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Do children whose birth was unintended have different cognitive development from others? Evidence from the UK Millennium Cohort

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Context. Unplanned pregnancies are still common in UK. The hypothesis is that unplanned pregnancies could affect child development, through parenting practice, controlling for the sociodemographic environment.

Objective. To explore the relationship of the "intendedness" of births and child development at age 3 in the UK Millennium Cohort (MCS).

Data. MCS follows 18,552 families of children born in UK between 2000 and 2002. It has questions about the intendedness of the cohort pregnancy, whether it involved assisted reproduction techniques and further fertility intentions.

Methods. Associations between a more or less "wanted" birth and low and high school readiness (Bracken) at age 3 are investigated using logistic regression.

Results. Although child development is broadly associated with the intendedness of the birth, the relationship is largely statistically accounted for by the social and educational background of the mother, poor parenting also helps account for the low scores.

Discussion. The findings will feed into a comparative analysis between UK and France where the level of unplanned pregnancy is thought to be lower (probably around 1 birth out 5 rather than 2). Such comparative analysis will be possible when the French ELFE Cohort data become available (20,000 families of children born in 2011).