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Research Shows Teens Seeking Judicial Bypass for Abortion Demonstrate Reasoned and Thoughtful Decision Making

Teens consider a wide range of factors in choosing abortion, actively seek social support, and correctly predict negative reactions of others

AUSTIN, Texas—New research shows that pregnant teens who seek a judicial bypass for parental consent for abortion demonstrate reason and thoughtful decision-making and involve others, all while managing abortion stigma. This study, based on in-depth interviews of 20 teens who had sought judicial bypass in Texas between 2015 and 2016, was recently published in *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. The lead authors, from the University of Colorado, conducted the research as part of [Texas Policy Evaluation Project](#) (TxPEP).

The study shows:

Teens fully consider their abortion decision: The study shows that teens research their pregnancy options and consider a wide range of factors in their decision, including the impact of parenting on their goals and futures and their ability to care for and nurture a child. They also carefully anticipate difficulties stemming from lack of support in their lives.

Teens consult others: Almost all teens confided in the male involved in the pregnancy, and most also discussed their decision with other trusted figures.

Teens correctly anticipate shame and stigma: Throughout the process of seeking abortion, the teens in the study experienced others' negative reactions to their decisions, including disagreement, shame, and emotional abuse. Some teens were exposed to these reactions even from people who accepted the teen's decisions.

"Our study shows that even when they cannot involve a parent, teens involve other trusted individuals, thoroughly think through their pregnancy decisions, and consider their own well-being—as well as that of their family and a potential child," says Kate Coleman-Minahan, assistant professor in the University of Colorado College of Nursing and researcher at TxPEP. "Our study suggests that policies that force young people to disclose their pregnancy or

abortion to a parent in order to obtain abortion care, without regard to their relationship to their parents, are harmful and can expose them to abandonment or abuse from parents.”

“Teens who seek judicial bypass must navigate many hurdles in order to even make it to court. The strength and resiliency required to navigate the bypass process shows that they are thoughtful and careful as they make reproductive decisions,” says Amanda Stevenson, assistant professor of sociology at CU Boulder and TxPEP researcher. “Policymakers should know that adolescents who seek judicial bypass display careful decision-making and a capacity to correctly assess the risks of involving their parents when considering parental consent laws.”

Although the majority of teens under 18 willingly involve a parent, thirty-seven states require minors to notify or obtain consent from parents if they are seeking an abortion. The state of Texas, where the study was conducted, requires parental consent. Teens who cannot or do not want to involve a parent can try to obtain a judicial bypass of parental consent by proving to a judge that they are mature enough to make the decision or that involving a parent is not in their best interest.

A Florida bill set to replace a parental notification for abortion requirement with a parental consent law is currently a step from final passage.

Previous research by the team on judicial bypass for parental consent to abortion has focused on how [judges sometimes deny abortion care to teens](#) and how [the numerous hurdles and emotional consequences of the bypass process can work as a form of punishment](#) for pregnant teens.

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About the Texas Policy Evaluation Project

The [Texas Policy Evaluation Project](#), or TxPEP, is a comprehensive effort to document and analyze the impact of the measures affecting reproductive health passed by the Texas Legislature. The project team includes researchers at The University of Texas at Austin Population Research Center, the University of California San Francisco, and Ibis Reproductive Health. The project is supported by grants from the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation. Infrastructure support for the Population Research Center is provided by a grant from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Funders of the Texas Policy Evaluation Project have no role in the design and conduct of the research, interpretation of the data, approval of the final manuscript or decision to publish.