiny sperm-carrying tubes in the scrotum, preventing sperm from leaving the body and resulting in conception. Vasectomy should be regarded as a permanent method of male birth control, even though it can be reversed.

- **Fertility Awareness**

Finding out which days of a woman's menstrual cycle she is most likely to be fertile is the goal of fertility awareness techniques. One may utilize this knowledge to either boost or decrease their chances of getting pregnant.

- **Emergency contraception**

The term "emergency contraception" describes birth control techniques that can be used to avoid pregnancy following a sexual encounter. Although using them within five days of having sex is advised, using them sooner after the act of sex increases their effectiveness.

- **Abstinence**

The only birth control that is certain to prevent conception is abstinence. Practicing abstinence ensures that a woman will not become pregnant because there is no chance for sperm to fertilize an egg (Gordon, 2022).

- **Withdrawal**

Withdrawing, or pulling out, is a method of preventing pregnancy by preventing semen from entering the vagina. When combined with another type of birth control, such as a condom, withdrawal is most effective. In addition to requiring self-discipline, the withdrawal technique of birth control does not provide protection against STDs.

- **Counselling and Family Planning Services**

Counselling services are essential for educating people about their options for reproductive health and helping them plan their families appropriately. Confidential counselling that is individualised, culturally aware, and sensitive should be offered by family planning providers. Health care professionals should go over available forms of contraception, their advantages and disadvantages, and advice on how to use them

correctly to guarantee efficacy. According to studies, women who get contraception counselling are more likely to use the method regularly and successfully.

- **Promotion of Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptives (LARCs)**

IUDs and implants are two examples of long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs) that are quite successful in preventing conceptions and require little upkeep. Encouraging the use of long-acting contraceptives (LARCs) can dramatically lower the incidence of unintended pregnancy, especially in young people and adolescents who are likely to be less dependable with pill-based daily contraceptives. Research has shown that when women are provided with comprehensive information about LARCs and have access to them, there is a substantial decline in unintended pregnancies (Winner et al., 2018).

CONCLUSION

Addressing unwanted pregnancy requires a multidimensional approach that includes enhancing access to contraception, improving sexual education, and addressing socio-economic barriers. The peril of unwanted pregnancies, including health risks and socio-economic impacts, underscores the urgent need for effective control measures. Comprehensive family planning services and innovative solutions, such as digital health technologies, play crucial roles in reducing incidence rates. By fostering global collaboration and focusing on vulnerable populations, it is possible to mitigate the adverse effects of unwanted pregnancies and promote better reproductive health outcomes. Continued investment in these areas is essential for achieving lasting improvements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enhance access to contraceptives, particularly in underserved and low-income areas. Ensure that contraception is accessible through public health systems and community-based distribution channels.
- Implement comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education programs in schools and communities. These programs should cover contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), consent, and healthy relationships to equip individuals with the knowledge to make informed decisions.
- Strengthen family planning services by integrating them into general healthcare systems. Provide counseling and support for individuals to choose and use the most appropriate contraceptive methods effectively.
- Develop targeted interventions to support marginalized populations, including low-income families, young people, and rural communities. Provide financial assistance, transportation, and other resources to reduce barriers to accessing reproductive health services.

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