

What Women Want:

when faced with
an unplanned
pregnancy

November 2006

Key Findings

Conducted by:
WebSurvey

websurvey

Commissioned by:
Marie Stopes
International



**MARIE STOPES
INTERNATIONAL**

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To order a complete copy of the research report, please contact Marie Stopes International National Support Centre on FREECALL 1800 003 707.

Marie Stopes International

Marie Stopes International is a not-for-profit organisation offering a range of sexual and reproductive health care services to men and women throughout Australia.

The Australian centres located in NSW, QLD, WA and the ACT, are part of the global Marie Stopes International Partnership – a UK based registered charity providing a full range of reproductive healthcare services to over 4 million people in 37 countries worldwide.

Australian centre services include abortion, vasectomy, sexually transmitted infection check-ups and contraception. Surplus proceeds from Australian activities support the work of the Marie Stopes International Partnership.

Unplanned pregnancy

Unplanned pregnancy is a key health issue for Australian women. Such pregnancies may result from contraceptive failure, or where contraception is not readily available.

While not every unplanned pregnancy is unwanted, all require women to make a time-sensitive decision about which of the three available options – abortion, adoption or parenting - is best for them and their families.

The need for research

Government initiatives targeting women facing an unplanned pregnancy are not based on qualitative or quantitative data about Australian women's experience of unplanned pregnancy and their desires for support and information.

In particular, data is lacking with regard to:

- o Women's experience of emotional support and information when faced with an unplanned pregnancy;

- o Women's desire for emotional support and information when faced with an unplanned pregnancy;
- o Women's desire for counselling to support their decision-making, and the kind of counselling they want.

Given this, Marie Stopes International believes that Australian specific data will assist in helping governments, the medical profession, NGOs and other service providers to recognise and meet the needs of women faced with an unplanned pregnancy.

Recognising the sensitive nature of the questioning, Marie Stopes International commissioned WebSurvey - a data collection and research agency specialising in the provision of efficient and flexible online surveys – to independently conduct the research via an online method of surveying. 6,593 women received an email invitation to complete the survey. Of the 2,003 who responded around half (1,022) had experienced an unplanned pregnancy, and so qualified to participate in the research. Participating women were of reproductive age, and were drawn from all over Australia.

Current political climate

The publication of **What Women Want When Faced With An Unplanned Pregnancy** coincides with the release by the Federal Government of two pregnancy support measures – a Medicare rebate for psychological counselling and a telephone counselling Helpline for women concerned about an unplanned pregnancy – and a Private Member's Bill seeking to ensure transparency in advertising and notification of pregnancy counselling services (Transparent Advertising and Notification of Pregnancy Counselling Services Bill).

The data brings important additional information to the debate surrounding the issues of pregnancy counselling and transparent advertising of such services.

Research implications

This research report does not contain recommendations for further action. Rather it provides evidence of women's experience of unplanned pregnancy, and their desire for support at this time to inform public debate, policy and service provision.

Notwithstanding, Marie Stopes International believes the findings of the report have a number of implications:

- o The response rate suggests that among women of reproductive age at any one time, approximately half will have experienced an unplanned pregnancy, indicating a need for increased resources to be directed towards lowering contraceptive failure rates, and greater access to sexual health services.
- o The finding that three out of every four women do not wish to speak to a counsellor before making a decision regarding their unplanned pregnancy suggests that, while pregnancy counselling should be available to women, it would be mistaken to see it as desired or required in all circumstances.
- o The fact that the vast majority of women (81%) believe that it is important that pregnancy counsellors referred for all three options (abortion, adoption and parenting), together with the 12% of women who stated that, when they faced an unplanned pregnancy, they relied on pregnancy counsellors accessed by phone or in person for support, highlights the need for regulation in this area to ensure integrity and quality of care.

