

## Parental Notification for under-16s seeking an abortion

### Frequently Asked Questions

Question	Answer
<b>Is there any information on how many young people involve their parents in their abortion decision?</b>	<p>There is no definitive research on the number of young people that talk to a parent, guardian or trusted adult about their abortion decision in New Zealand. However, anecdotal evidence from physicians indicates that the majority of under-16s are supported by a family or whānau member. This aligns with international evidence, particularly from the US, showing that the majority of young people are likely to involve a parent. One study of young people<sup>1</sup> indicated that up to 90% of 14 year olds and 75% of 15 year olds involved one parent in states without mandatory parental notification laws.</p>
<b>Do parental involvement laws reduce the abortion rate?</b>	<p>A literature review conducted by the Guttmacher Institute<sup>2</sup> found inconclusive evidence of the actual impact of parental involvement laws in the US. Many of the studies that were reviewed reported a decline in minors' abortion rate associated with parental involvement laws. However, most of these studies did not measure abortions among minors who leave the state, or stop coming into the state, because of the law.</p> <p>Research suggests that parental involvement laws do not affect teen pregnancy rates, nor do they stop young people from having sex.</p>
<b>What do doctors think about parental involvement laws?</b>	<p>During the debate over parental involvement in 2004, all major medical bodies in New Zealand opposed mandated parental involvement including the New Zealand Medical Association and the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners. This aligns with international medical bodies, particularly the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO), that advise against parental involvement laws.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Hendshaw and Kost, 1992. 'Parental involvement in minors' abortion decision.' *Family Planning Perspectives* 25(5): 196-207.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis, et. Al., 2009. 'The impact of laws requiring parental involvement for abortion: a literature review.' New York: Guttmacher Institute.

In its Rights-Based Code of Ethics<sup>3</sup>, FIGO stated:

*“Assure that adolescent women are treated without age discrimination, according to their evolving capacities, in facilitating them to make free and informed decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health”*

**What do young people think about parental involvement laws?**

There is no New Zealand based research on what young people think about parental involvement laws. What we do know is that 20.8% of females surveyed as part of the Youth 2000 series said they had not sought health care in 2012 because they worried about their privacy being kept. This is a concerning number in and of itself, but requiring mandated parental involvement for abortion has been shown to compromise physical health and wellbeing of young people as they delay or do not to seek care out of fear that their parents will have to told.

**Are parental involvement laws designed to protect the health and welfare of minors?**

The claim that abortion has serious or lasting medical, emotional and psychological consequences is incorrect and not scientifically supported. Abortion is a very safe procedure when performed by a trained professional (it is 14 times safer than carrying a pregnancy to term). Studies conducted on the psychological impact of abortion have also proven that abortion does not cause mental illness. Patients with a pre-existing mental health illness were more likely to have mental health problems post-abortion, while having an unwanted pregnancy was also associated with increased risk of mental health problems.<sup>4</sup>

Parental involvement laws are usually designed by anti-choice groups who use the sensitive issue of under 16s to incrementally erode access to safe and legal abortion. Some parents support such laws because of a genuine desire to be part of their children’s lives and to ensure they are there to support them.

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<sup>3</sup> Published in October 2003. Available online at: [http://www.figo.org/sites/default/files/uploads/wg-publications/wsr/Rights-Based\\_%20Code\\_of\\_Ethics\\_October%202003%20-%20Copy%20-%20Copy.pdf](http://www.figo.org/sites/default/files/uploads/wg-publications/wsr/Rights-Based_%20Code_of_Ethics_October%202003%20-%20Copy%20-%20Copy.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See the American Psychological Association, The National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health part of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, and the Turnaway study out of the University of California, San Francisco’s Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health (ANSIRH) for more detail on comprehensive studies relating to mental health and women’s satisfaction with their abortion decision.

Unfortunately, parental involvement laws frequently have the opposite effect; they compromise a minor's health and welfare by delaying care and potentially forcing them to seek an unsafe or self-performed abortion. These laws also have wider implications, with many young people feeling as if their confidentiality and privacy have been compromised, and not seeking care for other sexual and reproductive health issues, e.g. STIs, because of a lack of trust.

**Are there a lot of under-16s who are sexually active?**

The Youth 2000 survey series of secondary school students (carried out in 2001, 2007 and 2012) found decreases in sexual activity between 2007 and 2012. In New Zealand and overseas, teenage pregnancy rates have declined substantially, especially for younger teenagers.

Specifically, the Health and Wellbeing of New Zealand Secondary School Student in 2012, part of the Youth 2000 series, highlights that 11% of the under 16s surveyed reported that they were sexually active (594 under-16s out of 5332). The number of sexually active under-16s increased with age: 100 were 13 and under (5.6%), 176 were 14 (9.6%) and 318 were 15 (18.8%).

## **Family Planning believes the following in relation to abortion for under-16s**

- Family Planning supports the current law which allows young people to make autonomous and confidential decisions regarding their reproductive decisions, including abortion.
- We recognise the evolving capacity of the young person, while also believing doctors are empowered to use their own medical judgment regarding the competency of each patient to provide informed consent.
- Family Planning promotes and encourages young people to talk to a parent, guardian or whanau regarding their reproductive decisions.
- However, we do recognise that parental involvement is not always recommended, particularly in situations of physical or emotional violence, and we trust young people to determine their own safety.
- Family Planning promotes the findings of peer-reviewed, internationally recognised and published clinical studies which have confirmed that there are no long-term medical, physical or mental risks associated with abortion.
- Family Planning believes it sets a dangerous precedent to make an arbitrary distinction between abortion and other reproductive health decisions, like contraception, continuing a pregnancy or adoption, where no parental involvement is required.