measures at two points in time, allowing a comparison of the effects of planning status on child development in infancy and in preschool years.

Most analyses of unintended pregnancy and childbearing (such as those using information from the National Survey of Family Growth) rely on retrospective data.* Respondents are asked to recall, sometimes many years after the pregnancy, their pregnancy intentions at the time of conception. The results of retrospective studies may be affected by recall error and by the possibility that women will redefine planning status because of their child’s characteristics and their changing family circumstances.

By contrast, a large proportion of women in this sample reported planning status during their pregnancy. Hence, these reports are relatively unlikely to have been influenced by the observed characteristics of the child. On the other hand, pregnant women may rationalize their pregnancy. This will result in an underestimate of the extent of unintendedness and blurring of the differences between wanted and unwanted or mistimed children.

In quantitative models, maternal characteristics are often linked to child outcomes directly, although these characteristics may affect child development indirectly, through their impact on the family environment. The models used in this study include measures of the proximate determinants of child development (i.e., developmental resources provided in the family environment), so that direct and indirect effects of planning status can be estimated.

The findings revealed that planning status is significantly associated with the resources provided for skill development after one year of age. By preschool age, mistimed and unwanted children receive fewer opportunities for skill development, have less-positive interactions with their mothers and experience more authoritarian parenting styles than wanted children.

The poorer psychometric quality of these measures for very young infants or the homogeneity of maternal behavior toward very young infants, regardless of planning status, may explain the apparent lack of differences in developmental resources provided to infants younger than one year old.

Some planning status differences that appear to be very strong when examined bivariately diminish or disappear when relevant attributes of the family environment are controlled for. To interpret this finding, one must closely examine the characteristics that mediate the association between planning status and developmental resources. If these are characteristics that the mother cannot change, then the observed association is due to compositional differences in the characteristics of the mothers who have unintended births. If, however, these characteristics are not fixed, planning status may be an expression of the mother’s expectation regarding her ability to provide a favorable family environment to her child.

While race or ethnicity and maternal ability mediate the association between planning status and developmental resources, other characteristics of the family (such as income, maternal employment and the presence of the father) also influence this association, indicating that maternal expectations regarding these circumstances contribute to the definition of the planning status of a birth. Only one developmental resource has a significant independent association with planning status: Mistimed preschoolers experience less-favorable parenting styles than wanted preschoolers.

The analyses revealed few significant developmental effects of planning status. Assessments of children’s early motor and cognitive development did not differ by planning status. (Similarly, a study in Czechoslovakia revealed no cognitive im...