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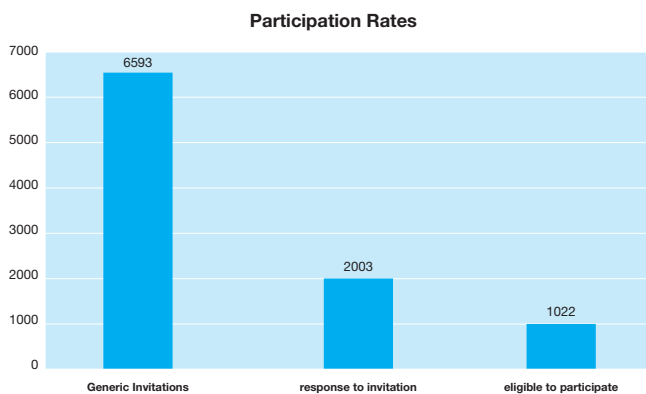
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METHODOLOGY

To select the sample, WebSurvey enlisted the database of Pureprofile – an internet-based company that facilitates direct communication between businesses and consumers.¹

Pureprofile invitations were sent to 6593 women asking them to participate in a survey. 2003 women replied to the invitation, of which just over half, or 1022 women, were eligible to participate on the grounds that they had experienced an unplanned pregnancy (Chart 1).

Chart 1



Invitations were extended so as to obtain weighted samples with regard to age and residency by state, as ascertained by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

This resulted in a near total match of the sample to the distribution of the population across the 8 Australian states and territories (Table 1).

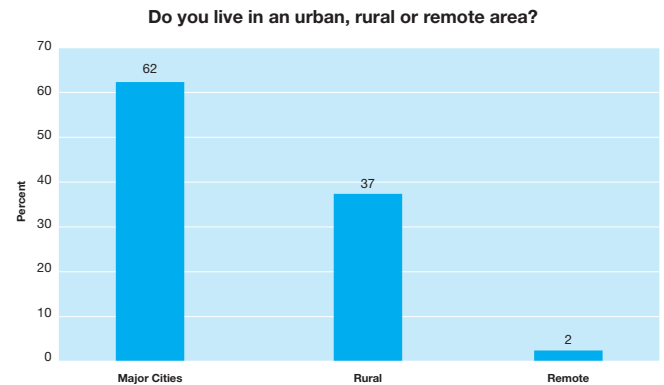
Table 1

	ABS	Current Sample
NSW	33%	33%
VIC	25%	28%
QLD	19%	20%
SA	8%	8%
WA	10%	9%
ACT	2%	1%
TAS	2%	2%
NT	1%	1%

1. For more information on Pureprofile, visit www.pureprofile.com.au

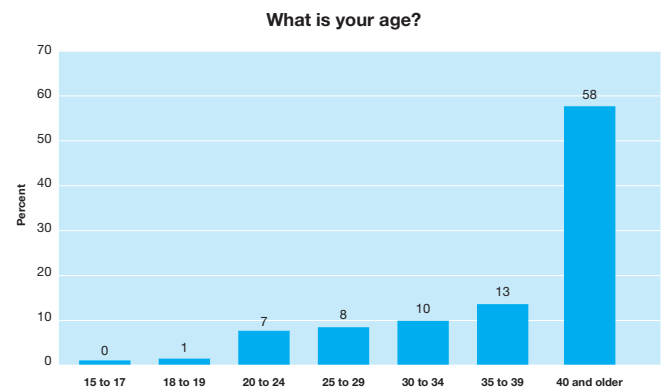
Women who participated in the survey came from urban, rural and remote areas (Chart 2).

Chart 2



Women of all ages were invited to participate in the survey in numbers proportional to their representation in the community. However, the positive correlation of age with the likelihood of experiencing an unplanned pregnancy – and therefore being eligible to complete the survey - meant that the final sample is weighted at the upper end of the age spectrum, with over half the sample (56%) aged 40 and older, and women aged 18 to 19 comprising 1% (see Chart 3 for the complete age distribution of the sample). Despite this, analysis shows that 14% of those answering the survey were in the same age band as they had occupied at the time of their unplanned pregnancy.

Chart 3



Of the 2003 that commenced the survey, 981 (49%) responded negatively to the screening question “Have you ever experienced an unplanned pregnancy?”, leaving a final sample size of 1022 women, or 51% of those who accepted the initial invitation to participate. The figure of 51% is a “snapshot”, suggestive of the experience of unplanned pregnancy in Australian women of reproductive age at any given moment in time. It implies that if women were asked this question at the end of their reproductive life span, this figure would be higher, as some women in the snapshot have not yet completed their reproductive years and still have reproductive years left in which they might experience an unplanned pregnancy.

As with all Pureprofile surveys, respondents were paid for their involvement. Women were paid \$1.00 for starting the survey, but not qualifying to complete it, and \$3.00 for starting and completing the survey.

