

# Male Pregnancy Intendedness: Links to Child Mental Proficiency and Attachment Security

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# “Pregnancy Intentions”

➤ *Pregnancy intentions* refer to men’s feelings about their partners’ pregnancies.

- **Intended**

- Wanted at the time of conception
- Includes pregnancies that occur later than when wanted

- **Mistimed**

- Not wanted at the time of conception, but wanted eventually

- **Unwanted**

- Not wanted either at the time of conception or at any other time

# Previous Research

Focus on women's pregnancy intentions

- *Men's* pregnancy intentions and effects on child well-being little researched
- Unintended (Mistimed/Unwanted) pregnancy for first-time fathers may:
  - Result in stressful transition to parenthood
  - Result in more adverse child outcomes
  - Lower men's levels of prenatal involvement
  - Affect the quality of the mother-father relationship
  - Lower men's level of involvement post-birth

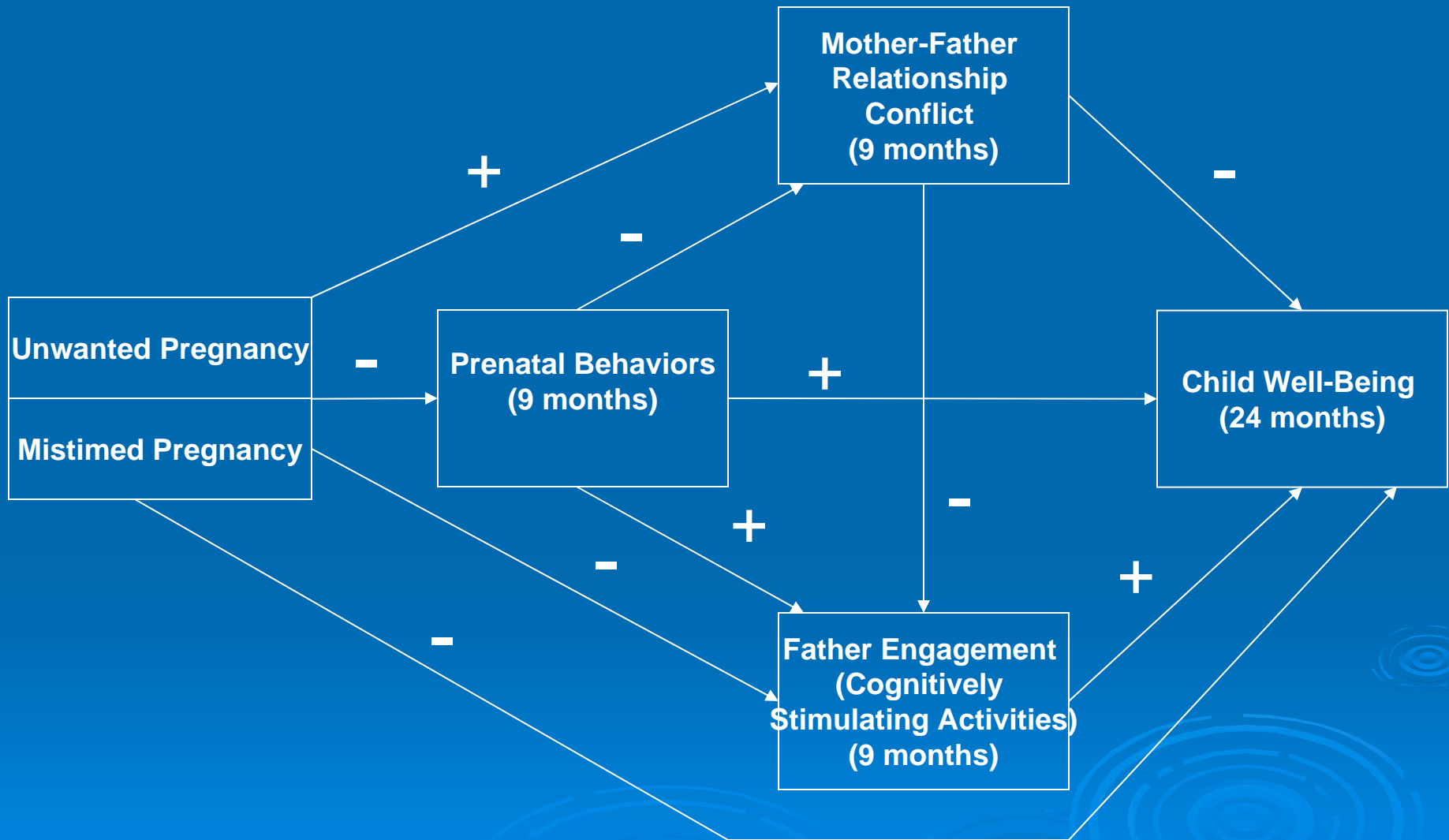
# Research Questions

Q.1: Are men's pregnancy intentions associated with children's mental proficiency and attachment security?

Q.2: Are these associations mediated by men's prenatal behaviors, the father-mother relationship, and post-birth father involvement?

Q.3: Do associations between father's pregnancy intentions and children's well-being differ by mother's pregnancy intentions?

# Figure 1. Hypothesized Associations between Pregnancy Intentions and Child Well-being



# Data and Sample

## ➤ **Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Birth Cohort (ECLS-B):**

- Nationally representative longitudinal study
- Designed to track children from infancy to first grade to assess experiences in variety of domains
  - Full sample includes 10,700 children born in 2001
- 9 and 24-month surveys
  - 9-month survey (10,700 children; 6,300 resident fathers)
  - 24-month survey (9,850 children; 5,850 resident fathers)

## ➤ **Analytical Sample:**

- 5,300 resident biological fathers who participated in both the 9-month and 24-month waves of study

# Measures

## Dependent Variables

### ➤ **Mental Proficiency (24 months)**

- Bayley Short Form - Research Edition (BSF-R) Mental Scale (Nord et al., 2004).
- Designed to assess early cognitive and language ability
- Score range: 92.6 – 173.3

### ➤ **Attachment Security (24 months)**

- Toddler Attachment Sort-45 (TAS-45)
