

# THE EFFECTS OF MINOR CONSENT LAWS ON SUBSTANCE USE TREATMENT UTILIZATION AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

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## Background:

Minor consent laws in the United States (US) enable minors to independently consent to medical care without involving their parent or guardian. These state laws are intended to remove barriers to care, especially for minors who face stigma in seeking certain treatment services, such as treatment for substance use disorders (SUD). The proposed study aims to assess whether changes in minor consent laws for SUD treatment impact subsequent changes in SUD treatment utilization among US adolescents.

## Methods:

Our team applied legal epidemiologic methods to code US state laws from 1900—2024 that establish the minimum age and conditions under which adolescents may independently consent to outpatient, residential, and prescription medication treatment for SUD. We then merged these data with National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) data from 2002—2019 among minors ages 12—17. To test for associations between minors' legal ability to independently consent to care and changes in self-reported use of treatment or counseling for alcohol or drug use in the past 12 months, we will use a difference-in-differences approach with event study specification. Negative binomial regression models will include state and month fixed effects.

## Results:

Between January 2002 and December 2019, two states (Delaware and New Mexico) passed laws enabling minors to independently consent to SUD treatment. Forthcoming analyses will compare differences in adolescent SUD treatment utilization before and after statewide implementation of minor consent laws to changes in SUD treatment utilization among adolescents in the five US states without such laws.

## Conclusion:

Although minor consent laws are meant to decrease barriers to SUD treatment, our findings will illuminate whether these laws impact SUD treatment utilization among adolescents in the US. Knowledge about the impact of these laws will help inform future policies and interventions related to the implementation of these laws in practice.

## Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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