



ELSEVIER

www.rhm-elsevier.com

© 2006 Reproductive Health Matters.

All rights reserved.

Reproductive Health Matters 2006;14(27):181-190

0968-8080/06 \$ - see front matter

PII: S0968-8080(06)27219-7



www.rhmjournal.org.uk

# Born Unwanted, 35 Years Later: The Prague Study

Henry P David

Director, Transnational Family Research Institute, Bethesda, MD, USA. E-mail: [henrydavid@comcast.net](mailto:henrydavid@comcast.net)

**Abstract:** *A long-held belief among mental health practitioners is that being born unwanted carries a risk of negative psychosocial development and poor mental health in adulthood. The Prague Study was designed to test this hypothesis. It followed the development and mental well-being of 220 children (now adults) born in 1961–63 in Prague to women twice denied abortion for the same unwanted pregnancy. The children were individually pair-matched at about age nine with 220 children born from accepted pregnancies when no abortion had been requested. This article brings together in one place the theoretical assumptions and hypotheses, the criteria for selecting the study participants and major findings from five follow-up waves conducted among the children around the ages of 9, 14–16, 21–23, 28–31 and 32–35 years, plus a sub-study of married unwanted pregnancy subjects and accepted pregnancy controls at ages 26–28. To control for potential confounding factors in data interpretation, all siblings of all subjects were included in the last two waves. It was found that differences in psychosocial development widened over time but lessened at around age 30. All the differences consistently disfavoured the unwanted pregnancy subjects, especially only children (no siblings). They became psychiatric patients (especially in-patients) more frequently than the accepted pregnancy controls and also more often than their siblings. The overall findings suggest that, in the aggregate, denial of abortion for unwanted pregnancy entails an increased risk for negative psychosocial development and mental well-being in adulthood.*

© 2006 Reproductive Health Matters. All rights reserved.

**Keywords:** unwanted pregnancy, abortion denied, child development, adult mental health, Czech Republic

THERE has been much discussion of the dynamics of intended and unintended conceptions, and wanted and unwanted pregnancies, and of subsequent voluntary or involuntary child-rearing. However, it has seldom been possible to conduct follow-up studies from childhood to adulthood of children unwanted at conception or during early pregnancy. Conducting research on the developmental and mental health effects of denied abortion requires a legal system that approves certain requests for pregnancy termination and rejects others. Also needed is a national population register that records medical events and facilitates follow-up of children delivered involuntarily. Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic) was one of the few countries meeting these conditions at the time the Prague Study

(as it became known internationally) was initiated in 1969.

The Prague Study began when an abstract of a Czech paper on social questions of pregnancy interruption by Drs. Vratislav Schüller and Eva Stupkova came to my attention.<sup>1</sup> On meeting Dr. Stupkova, then Director of the Prague Public Health Services, I learned that during the years 1961–63 she had been Chair of the Prague Regional Appellate Abortion Commission. She had kept in her possession the names of the women twice denied abortion for the same pregnancy, once on original request and again on appeal. Dr. Stupkova was willing to make her material available for a follow-up study. In consultation with Drs. Zdenek Dytrych, Zdenek Matejcek and Vratislav Schüller, I developed the original

pair-matched research design that was supported over the years by US, Czech and international donor organisations. All the research was conducted under the auspices of the Prague Psychiatric Research Institute (now the Prague Psychiatric Centre). I secured grants, served as senior consultant to all phases of the Prague Study, and wrote and/or edited English language reports.<sup>2,3</sup> I also arranged a presentation by Stupkova and Schüller<sup>4</sup> at an international seminar and publication of an English language article.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Ludek Kubicka developed the concept of the sibling studies, conducted all the data analyses in consultation with Ing. Zdenek Roth, and was the senior author of related research reports.<sup>6,7</sup> Matejcek and Dytrych, both now deceased, supervised the field studies coordinated by Ms. Karla Topicova and were co-authors of early international publications and presentations.<sup>8,9</sup> Schüller, also deceased, managed the pair-matching process and for years was the only person to know “who was who”.

The few related studies in the literature, mostly from Sweden and Finland, were reviewed in previous publications.<sup>2,3,6,7</sup> The Swedish studies<sup>10-16</sup> indicated that children born to women denied abortion for an unwanted pregnancy tended to be less well adjusted socially, were more often in psychiatric care and were more frequently registered for crimes than children born from accepted pregnancies. The results of the Finnish study<sup>17-19</sup> showed that unwantedness was frequently associated with less favourable socio-economic circumstances.

This article brings together in one place major findings from five follow-up waves conducted around ages 9, 14-16, 21-23, 28-31, and 32-35 years and a substudy of married subjects and controls (the latter from accepted pregnancies) at ages 26-28. Descriptions of data collection methods (individually administered questionnaires, structured interviews and public registers) as well as detailed statistical analyses of the empirical findings with tables and graphs have been presented over the years in nearly 100 papers and books, published, thus far, in five languages.

## The setting

Following decriminalisation of abortion in the Soviet Union, the Government of Czechoslovakia liberalised its abortion law in December 1957, providing termination of pregnancy on medical and “other” grounds during the first

three months of gestation.<sup>2</sup> Approval of a woman’s request for pregnancy termination was the responsibility of the District Abortion Commission. If that Commission denied the request, the woman had the right to appeal to a Regional Appellate Abortion Commission, whose decision was final. Requests were denied mostly because the woman had presented false or insufficient reasons for abortion, or because she was more than 12 weeks pregnant, or because another pregnancy had been terminated during the immediately preceding months. Appealing a denial and making a second request to terminate the same pregnancy constituted empirical confirmation that the pregnancy was strongly unwanted, at least in its early stages.

## Hypotheses

The theoretical assumption underlying the study evolved from the concept of *psychological deprivation*.<sup>20</sup> It was believed that if there is a continuum of depriving conditions (ranging from a child’s isolation in an institutional setting to relatively mild emotional neglect in a dysfunctional family), there is also likely to be a continuum of consequences (from severe to relatively mild). This assumption underlies the concept of *psychological sub-deprivation*.<sup>21,22</sup> The basic hypothesis to be tested was that differences between children born from unwanted pregnancies and children born from accepted pregnancies would be to the disadvantage of the unwanted pregnancy children. Disparities were expected to be apparent in their medical history, social integration, educational achievement, psychological condition and family relations. This expectation, together with the impression that boys are more vulnerable than girls to adverse social-environmental conditions, led to the prediction that unwanted pregnancy boys would suffer relatively more than girls.<sup>23</sup> It was also understood from the beginning that although the unwanted pregnancy subjects were selected on the basis of unwantedness during early pregnancy, many of these children were likely to become accepted, or indeed loved, after they were born.

To safeguard confidentiality, the research project was officially described as the Prague Study of Child Development. The topic of abortion was raised only once – as the final question in the first interview with the mother who had been twice denied abortion for the same

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1090527>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1090527>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)