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## **Thesis Prospectus**

### Research Question

The purpose of this project is to determine whether there is a significant correlation between the restrictiveness of abortion laws and the number of cases of child maltreatment.

### Rationale

Theoretically, why should we expect a relationship between restrictiveness of abortion laws and child maltreatment?

Unintended pregnancy has been associated with lower-quality parental behaviors and outcomes in the prenatal phase, including late access to prenatal care (Hulsey, Laken, Miller, & Ager, 2000; Joyce, Kaestner, & Korenman, 2000; Kost, Landry, & Darroch, 1998), and delays in ceasing tobacco and alcohol use (Green-Raleigh, Lawrence, Chen, Devine, & Prue, 2005; Joyce et al., 2000; Kost et al., 1998). Additionally, unintended pregnancies result in higher rates of underweight and premature infants (IOM, 1995; Kost et al., 1998). Although less evidence exists, unintended pregnancy has also been associated with poorer postnatal and childhood outcomes. When one or both of the parents did not intend a pregnancy, attachment security and mental proficiency have been found to be comparatively lower (Bronte-Tinkew, Scott, & Horowitz, 2009). Additionally, feelings and thoughts that parents have about their children, even before birth, have been shown to affect the quality of later parenting (Fonagy, Steele, & Steele, 1991; Weiss, 1974). There is also evidence that children from unintended pregnancies are more likely to have difficulties in social, interpersonal, mental health, and occupational areas that persist into adulthood, including involvement in criminal activity (Dagg, 1991; David, 2011).

Unintended pregnancy demonstrates predictive value as one of the earliest identifiable risk-factors for child maltreatment. Regardless of whether the mother or father identified the pregnancy as being unintended, the relationship with maltreating behavior is very similar, although leading to different maltreatment types. Mothers' reports of unintended pregnancy are associated with psychological aggression, and neglect. Fathers' reports of unintended pregnancy are associated with physical aggression. Identifiable in the earliest stages of caregiving, unintended pregnancy may be an important risk-factor in the predicting and understanding child maltreatment. The circumstances surrounding a pregnancy may considerably impact the environment in which later parenting behaviors occur. These early circumstances set the stage, creating a trajectory for the subsequent environment, and can lead to a situation where children may enter the world unwanted and unwelcomed. In the literature, the broader category of unintended pregnancy is typically divided into two subcategories: mistimed and unwanted pregnancies. Mistimed pregnancies include those that occur either too early or too late to achieve family planning goals. Unwanted pregnancies are even more extreme, and occur among women who never wanted to have children at any time, as well as those who wanted no more children than they already had (Guterman, 2015).

### Theoretical Framework

Given the research cited above I believe that I will find a positive correlation between restrictiveness of abortion laws and the rate of child maltreatment because of the given correlation between unintended pregnancies and child maltreatment. The more restrictive a given country's abortion laws, the higher one can expect the number of unintended pregnancies in that country to be.

### Research Design

## 1. Case Selection

I will select 24 developing countries to examine. These countries will have varying levels of restrictiveness (and actual accessibility to services) and will be codified in an Index based on the content of their abortion laws.

Belize, Thailand, Mali, Kazakhstan, Mauritania, Senegal, Mexico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Oman, Serbia, Montenegro, Panamá, Algeria, Uruguay, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Costa Rica, and Jamaica, Macedonia are all likely candidates giving the extensive and reliable data available through the UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey.

Additionally, I will attempt to find data of corresponding depth for a smaller subset of developed countries.

## 2. Data

I plan to use data that will allow me to operationalize both my dependent and independent variables.

Independent variable: legality of and access to abortion

The World Health Organization's (WHO) Human Reproduction Programme (HRP) research website has extensive data on the legality and accessibility of abortion services in individual countries. Using this I will be able to create an index that will rank countries according to the legal situation and accessibility of abortion services.

<https://srhr.org/abortion-policies/countries>

Further reliable information is also available via the Guttmacher Institute.

<https://data.guttmacher.org/countries>

Dependent variable: child maltreatment

Definition: Child maltreatment is behavior toward a child that is outside the norms of conduct and entails substantial risk of causing physical or emotional harm. Four types of maltreatment are generally recognized: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse (psychological abuse), and neglect. Neglect is the failure to provide for or meet a child's basic physical, emotional, educational, and medical needs. Neglect differs from abuse in that it usually occurs without intent to harm. Physical neglect includes failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, supervision, and protection from potential harm. Emotional neglect is failure to provide affection or love or other kinds of emotional support. Educational neglect is failure to enroll a child in school, ensure attendance at school, or provide home schooling. Medical neglect is failure to ensure that a child receives appropriate preventive care (eg, vaccinations, routine dental examinations) or needed treatment for injuries or physical or mental disorders. Different forms of maltreatment often coexist, and overlap is considerable (Pekarsky, 2014).

The UNICEF Multi Cluster survey has a wealth of information on child well-being in the transitional countries listed above in the case selection. The wealth of data includes possible indicators of maltreatment such as figures on nutritional care, early childhood development index, child protection, postnatal health checks for newborns, learning materials, inadequate care, literacy, primary school entry.

<http://mics.unicef.org/surveys>

Control Variables:

In order to reduce the possibility of making conclusions about spurious relationships between abortion access and child maltreatment, my statistical analysis will include several control variables. The control variables need to account for things that could also be related to child maltreatment. Possible control variables include the country's poverty rate, literacy rate, attitudes towards corporal punishment, attitudes towards domestic violence, religious attitudes regarding family planning, and access to health care facilities.

### **3. Method**

In order to examine the relationship between abortion legality and availability and child maltreatment, I will be taking a two-level research approach that will include statistical analysis and extensive literature and legal review. The literature and legal review will focus primarily on the laws surrounding abortion in the case countries, and any previous studies, articles, critiques, or other pieces of literature regarding the availability and accessibility of these services. The statistical analysis (multivariate OLS regression) will help to quantitatively determine the strength of the relationship between abortion access and child neglect, controlling for other possible explanations, in order to make claims on the effects of laws regulating abortion legality and access and instances of child maltreatment.

Since it is likely that laws regulating abortion are not the only variables which have an effect on child maltreatment statistics, I will be taking into account other control variables (see above).

### **Proposed Outline of Chapters**

Chapter 1: Overview and Operationalization

I. Defining Abortion

II. Defining Child Maltreatment

III. Index of Abortion Restrictions and Availability

IV. Operationalizing Child Maltreatment

Chapter 2: Spectrum of Laws Surrounding Abortion – Case Studies

I. Legalized Case Study

II. Partially Legalized Case Study

III. Unclear Regulations Case Study

IV. Criminalized Case Study

Chapter 3: Statistical Analysis

I. Effects of Abortion Restrictions on Child Maltreatment

II. Other Variables

Chapter 4: The Relationship between Abortion Restrictions and Child Maltreatment

Chapter 5: Conclusions

#### Preliminary Bibliography

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3) <https://srhr.org/abortion-policies/countries>

4) <https://data.gutmacher.org/countries>

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