



## Maternal Psychological Health during Pregnancy

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### STUDY DESCRIPTION

Pregnancy marks a period of emotional, physical, identity and relational changes that are largely shaped by women's individual circumstances. For some women, learning of a pregnancy is an overwhelmingly positive experience. For others, it may evoke fear and anguish, or feelings of shock, surprise or ambivalence. Pregnancy acceptability is a term used to describe how a woman thinks and feels about a pregnancy once she learns of it. The concept of pregnancy acceptability aims to capture a woman's appraisal of the desirability and timing of the pregnancy after conception. Previous frameworks have used a pregnancy intendedness model, founded on a planned versus unplanned dichotomy, to identify women at risk of mental health and early bonding difficulties. Given the complex trajectory of pregnancy emotions and experiences, a dichotomy based on initial reproductive intentions may be limited for understanding and supporting pregnant women.

The pregnancy intendedness model holds that pregnancy can be categorized as intended, mistimed or unwanted, with the latter two groups forming an umbrella category of 'unintended' pregnancy. International research suggests that approximately half of all pregnancies, and 40% of pregnancies that are continued to birth, are unintended. Unintended pregnancy is associated with delayed antenatal care and less health-related behavior during pregnancy for mothers as well as increased risk of need for neonatal special care after birth, breast-feeding difficulties, and mental health and behavioral problems in children. For these reasons, the intended or unintended nature of women's pregnancies has been an area of sustained research attention over the last 20 years. Some studies have found that women with unintended pregnancies find it more difficult to

establish a bond with their baby and maintain good mental health during pregnancy, however other studies have not found significant results.

Although the forthrightness of the intended versus unintended pregnancy dichotomy is valuable, it has also been subject to censure for over-simplifying the complications of pregnancy. The intendedness model requires conventions to be made about women's reproductive decisions when planning does not occur and does not account for circumstances in which a pregnancy may not be planned but welcomed. In particular, the model may be insufficiently sensitive to individual differences in women's attitudes towards their pregnancy as it does not account for feelings of ambivalence often reported by women and the fact that many women report varying attitudes towards intendedness throughout their pregnancy. Wakefulness of these limitations has urged a retrospection of whether pregnancy intendedness provides a sound basis for clinical decisions in identifying women in need of support. One conception that has emerged to address this gap is pregnancy acceptability.

Pregnancy acceptability is defined as the degree to which women consider their pregnancy 'acceptable' after conception. It takes into account a woman's appraisal of the desirability and timing of the pregnancy.

The complex relationship between women's mental health and antenatal bonding can be better understood when consideration is given to women's individual characteristics and circumstances.

This study highlights that pregnancy acceptability may be an important factor in the way women feel about themselves and their baby, especially when they experience mixed or negative feelings towards their pregnancy.

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