

ISSUE BRIEF, JANUARY 2019

## Women's access to abortion improves children's lives

The Turnaway Study examined how abortion denial affected a woman's children. These are the first studies to examine the effect of abortion access on a woman's existing and future children in the U.S.

### We found:

- When women have control over the timing of having children, their children benefit.
- The economic wellbeing and development of existing children is negatively impacted when mothers are denied abortion.
- Children born later to women who are able to get an abortion experience more economic security and better maternal bonding than the children born because a woman was denied an abortion.

### Effect on current children

Most women who seek abortion services are already mothers. Consistent with the reasons women often give for wanting an abortion, in particular that they want to take care of the children they already have, we find that children do worse when their mother is unable to terminate a subsequent unwanted pregnancy.

Specifically, the existing children of women who are denied an abortion and carry the pregnancy to term have more than three times greater odds of living in a household enrolled in public assistance programs like Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). These programs are essential in supporting women and their families, but the added public support is not sufficient to keep families from poverty.

We found that children of women who are denied an abortion had greater odds (72% vs 55%) of living in poverty compared to children of women who received a wanted abortion. Similarly, existing children were more likely (87% vs 70%) to live in a household in which their mother is not able to afford necessary living expenses such as food, housing, and transportation compared to children of women who received a wanted abortion.

Existing children are also less likely to achieve developmental milestones compared to the existing children of women who were able to obtain a wanted abortion (73% vs 77%), perhaps a result of increased financial strain or stress in the family.

### Effect on future children

Parents do the best they can with limited resources, yet denying a woman a wanted abortion can have negative effects on her future children. We compared the child born because

For more information about this and other ANSIRH research, please visit [www.ansirh.org](http://www.ansirh.org).

the mother was denied an abortion to the next child born to women who received an abortion. Subsequent pregnancies were more likely to be intended than the pregnancies in which the mother was denied an abortion; one-fourth of subsequent children were the result of planned pregnancies, compared with less than 1% of children born as the result of abortion denial. In fact, women who were able to access a wanted abortion were more likely to have an intended pregnancy in the next five years compared to women who were denied the abortion they wanted (13% vs 8%). Being able to access abortion gives women the opportunity to have a child when they decide it is the right time.

The inability to control the timing and circumstances of birth have an effect on the children born. Women are much more likely to report poor maternal bonding, such as feeling trapped as a mother or resenting their baby, with the child born after abortion denial than with the next child born after receiving an abortion (9% vs 3%). This may be a consequence of economic hardship and the circumstances that led the woman to want an abortion in the first place.

Children born as the result of abortion denial are more likely to live below the federal poverty level (63% vs 55%), an average of 101% vs 132% of federal poverty level among children born subsequently to women who were able to receive an abortion.

## Conclusion

---

Abortion restrictions are an intrusion of government into women's childbearing decisions. When we follow the lives of women denied abortions, we see that they are right to be concerned about how pregnancy and parenthood

might impact their lives and their families. Women who are denied abortions are worse off than women who receive abortions, and so are their children. Access to abortion protects women's health, strengthens the economic security of families, and increases the wellbeing of children.

Data in this fact sheet come from the Turnaway Study, the first study in the U.S. to examine the consequences of receiving versus being denied a wanted abortion for women and their children.

## References

1. Foster DG, Biggs MA, Raifman S, Gipson JD, Kimport K, Rocca CH. Comparison of Health, Development, Maternal Bonding, and Poverty Among Children Born After Denial of Abortion vs After Pregnancies Subsequent to an Abortion. *JAMA Pediatrics* (2018) Sept; 172(11):1053-1060.
2. Foster DG, Raifman SE, Gipson JD, Rocca CH, Biggs MA. Effects of Carrying an Unwanted Pregnancy to Term on Women's Existing Children. *J Pediatr*. 2018 Oct 22. PMID: 30389101
3. Upadhyay UD, Angel Aztlan-James E, Rocca CH, Foster DG. Intended pregnancy after receiving vs. being denied a wanted abortion. *Contraception*. 2018 Sep 20. PMID: 30244161