WebSurvey hosted the online survey, and analysed the results.

The survey consisted of 3 open-ended questions, and 19 pre-coded ones, and took women approximately 10 minutes to complete. A paper copy of the questionnaire is found at Appendix A.

Highlights of research

- o Response rates to the current survey suggest that at any given time amongst a sample of women of reproductive age, just over half (51%) have experienced an unplanned pregnancy.
- o Parenting was the most, and adoption the least, popular choice for resolving an unplanned pregnancy.
- o Three out of every four women with an unplanned pregnancy, or 75%, did not wish to speak to a counsellor before deciding. Just 25%, or one in four women, wished to speak to a pregnancy counsellor before making a decision.
- o The vast majority of women, four of every five or 81%, said it was important that a pregnancy counsellor refer for all three options: abortion, adoption, parenting. Just 9% of women said it was unimportant.
- o Women who adopted were the most likely of all women to feel it was important for pregnancy counsellors to refer for all three options (95%), followed by women who aborted (89%), women who miscarried (85%) and women who parented (78%).
- o Just over one in five women (21%) sought information to assist their decision making from their spouses/partners/biological father, while their local GP's surgery was the port of call for 17% of women facing an unplanned pregnancy.
- o Nearly one in five women facing an unplanned pregnancy turned to their doctor for support (19%), with the next most common resource their families (16%) and anonymous pregnancy counsellors available by phone (12%).
- o The vast majority of women (90%) believed women should be able to obtain an abortion in all or some circumstances. Only 3% of women believed abortion should not be allowed under any circumstances.

Unplanned pregnancy resolution: rate, outcome and decision-making experience

- Few figures exist as to the rate of unplanned pregnancy in Australia. Response rates to the current survey suggest that at any given time amongst a sample of women of reproductive age, just over half (51%) have experienced an unplanned pregnancy. This figure is likely to be higher in a sample of women who have completed their reproductive years.
- Parenting was the most, and adoption the least, popular choice for resolving an unplanned pregnancy. The majority of women (56%) resolved their unplanned pregnancy by choosing to parent. The next largest group (29%) chose abortion, while just 2% chose adoption. Thirteen percent (13%) of women miscarried.
- Non-parents were more likely than parents to choose abortion to resolve their unplanned pregnancy (33% of non-parents compared to only 25% of parents).
- While the overall number of women in the sample who chose abortion was small, only non-parents chose adoption as a means of resolving their unplanned pregnancy.
- A significant proportion of women who adopt – nearly half – are teenagers aged 17 and younger.
- Nearly half the sample (48%) said they found it difficult to make up their mind what to do. In contrast, just over one third of the sample (35%) found it easy to decide. The remainder, 17% of women, said they found it neither easy nor difficult to make their decision.
- When faced with an unplanned pregnancy, those making the choice to parent found the decision making process least difficult. Women who adopted, followed by those who aborted, were most likely to say they found it very difficult to make up their mind what to do. Women who chose to parent were the least likely to say they found it very difficult, and most likely to say they found it easy, to decide.
- Decision-making was nominated by 18% of women facing an unplanned pregnancy as the most challenging part of discovering they were pregnant

KEY FINDINGS

when they didn't plan to be, while managing or attempting to resolve financial stresses and concerns was cited by 15% of the sample. Twelve percent (12%) found the anticipated or actual reaction of their family, friends, partners or community – or their attempts to avoid such reactions by concealing the pregnancy - the greatest challenge.