- Dichotomous variable to indicate secure (64%) vs. insecure (36%) attachment (*disorganized, avoidant, or ambivalent* attachment styles)

# Measures

## Primary Predictor

- **Father's Pregnancy Intentions: (9 months)**
  - Men who reported not wanting a baby at any time coded as having unwanted pregnancy
  - Men who reported that the pregnancy occurred sooner than they wanted coded as having mistimed pregnancy
  - Men who reported that the pregnancy occurred later than they wanted or about the right time coded as having intended pregnancy

# Measures


## Mediators

### Mediator 1: Prenatal Behaviors (9-months)

- Father involvement in six activities prior to birth:
  - discussed pregnancy with mother
  - saw a sonogram or ultrasound of the baby
  - listened to the baby's heartbeat
  - felt the baby move
  - attended childbirth classes or Lamaze classes with the child's mother
  - bought things for the baby.
  
- Fathers involved in all six of these activities coded as 1 (high involvement), and fathers involved in fewer than 6 activities coded (low involvement).

# Measures Mediators

## Mediator 2: Father-Mother Relationship Quality (9 months)

- 10-item index of father's report of how often he and the child's mother argued about topics (e.g., chores and responsibilities, children, money etc.)
  - Range: 0-30 ( $\alpha = 0.81$ )
  - Higher scores = higher levels of conflict
- 

# Measures Mediators

## Mediator 3: Father Involvement (9 months)

- Involvement in *cognitively stimulating activities*
- Fathers report how frequently they:
  - Read
  - Told stories
  - Sang songs to the child
- Score range: 0 to 9 ( $\alpha = 0.80$ )
- Higher scores = more involvement in cognitively stimulating activities

# Measures

## Control Variables

### ➤ **Father Characteristics:**

- Marital status, race, education, employment, depressive symptoms (CES-D), age, perceptions of father role, depressive symptoms

### ➤ **Mother Characteristics:**

- Employment, pregnancy intentions (mistimed, unwanted, wanted)

### ➤ **Household Characteristics:**

- Poverty status, number of children in the household

### ➤ **Child Characteristics:**

- Gender, age

# Analytic Strategy

## ➤ Path Analysis

- Covariance estimation for mediational analyses
- Test direct & indirect effects of men's pregnancy intentions on child outcomes

