Change in the Second-Trimester Abortion Rate

The high proportion of second-trimester abortions among teenagers aged 17 years and 8–9 months who delayed until they were 18 does not necessarily imply that the rate of second-trimester abortions increased among this group. First, the law caused a decrease in the abortion rate among minors, which may have occurred disproportionately among those who would have obtained an abortion in the first trimester in the absence of the law. Second, abortion rates among all teenagers and minors in Texas declined during the 1990s. In other words, even without the law, we would expect a decrease in the rate of second-trimester abortions commensurate with the decline in the overall abortion rate among minors.

To illustrate, we show the number of second-trimester abortions per 1,000 population in 1998–1999 and in 2000–2003 by teenagers’ age at conception (Table 2, page 124). Among minors aged 17 years and 10–11 months, the rate fell from 4.0 to 3.2. This is approximately a 22% reduction, as indicated by the rate ratio (0.78). If these oldest minors were unaffected by the law, then the decline in their second-trimester abortion rate was due to ongoing trends in abortions. Minors aged 17 years and 8–9 months at conception also experienced a decline (from 3.7 to 3.5), but it was much smaller (5%). This suggests that Texas’s law was associated with a relative increase of 21% in the second-trimester abortion rate of minors aged 17 years and 8–9 months, as indicated by the relative rate ratio (p=.06; one-tailed test).

Our findings that are based on the number of second-trimester abortions per 1,000 pregnancies are very similar. Minors aged 17 years and 8–9 months experienced a 3% increase in the proportion of pregnancies that were terminated in the second trimester, while those aged 17 years and 10–11 months experienced a decline of 16%. In relative terms, the second-trimester abortion rate per 1,000 pregnancies among minors aged 17 years and 8–9 months increased by 22% (p=.06; one-tailed test).

We also compared the change in the second-trimester abortion rate among teenagers aged 17 years and 10–11 months with the change among teenagers aged 17 years and 6–7 months. If we are correct in attributing the increase in the risk of second-trimester abortions among minors aged 17 years and eight 8–9 months to the effort to circumvent Texas’s law, then we should find no such increase among the younger 17-year-olds. The estimates support our hypothesis. We found no increase in the second-trimester abortion rate per 1,000 population among minors aged 17 years and 6–7 months. Among the three groups of 17-year-olds, the youngest experienced the largest decline in this outcome (35%). In other words, their second-trimester abortion rate declined by 18% more than the rate of minors aged 17 years and 10–11 months, indicating that Texas’s law may have led to a reduction in the risk of second-trimester abortion for this younger group, although this change was not statistically significant (p=.14). The estimates that are based on the number of second-trimester abortions per 1,000 pregnancies yield the same findings (a decline of 18%; p=.14).

Our main conclusion as to the likely impact of Texas’s parental notification statute on the second-trimester abortion rate of minors who delay does not change if the outcomes of teenagers aged 18 years and 1–2 months serve as the counterfactual. This group also experienced a decline in the number of second-trimester abortions as measured both per 1,000 population and per 1,000 pregnancies, although the decline was smaller than that experienced by minors aged 17 years and 10–11 months.