

Do Adolescents Need Parental Permission for Pregnancy Termination?¹

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The paper “Should Physicians Elicit Parental Permission before Providing Termination of Pregnancy to All Adolescent Patients”, available online prior to the publication in *Central European Journal of Paediatrics*, offers not only an interesting review of legislation on pregnancy termination in adolescents worldwide but also the analysis of their potential consequences (1). As authors have stated, this is an important health issue, since adolescent girls are a group at high risk of suffering from obstetric complications as well as the group prone to unsafe abortion with the number of unsafe abortions performed in this age group globally every year estimated at 3.9 million. Therefore, pregnancy termination in adolescents is an important public health issue and a medical procedure that requires a multidisciplinary approach. Although unintended pregnancy and pregnancy termination in adolescents are prevalent, with significant consequences on girl's health and life, the subject of pregnancy termination in all age groups, especially in adolescents, is still a controversial topic, even in academia. All this demonstrates the importance of

papers like the one authored by Stamenković and Jeremić Stojković. Here are some points from the paper that I would like to emphasize.

Throughout the paper authors use the term “adolescent”. According to the *World Health Organization (WHO)*, adolescence is a period of life between childhood and adulthood and numerically speaking it is the age between 10 and 19 (2). It is important to point this out since the legislation is usually applicable to minors i.e., persons under the age of 18. The term adolescent is not recognised by law as far as it could be concluded from the review offered by the authors. All persons under the age of 19 are a vulnerable category of the population, but according to the legislation worldwide, when it comes to pregnancy termination, only minors and adults are recognised. This means that usually there is a difference in procedure preceding pregnancy termination in an adolescent who is 17.9 and an adolescent who is 18.0 years old.

It is shown how both types of legislation, those that demand permission of a parent/guardian for adolescents to terminate pregnancy and those that do not, can have both positive and negative impacts on an adolescent undergoing the procedure of pregnancy termination. This implies that an individual approach is needed.

¹Reader's Commentary on Paper: “Should Physicians Elicit Parental Permission before Providing Termination of Pregnancy to All Adolescent Patients” by Stamenković and Jeremić Stojković. *Central Eur J Paed.* 2021;17(2):157-61. 10.5457/p2005-114.304.

One of the main reasons in favour of obligatory permission of a parent/guardian is that 'adolescents are not mature enough to be aware of all potential, both short-term and long-term, consequences of pregnancy termination'. This type of legislations protects only the system, not the patient, because, for instance, no one can be aware of the patient's background. Therefore, an adolescent would be protected better if counselling was offered before making a decision on the outcome of unintended pregnancy. This requires engagement of different specialists – gynaecologists, paediatricians, family practitioners and psychologists.

It is commonly believed almost like a myth that all adolescent pregnancies are unwanted and unplanned, which does not have to be the case. Therefore, as the systemic support is needed for adolescent who decide to terminate their pregnancy, the support is also needed for those who decide to continue with the pregnancy. In both cases, adolescents are encountering a life changing event and can never be prepared enough, both physically and psychologically.

Thanks to this paper, which brings up an important global issue, important conclusions can be brought to attention and the most important con-

clusion is that approach to a pregnancy in adolescents should be individualised. Better prevention, health education at younger age, would lead to lesser number of unintended pregnancies in adolescents and in that way increase availability of resources for those that still do have to decide on the outcome of the pregnancy by providing them with individualised counselling, which has the goal of making sure that the pregnant adolescent is aware of all short-term and long-term outcomes of both possible decisions – to terminate or continue with the pregnancy.

Conflict of Interest: Author declare that she is a member of the Editorial Team of *Central European Journal of Paediatrics*.

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