## ➤ Sobel Tests

- Determine the statistical significance of pathways on child well-being outcomes

## ➤ Interaction Effects

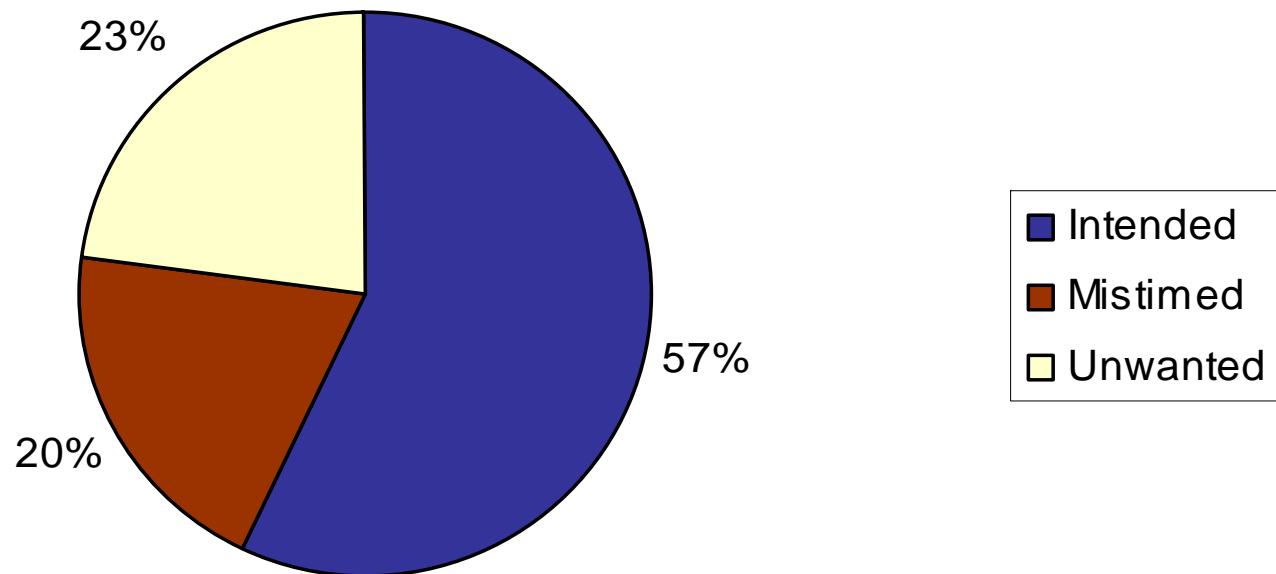
- Test whether the effect of father's pregnancy intentions differs based on mother's intentions

