

FIGO Human Rights and Women's Health Case 5

No easy choices for a pregnant teenager

O.P., an unmarried 15-year-old high school student, finds herself pregnant by her 17-year-old boyfriend of several months. She estimates she is 10 weeks pregnant and visits a doctor to ask for an abortion.

O.P.'s parents have made it very clear that they would no longer allow her to live at home and would withdraw all financial support were she to become pregnant before marriage. O.P. has always aspired to attend college and graduate school. Her family knows about her relationship with the young man but they are unaware of its sexual nature. In her country, the law requires parental consent in all health care services for minors under the age of 16 years. It also provides for abortion for any woman upon request, up to 12 weeks of pregnancy. However, the doctor refuses to perform an abortion for O.P. unless one of her parents provides consent for the procedure.

Questions for discussion

1. What are the medical issues in this case? Specifically:
 - a. What are the health risks and benefits of a termination procedure at 10 weeks' gestation?
 - b. How do these risks change if the procedure is delayed for a further 4–6 weeks?
 - c. What are the health risks if this girl undergoes an unsafe abortion?
 - d. What are the likely health and social outcomes of a pregnancy for this 15 year old?
2. Using the Integrated Human Rights and Health Checklist, identify the human rights that were infringed in this case.
3. How does the law in your country/state/province recognize the principles of evolving capacity or best interest of the child as it applies to medical care?
4. How do your responses to the above questions guide your support of O.P.'s decision-making authority free from parental consent?

