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## FSU News

### *FSU study: Abortion notification, consent laws reduce risky teen sex*

*by Jill Elish*

Laws that require minors to notify or get the consent of one or both parents before having an abortion reduce risky sexual behavior among teens, according to a Florida State University law professor.

Jonathan Klick, the Jeffrey A. Stoops Professor of Law, and Thomas Stratmann, professor of economics at George Mason University, came to that conclusion after they looked at the rates of gonorrhea among teenage girls as a measure of risky sex in connection to the parental notification or consent laws that were in effect at the time.



Jonathan Klick

The researchers found that teen gonorrhea rates dropped by an average of 20 percent for Hispanic girls and 12 percent for white girls in states where parental notification laws were in effect. The results were not statistically significant for black girls. The study will be published in an upcoming edition of *The Journal of Law Economics and Organization*.

"Incentives matter," Klick said. "They matter even in activities as primal as sex, and they matter even among teenagers, who are conventionally thought to be short-sighted. If the expected costs of risky sex are raised, teens will substitute less risky activities such as protected sex or abstinence."

In this case, the incentive for teens is to avoid having to tell their parents about a pregnancy by substituting less risky sex activities. In doing so, the researchers say, the rates of gonorrhea among girls under the age of 20 went down.

"This suggests that Hispanic and white teenage girls are forward looking in their sex decisions, and they systematically view informing their parents and obtaining parental consent as additional costs in obtaining an abortion, inducing them to engage in less risky sex when parental involvement laws are adopted," Klick said. "Unfortunately, the data do not allow us to differentiate between the possibility that teens engage in less sex or they simply have the same amount of sex but are more fastidious in their condom use."

The researchers ruled out the possibility that teens simply substitute risky sexual behaviors for which pregnancy is not a concern, such as oral or anal intercourse, because these activities still could transmit gonorrhea. The use of birth control pills also would not protect against the sexually transmitted disease.

The researchers used data from the Centers for Disease Control to determine the rates of gonorrhea for women by age and race for the years 1981 through 1998. Gonorrhea rates for teenage girls were compared to those of women 20 and older whose behavior would not be affected by the notification and consent laws. Using the rate of gonorrhea among older women as a control, the researchers were able to ensure that the decline in incidence among the teens was not simply reflective of an overall decline of the disease in the state.

Forty-four states, including Florida, have adopted laws requiring minors to obtain consent or notify one or both parents prior to an abortion, but the laws have been blocked by the courts or otherwise not yet enforced in nine of those states, according to the Center for Reproductive Rights.

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