Experience of and views on pregnancy counselling

- Three out of every four women facing an unplanned pregnancy, or 75%, did not wish to speak to a counsellor before deciding. Just 25%, or one in four women, wished to speak to a pregnancy counsellor before making a decision.
- The vast majority of women, four of every five or 81%, said it was important that a pregnancy counsellor refer for all three options: abortion, adoption, parenting. Just 9% of women said it was unimportant.
- The more difficulty women had making their decision, the more important they felt it was to have a counsellor who would refer for all three options. The less difficulty women had making their decision, the less important they felt it was for a counsellor to refer for all three options.
- Women who adopted were the most likely of all women to feel it was important for pregnancy counsellors to refer for all three options (95%), followed by women who aborted (89%), women who miscarried (85%) and women who parented (78%).
- 14% of women facing an unplanned pregnancy spoke to a counsellor, and 86% did not.
- 30% of those who were counselled did not wish to have counselling. 18% of those who were not counselled wished to have counselling before making a decision.
- Women who adopted, followed by women who miscarried were the most likely to have wanted counselling but not to have obtained it. Women who aborted were most likely to have not wanted counselling, but to have received it anyway.
- In every age category, more women did not wish to speak to a pregnancy counsellor than did wish to speak to a pregnancy counsellor. However, the younger the woman, the more likely she was to wish to speak to a pregnancy counsellor before making her decision.
- Just over one in five women (21%) sought information to assist their decision making from their spouses/partners/biological father, while their local GP's surgery was the point of call for 17% of women facing an unplanned pregnancy.
- Nearly one in five women facing an unplanned pregnancy turned to their doctors for support (19%), with the next most common resource their families (16%) and anonymous pregnancy counsellors available by phone (12%).
- The most common place for women to obtain counselling was an abortion clinic (45%) followed by sexual health centres (17%).
- The vast majority of those who obtained counselling (80%) expressed satisfaction with the service provided. Only 6% said they were dissatisfied with their counselling experience.
- Of those women who obtained counselling, 46% said the most helpful thing about it was that it was non-judgemental. Twenty-four percent (24%) nominated the unbiased nature of the counselling they obtained as the most helpful aspect of the service. Only 10% said talking and being listened to was the most helpful thing.

Women's characteristics and views on abortion

- Women in the survey came from a range of ages, religions, and educational backgrounds. They were drawn from urban, regional and rural areas in every state in Australia.
- Over half the women (60%) were married or in a relationship at the time of their unplanned pregnancy, and the majority (62%) were not parents when their unplanned pregnancy occurred.
- Women who were not parents at the time of their unplanned pregnancy were more likely to choose abortion than those who were parents. Women who were parents of at least one child at the time of their unplanned pregnancy were more likely to choose to parent than women who were not already parents.
- While the overall number of women in the sample who chose adoption was small, only women who were not parents chose this as an option to resolve their unplanned pregnancy.
- The vast majority of women (90%) believed women should be able to obtain an abortion in all or some circumstances. Only 3% of women believed abortion should not be allowed under any circumstances.
- A comparison of women's views before and after their unplanned pregnancy suggests the experience leads women to become more pro-choice. After the experience of an unplanned pregnancy, the number of women who say they are opposed to abortion in all circumstances, and those who say they don't know or are unsure about their views, declines while the number who support abortion in all or some circumstances increases.
- Highly educated women are more liberal in their views about abortion than those with less education. While 92% of undergraduates and postgraduates supported abortion in all or some circumstances, just 87% of secondary school graduates took this view.

What Women Want When Faced With An Unplanned Pregnancy

WebSurvey is conducting a survey on unplanned pregnancy. The survey is being conducted with the aim of improving the quality of reproductive health services available to women. Some questions might be of a personal and sensitive nature. The survey should take you no longer than 10 minutes to complete.

Your responses are important to us and we ask that you answer the following questions honestly and thoughtfully.

We respect your privacy. All responses are anonymous and will be kept confidential. They will not be linked to your personal profile.

Have you ever experienced an unplanned pregnancy?

If no, Exit.

If yes:

1. What was the most challenging part of discovering yourself pregnant when you didn't plan to be?

2. When you discovered you were pregnant when you did not plan to be, what did you want in the way of emotional support and information? (tick as many as you like)

- Support from my doctor
- Support from my family
- Support from my partner/spouse/the biological father
- Support from an anonymous pregnancy counsellor by phone
- Support from a pregnancy counsellor I could meet with in person
- Information about where I could stay if I was going to keep the baby and adopt it out
- Contact details for an agency that organizes adoptions
- Contact details for an abortion provider
- Contact details for services that support and assist parents
- Contact details about community and church groups able to provide support to keep the baby
- Balanced and medically accurate information about what happens when you have an abortion, and the medical risks
- Balanced and medically accurate information about what happens when you adopt a child, and the medical risks
- Balanced and medically accurate information about what happens during pregnancy and birth, and the medical risks
- Laws that clearly state that abortion is legal
- Laws that make abortion harder to get
- More affordable abortion services (full Medicare rebate and no out of pocket costs)
- Bulk-billing for abortion services to protect my privacy
- Other

APPENDIX A: Questionnaire

3. How was your unplanned pregnancy resolved? (if you have had more than one unplanned pregnancy, please answer all questions for the most recent one)

- Abortion
- Adoption
- Chose to parent
- Miscarriage

4. When you discovered you were pregnant when you did not plan to be, how difficult was it to make up your mind about what to do?

