

# British Study Finds Family Planning Increases Teen Pregnancies

by Paul Burnell

NOTTINGHAM, England – In the mid-1980's, Catholic mom Victoria Gillick became a much derided figure in Britain when she went to the highest court in the land to challenge doctors handing out the contraceptive pill to underage girls. Courtesy of her prophecy that the policy would only lead to an upsurge in teen sex and pregnancies, the mother of 10 became a hated figure and an object of scorn among politically correct media commentators and the family planning lobby. Initially she secured a ruling that doctors had to tell the parents of teens if they were prescribing the pill to girls under 16 (the UK age of consent is 16). The ruling was later overturned, but Gillick has been proved right by new academic research, which has shown a continuing rise in teen pregnancy and sexual activity despite the greater availability of state funded contraception and sex education programs.

A study by Dr. David Paton of Nottingham University Business School has found no evidence that providing family planning reduces either underage conception or abortion rates among teen-age girls under age 16 in the U.K. Figures compiled by the U.K. Office of National Statistics for 2000 revealed that 4,382 girls under age 16 had abortions, up 200 from the year before and a rise of more than 20% over the 1992 figure of 3,510. In fact Paton's study, published in the March 2002 edition of the *Journal of Health Economics*, has found some evidence that greater access to family planning services is associated with an increase in underage pregnancy. The UK has one of the highest rates of teen-age pregnancy in Europe. The government of British Prime Minister Tony Blair has committed itself to halving the rate of conceptions among those under 18 by 2010. One of its main planks is easier access to contraception and the morning-after pill for teens.

Paton, a senior lecturer in industrial economics, investigated the impact of family planning on teen-age conceptions and abortions by testing data from 16 UK regions during a 14-year period. One of the aims of Paton's research was to explore the impact of the 1984 "Gillick ruling," which severely reduced attendance by teen-agers at family planning clinics in the UK until it was overturned. Paton explained: "This ruling provided us with a useful natural experiment involving a change in public policy." Contrary to forecasts, the Gillick ruling, which forced health professionals to inform parents before providing contraceptives to females under age 16, did not lead to an increase in underage pregnancies. "My research casts serious doubt on current government policy," Paton said. "Over the past few years, we have had a massive expansion in family planning services for young people in the UK, yet there is no evidence that this has reduced either underage pregnancy or abortion rates."

## Encourage Sex

Said Paton, "Although family planning may make sexually active teen-agers less likely to get pregnant, it seems that it also encourages others to start having sex. I think you can say the ruling has vindicated Mrs. Gillick although you have to be a bit careful," he added. "The pregnancy rates has stayed pretty much the same, more young people are having sex but the same proportion of them are getting pregnant." And given his findings, Paton said the recent policy of easier availability for the morning-after pill for teens has been disastrous. Paton's findings confirm other recent British research. A 1999 study by Gerald Oettinger in the *Journal of Political Economy* found that increased use of family planning information did not lead to a decrease in unwanted pregnancies, the *Guardian* newspaper reported March 17. The provision of such information resulted instead in an increase in the sexual activity of teen-age boys.

As well, a study published by the *British Medical Journal* in 2000 found that girls who were prescribed the morning-after pill were much more likely to have abortions. Gillick takes no pleasure in this statistical validation of her arguments. "It is a vindication of what I always said and what all the pro-family and pro-life groups have said: That an increase in contraception provision, particularly to underage children, does not reduce the levels of pregnancy but it does increase levels of promiscuity and abortion," she said. However, Gillick does not assign primary blame to the Blair government, noting that the policy was the same under previous Conservative governments. "It doesn't matter what political party gets into office; the Department of Health breaks them into their policy," Gillick said. "There are strong links between the contraceptive industry and government, and government will not change its policy. For example the second – in-command at the new teen-age pregnancy unit is Alison Hadley, former press

officer for Brook Advisory Centers, which provides abortion and the morning-after pill for teens." Gillick said that the result of this government promotion is a sex-obsessed culture among teens. Despite repeated attempts to get comment by phone and e-mail from the British Government Department of Health, there was no response to the Register's requests.

### **One Teen's Experience**

Mark, 17 recalled his experiences at a Catholic high school: "My friends at school were always talking about sex. Once in my classroom I was sitting between two boys, one of whom was saying to the other that there were no good 'porno' films on the TV last week," he said. "I was so disgusted that I suddenly interrupted their conversation and told them more people go to hell for sexual impurity than for anything else. I had read about the children of Fatima seeing hell and being taken there by Our Lady," Mark said. "I don't intend to preach to my schoolmates but it is hard to put up with their dirty talk," he said.

Family planning programs aimed at youth also create a tolerance for abortion. "Many of my school friends thought that human life in the womb is not a baby but a collection of cells," Mark said. "I try to tell them about a baby's soul but they don't believe me and most of them think abortion is OK." As a possible alternative to Britain's successful promotion of family planning as a means of reducing teen pregnancies, Paton intends to study the effects of abstinence programs in the United States. "There is little hard evidence about these programs at the moment," he said. "The only evidence available is anecdotal, although this has suggested that it is successful.

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