

# COVID-19 baby boom? This new study suggests perhaps not

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Over 80% of people surveyed in a study do not plan to conceive during the COVID-19 crisis, perhaps putting to rest suggestions that the lockdown could lead to rise in birth numbers.

Looking at parenthood desires during the ongoing [pandemic](#) crisis in Italy, a team of experts, led by the University of Florence, carried out 1,482 online interviews. Their results, published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics and Gynecology*, show that some 1,214 (81.9%) did not intend to conceive during the pandemic crisis.

Moreover, of the 268 participants who were planning to have a child before the pandemic, over one-third (37.3%) then abandoned the intention. The main reasons that led people to this decision included worries related to future economic difficulties (58%) and any potential consequences on pregnancy (58%) due to the disease.

The questionnaire, carried out in the third week of the lockdown in Italy, surveyed 944 women (63.7%) and 538 men (36.3%) aged between 18-46 years, and in a stable heterosexual relationship for at least twelve months. Study author, Dr. Elisabetta Micelli from the Assisted Reproduction Technologies Center, suggested that mental wellbeing during lockdown had an impact on the desire to have a baby.

"The impact of the quarantine on general population's perception of their stability and peacefulness is alarming. In our study sample, the majority of participants gave significantly higher total scores to their mental wellbeing before the pandemic, while lowest scores were reported in the answers referred to the COVID-19 period.

"We aimed to evaluate if pandemic-related concerns and worries are affecting the desire for parenthood in couples who were already planning to have a child or if quarantine is encouraging reproductive desire.

"What we found the main reasons that led people to not wanting to conceive included worries related to future economic difficulties and consequences on pregnancy.

"Interestingly, although almost half of the people referred no interruption in their job activity and no variations of salaries, probably due to the 'smart working' adapting strategy, over 40% of participants reported a worrying reduction of monthly profits. Remarkably, the fear of imminent and future economic instabilities led those who were searching for a pregnancy to stop their intention in 58% of cases."

Nevertheless, despite most people not wanting to conceive during the pandemic, 60% of the 268 correspondents already planning to conceive have carried on in their quest—with the experts suggesting that the fear of infertility potentially occurring in the future, outweighs the worries of the consequences of COVID-19 infection.

Additionally, some 140 (11.5%) people in fact revealed a new desire for parenthood during quarantine.

Specifically, the wish was mainly expressed by women. In most cases, the respondents referred "the will for change" (50%) and "the need for positivity" (40%) to be the main reasons of this intention. Only six out of the 140 (4.3%), however effectively tried to get pregnant in this period.

Co-author Dr. Gianmartin Cito, in specialist training in Urology at the University of Florence, added: "Again, fear of consequences on pregnancy in addition to the economic impact on families are probably the reasons why almost the whole group of couples who unexpectedly started to express a desire for parenthood during quarantine did not translate this dream into a concrete attempt."

The study also measured people's reported levels of sexual activity. 712 respondents (66.3%) who did not experience the desire for parenting before the pandemic, nor during, reported no reduction in sexual intercourses—with no significant differences among genders. 60% of the couples who were already involved in childbearing attempts,

continued in this project and did not report a reduction in the number of sexual intercourses.

Commenting on the limitations of the study, the authors add that "it is unknown whether these findings will result in a substantial modification of birth rate in the near future".

**More information:** *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics and Gynecology*, [tandfonline.com/10.1080/0167482X.2020.1759545](https://doi.org/10.1080/0167482X.2020.1759545)

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