# Results

## Descriptive Statistics

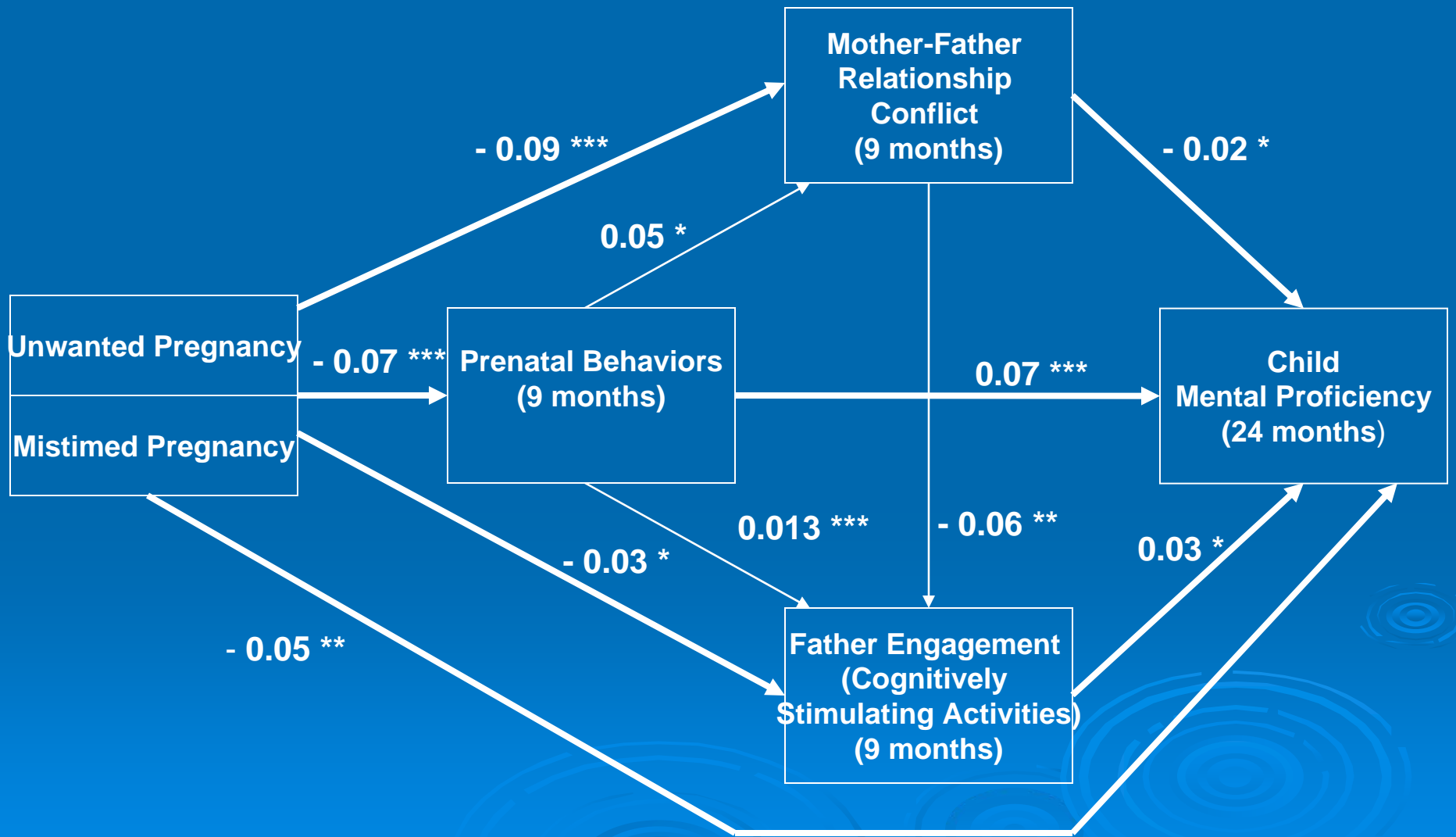
### ➤ Resident Biological Fathers

**Figure 1: Pregnancy Intentions Among Fathers**



# Figure 2

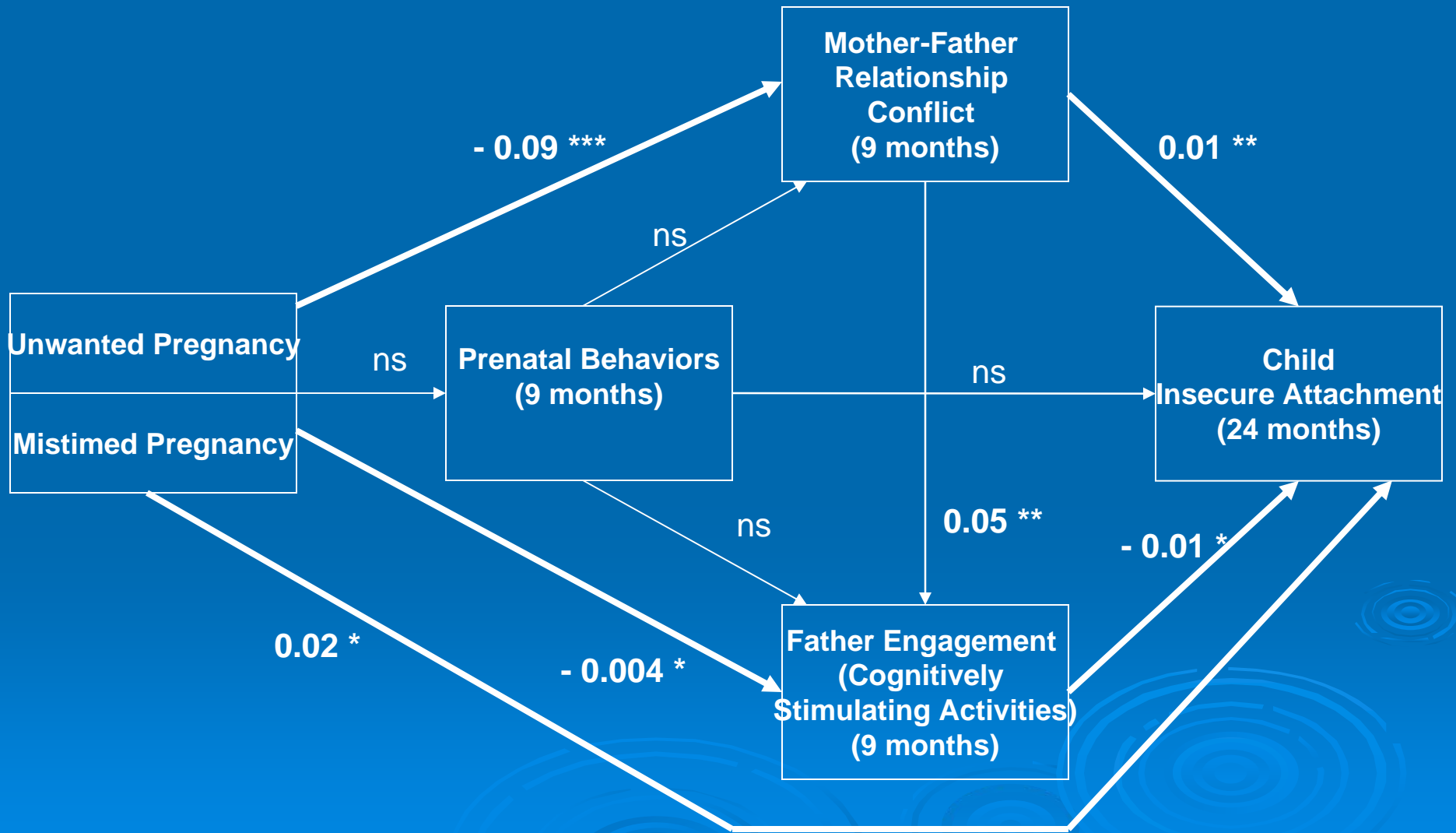
## Father's Pregnancy Intentions & Child Mental Proficiency



\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p < .001$

# Figure 3

## Father's Pregnancy Intentions & Attachment Security



\*p<.05 \*\*p<.01 \*\*\*p<.001

# Results

- Q3: Differences by Mother's Pregnancy Intentions
  - The strength of the negative association between fathers' pregnancy intentions and toddlers' attachment security was stronger if both parents did not intend the pregnancy.
  - No differences in the association between fathers' pregnancy intentions and mental proficiency by mothers' intentions.

# Summary

## ➤ Q.1: Direct associations

- Experiencing unwanted or mistimed pregnancy negatively associated with mental proficiency; positively associated with insecure attachment.

## ➤ Q.2: Indirect associations

- Prenatal behaviors, relationship conflict, father involvement important mediators between fathers' pregnancy intentions and child outcomes.
- Prenatal behaviors matter more for mental proficiency than insecure attachment.

## ➤ Q.3: Differences by Mother's Intentions

- Negative influence of pregnancy intentions on attachment if one or both parents did not intend. Associations stronger when neither parent intended pregnancy.

# Study Limitations

- Retrospective reports of intentions, at 9 months – possibility of recall error or distortion
- Use of a simple trichotomy of pregnancy intentions (wanted, mistimed, unwanted) may oversimplify fathers' feelings regarding the pregnancy
- Sample likely over-represents married fathers and fathers with strong attachments to children

# Policy Implications

- Men's pregnancy intentions important for child well-being.
- Need for programs that help men *and* women experience fertility according to their timing desires
- Increasing fathers involvement with children and relationship quality with partner should be focus of programs for fathers, especially those experiencing unwanted or mistimed pregnancy.



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