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One-third unplanned pregnancies aborted in Australia, says a survey

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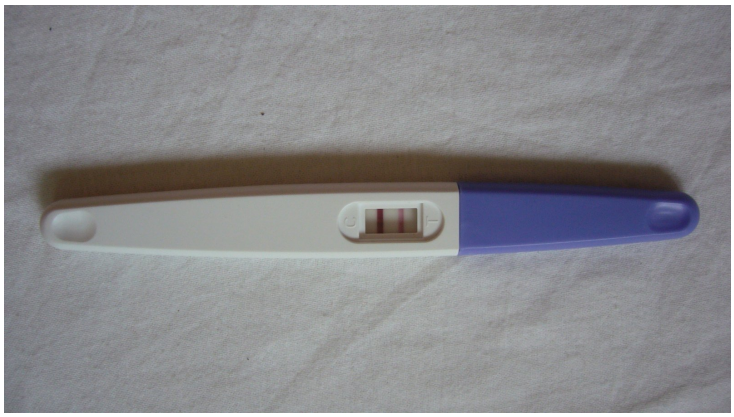
The authors also reported that almost one in five women (18.8%) who had been pregnant reported having had an abortion, but the proportion was likely to have been depressed by under-reporting on this sensitive topic.



One in three unwanted pregnancies end in abortion, if recent research undertaken in Australia is any indication.

The research, published in the Medical Journal of Australia, found that one in four women who responded to a national telephone survey reported falling pregnant in the past 10 years without planning to do so, and 30.4% of those pregnancies ended in abortion.

Ten years after the only other national household survey on the subject of mistimed or unplanned pregnancy, researchers led by Professor Angela Taft, a principal research fellow at the Judith Lumley Centre at La Trobe University, undertook a national random computer-assisted telephone (mobile and landline) survey (weekdays, 9 am–8 pm) during December 2014 to May 2015. Women aged 18–45 years with adequate English were asked whether they had had an unintended pregnancy during the past 10 years, and whether any unintended pregnancy was unwanted.

“Of 2571 eligible women, 2013 (78.3%) completed interviews. A total of 1390 women (69.1%) had been pregnant during the past 10 years, including 362 unintended pregnancies (26%). Most unintended pregnancies (246, 68%) were reported as wanted; 94 (26%) were described as unwanted. Of unwanted pregnancies 80% were terminated.

“Half the women with an unintended pregnancy gave birth (194, 53.6%), 110 (30.4%) had abortions, 55 (15.2%) miscarriages and three (0.8%) were still pregnant at the time of the survey. Of the women who had been pregnant but did not report an unintended pregnancy, 14.7% (151 of 1024) reported having had an abortion.

“Twenty-one of the 246 women (8.5%) with unintended but wanted pregnancies reported abortions. Of the 94 women with unwanted pregnancies, 78 (83%) had abortions, nine (10%) had miscarriages and seven (8%) carried the pregnancy to term. A total of 261 of 1390 women who had been pregnant (18.8%) reported abortions.

“Most women who had unintended pregnancies (205 of 362, 56.6%) reported not having used contraception at the time. Of the 150 women (41.4%) who had an unintended pregnancy while using contraception, 96 (64%) had used oral contraceptives and 40 (26.9%) had used condoms as their primary methods; nine (6%) were using long-acting reversible contraception.

“Research is required to explore the reasons for not [using contraception] and to determine where education would be most helpful. Clinicians and services should focus their attention on women at highest risk of unintended pregnancy, including those who have had three or more pregnancies. The immediate postpartum and post-abortion periods are opportune times for intervening to avert unintended pregnancies.”

The authors also reported that almost one in five women (18.8%) who had been pregnant reported having had an abortion, but the proportion was likely to have been depressed by “under-reporting on this sensitive topic”.