

Abstract:

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Unintended pregnancies over the lifecourse

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Even in times when safe contraception is affordable and available, a considerable number of unintended pregnancies can be observed. Former studies (Helfferich et al. 2001) showed a proportion of unintended pregnancy – depending on the definition of “unintended” – between 10% and one third of all pregnancies in the life course of women (20 to 44 years). As nearly every second unintended pregnancy ended in a birth, the contribution of contraceptive failure to the overall fertility over the life course should not be neglected. But little is known about unintended pregnancy and about the decision to abort or to accept such a pregnancy, and there is no explanation, why the annual absolute number of abortions and the abortion rate are constantly decreasing, as official data from the Statistisches Bundesamt indicate, and whether or why the number and proportion of unintended pregnancies is decreasing as well.

An ongoing study on family planning focuses unintended pregnancy and abortion in the life course of women (on behalf of the Federal Centre of Health Education, BZgA, Cologne). It started in November 2011 and is carried out by the Institute for Social Science Research on Women (SoFFI F.). An age-stratified random sample of 4.000 women, 20 to 44 years, was drawn from the telephone register of four countries in Germany, which can be contrasted according to the patterns of fertility (for instance: abortion rate) and social indicators (Berlin, Baden-Württemberg, Saxony and Lower-Saxony). Data are collected with a standardized questionnaire and, for 100 women out of the sample, with a qualitative, semi-structured interview. First results can be reported on the frequency of unintended pregnancy resp. birth, differentiated according to the parity of the pregnancy, education and social background of women, and on factors related to the life course, which influence the decision to accept or abort the pregnancy. The contribution to the overall fertility over the life course can be discussed for unintended (first) pregnancy in younger age and for those occurring later in life.