had completed high school or fewer years of education and black women. For poverty level, all of the comparisons but two (intended vs. moderately mistimed pregnancies and seriously mistimed vs. unwanted pregnancies) were significant. For educational level, three comparisons (intended vs. seriously mistimed, intended vs. unwanted and moderately mistimed vs. unwanted) were significant. For race, five of the six comparisons were significant; the exception was the comparison between seriously mistimed and unwanted pregnancies.

Thus, the distributions of moderately and seriously mistimed pregnancies were significantly different in comparisons for five of six maternal characteristics, and the distributions of moderately mistimed and unwanted pregnancies were significantly different in comparisons for four of six. By contrast, the distributions of intended and moderately mistimed pregnancies and those of seriously mistimed and unwanted pregnancies were significantly different in comparisons for only three of six characteristics.

Women’s mean happiness scores—which ranged from 9.4 for intended pregnancies to 4.1 for unwanted pregnancies—differed significantly from one another by intendedness (not shown). The exception was the comparison between seriously mistimed and unwanted pregnancies. Women whose pregnancies were moderately and seriously mistimed scored means of 6.4 and 5.3, respectively, on the happiness scale.

Maternal Behavior and Intendedness

The proportion of pregnancies for which women initiated prenatal care at or before eight weeks was significantly greater if the pregnancy was intended (73%) than if it was moderately or seriously mistimed or unwanted (51–63%). The proportion of pregnancies for which women initiated breastfeeding decreased with decreasing intendedness—ranging from 61% of intended pregnancies to 39% of unwanted pregnancies. All but two of the comparisons (intended vs. moderately mistimed and seriously mistimed vs. unwanted) were significant for this variable. Thus, the comparisons between intended and seriously mistimed or unwanted pregnancies were significantly different for both maternal behavior variables, and seriously mistimed and unwanted pregnancies did not differ for either variable.

Pregnancy Outcomes and Intendedness

Although only one of the comparisons for pregnancy outcomes was significant, the proportions of pregnancies that ended in the birth of a low-birth-weight infant (that is, one weighing less than 2,500 g) or in preterm delivery (before 37 weeks’ gestation) increased along the continuum of intendedness from intended to seriously mistimed births. The only significant comparison was for preterm delivery between intended and seriously mistimed pregnancies (8% vs. 14%).

DISCUSSION

Pregnancy mistiming does not appear to be a unitary construct. The amount of time by which pregnancies occur earlier than intended varies widely: For some women it is only six months, and for others it is more than five years. Pregnancies among young women, never-married women and black women are disproportionately mistimed by three or more years.

When we categorized pregnancies according to the degree of mistiming, we found that pregnancies described as intended, moderately mistimed, seriously mistimed or unwanted differ significantly from each other by maternal char-