- Very difficult
- Difficult
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Easy
- Very easy

5. Where did you look for information to assist you with your decision-making?

- Maternal/Child Health Nurse
 - Local GPs surgery
 - Local hospital
 - Sexual health centre
 - Telephone book
 - Local library
 - Internet
 - School teacher, nurse or counsellor
 - Family
 - Partner/spouse/the biological father
 - Friends
 - Nowhere. I knew what I needed to know already
 - Other
-
-
-

6. When you discovered you were pregnant when you did not plan to be, did you wish to talk to a pregnancy counsellor by phone or in person before making a decision?

- Yes
- No

7. How important is it for a pregnancy counsellor to be equally willing to refer you to any of the three options available: abortion, adoption, parenting?

- Very important
- Important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very unimportant

8. When you discovered you were pregnant when you did not plan to be, did you speak to a pregnancy counsellor? (if you have had more than one unplanned pregnancy, please answer all questions for the most recent one)

- Yes
- No this will skip to Q13

9. Where was that counsellor located?

- At an abortion clinic
 - At a freestanding pregnancy counselling agency
 - At a sexual health centre
 - I don't know as the contact I had was by phone
 - Other
-
-
-

APPENDIX A: Questionnaire

10. How satisfied were you with the counselling you obtained?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

11. What did you find most helpful about the counselling you obtained?

12. What did you find least helpful about the counselling you obtained?

13. Which of the following statements comes closest to your current views about abortion?

- Women should be able to obtain an abortion readily when they want one
- Abortion should only be allowed in special circumstances
- Abortion should not be allowed under any circumstances
- Don't know/unsure

14. At the time of your unplanned pregnancy, which of these statements comes closest to how you felt about abortion?

- Women should be able to obtain an abortion readily when they want one
- Abortion should only be allowed in special circumstances
- Abortion should not be allowed under any circumstances
- Don't know/unsure

15. What is your age?

- 14 years old or younger
- Aged 15 to 17
- Aged 18 to 19
- Aged 20 to 24
- Aged 25 to 29
- Aged 30 to 34
- Aged 35 to 39
- Aged 40 and older

16. What is your postcode?

17. What religion, if any, do you identify with?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> No religion | <input type="checkbox"/> Anglican |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Baptist | <input type="checkbox"/> Catholic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Churches of Christ | <input type="checkbox"/> Jehovah's Witness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lutheran | <input type="checkbox"/> Orthodox |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pentecostal | <input type="checkbox"/> Salvation Army |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Uniting Church | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Christian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buddhism | <input type="checkbox"/> Hinduism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Islam | <input type="checkbox"/> Judaism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traditional Aboriginal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Presbyterian and Reformed | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |
-

APPENDIX A: Questionnaire

18. What is the highest level of education you have obtained?

- Secondary/High School
- Diploma/Certificate/Trade Qualification
- Undergraduate
- Postgraduate

19. How old were you at the time of your unplanned pregnancy?

- 14 years old or younger
- Aged 15 to 17
- Aged 18 to 19
- Aged 20 to 24
- Aged 25 to 29
- Aged 30 to 34
- Aged 35 to 39
- Aged 40 and older

20. How would you describe where you were living at the time of your unplanned pregnancy?

- in a city
- in the suburbs surrounding a capital city
- in a regional centre
- in the suburbs surrounding a regional centre
- in the country
- in the bush/outback/remote area

21. At the time of your unplanned pregnancy were you?

- Single
- In a relationship but not living together
- Married
- Divorced
- Living with a partner/spouse
- Widowed

22. At the time of your unplanned pregnancy, which of the following apply?

- Not a parent
- Parent of 1 child
- Parent of 2 children
- Parent of 3 children
- Parent of 4 children
- Parent of 5 children
- Parent of 6 children
- Parent of 7 children
- Parent of 8 children
- Parent of 9 children
- Parent of 10 or more children

Thank you for your participation