

Extended Abstract

Topic

This study focusses on the relationship between unintended pregnancies and paternal involvement. Unintended pregnancies are very common. In the Netherlands, about one in five women have experienced an unintended pregnancy (Picavet, 2011). Unintended pregnancies are often unplanned, and can be either unwanted or wanted, or feelings towards the pregnancy can change over time. While most research focusses on women who unintentionally become pregnant, there is an emergent focus on fatherhood in both research and practice.

Paternal involvement during pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare is key (e.g. Lamb, 2004; Keizer et al., 2014). However, little research has focused on unintended fatherhood, paternal involvement and what factors help or hinder men in picking up their role as a father in the Netherlands. It remains largely unknown if the intendedness of the pregnancy is related to paternal involvement.

Theoretical focus

Paternal involvement in childcare exists in different forms, such as engagement, responsibility, and accessibility (Lamb et al., 1987). In our study, engagement, which is conceptualized as the time directly spend interacting with the child, and responsibility, meaning to take care of the child, not necessarily in a physical way, for example arranging appointments with doctors or buying clothes, are central. Research points to fathers being involved in childcare, but relatively less involved in responsibility tasks (Hawkins et al., 1994; Lamb et al., 1987). This is something we have witnessed in our previous work as well (van de Beek et al., 2023).

Moreover, much research has focused on general population examining paternal involvement. There is relatively little research on paternal involvement in case of unintended pregnancies. Studies that have been conducted on this theme were mainly carried out in the US (e.g. Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007; Combs et al., 2021; Lindberg et al., 2017) or central America (Rogers & Speizer, 2007). These findings mostly point to fathers being less involved in the case of unintended pregnancies. However, findings from the US are not easily extrapolated to European countries, such as the Netherlands. To fill this gap, the proposed study will examine the difference in paternal involvement between men who unintentionally and intendedly become fathers.

Previous studies point to several factors that might be related to paternal involvement. Results of these studies are inconclusive regarding the impact of ethnicity of the father and

gender of the child (see Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007). Financial situation (Wood & Repetti, 2004) and (mental) health status seem to play a significant role (van de Beek, 2023). Marital status or quality of the relation between the parents is also important. That is, married fathers are more involved with their children (Hofferth & Anderson, 2003). Also, older fathers seem to be more involved with their children compared to younger fathers (Cooksey & Craig, 1998; van de Beek, 2023). We will also examine these factors to investigate why some men are more successful in taking up their role as father compared to others.

Data

Data from the Generation R study is used for this study. Generation R is a multi-ethnic population-based prospective cohort from fetal life onwards. N=9778 pregnant women, with a delivery date between April 2002 and January 2006, and N=6347 partners residing in Rotterdam, the Netherlands participated in the study. Only biological fathers and corresponding mothers are included in our sample. Data at age of the child 6 months old and age of the child 3 years are used. The study sample is about 4000 families at both measurements. Of these about 20% of the pregnancies were unplanned.

Methods

Pregnancy intention was measured using a self-report questionnaire at the beginning of the study. Women were asked whether their pregnancy was planned or not. This question has been validated by comparing the answers with pre-pregnancy folic-acid intake and contraceptive use at conception (Enthoven et al., 2022). Paternal involvement was assessed by questionnaires filled out by mothers and fathers, taking both of their perspectives into account. At the child age of 6 months, father involvement in childcare was reported by the mothers, and at the child age of 3 years, father involvement in childcare was reported by the fathers themselves using the Child Caregiving Involvement Scale (Wood & Repetti, 2004).

In addition, multiple moderators were measured: Marital status (married or living together, or not); Age of the father at conception; Mental health status; Ethnic background categorized into Dutch, Moroccan/Turkish, Surinamese/Antillean and Other (Asian, African, American and Oceanian); Educational level categorized as: Low (primary school; lower vocational training; intermediate general school; 3 years general secondary school), which typically corresponds to ≤ 12 years of education; Medium (> 3 years general secondary school; intermediate vocational training; 1st year higher vocational training, higher vocational training; Bachelor's degree), in general corresponding with 13–17 years of education; and

High (higher academic education; PhD), usually indicating 18 years of education or more; Whether or not having a paid job (including being self-employed); Child sex.

Data analysis

Prior to analyses, multiple imputations will be performed to replace the missing values. After data imputation, regression analyses will be run using paternal involvement at child age 6 months and 3 years as outcomes and intendedness of the pregnancy as independent variable, including the moderators marital status, paternal age, paternal mental health, paternal ethnic background, paternal educational level, paternal job status, and child sex. For each moderator separate regression analysis will be run. Moreover, paternal involvement as outcome will be modelled using measures at age 6 months and age 3 years. Post-hoc analyses will be performed with subscales of involvement to get a better understanding of the factors that are at play regarding specific aspects of paternal involvement. Data will be analyzed with SPSS version 29.0 and R version 4.2.1.

Expected Findings

We hypothesize that while 1) men who unintentionally become fathers are less involved than men who intendedly become fathers, 2) fathers involved in an unintended pregnancy might be more involved in childcare if they have a good relationship with the mother of the child, if they are aged above 30 years old, if they do not have a migrant origin, if they have a stable financial situation and job, if they have a good mental health status, or if their child is a boy. With these insights, the project offers unique scientific understandings that can inform recommendations on how to improve paternal involvement. This is of utmost importance considering the benefits of such involvement.

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