

## **Availability of oral contraceptives free of charge and induced pregnancy rates among teenagers - results from a municipality based intervention study in Norway**

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**Objective:** To study frequency of contraceptive counselling and prescription of oral contraceptives (OCs) provided by public health nurses/midwives in relation to teenage pregnancy rates.

**Methods:** In the intervention municipality (TH) teenagers were provided OCs free of charge from three selected youth clinics, while no such intervention was initiated in the control municipality (DR).

The study was run as a clinical trial from August 31, 1998 through December 31, 2000. All visits at the selected youth clinics in TH and DR were computerised, as were consultations that resulted in an OC prescription. Intervals for follow-up were scheduled at 3-6 months. All analyses were done in SPSS.

**Results:** In TH the frequency of contraceptive counselling increased by a four-fold over the study period compared with a 1/10 increase in DR. In TH the study recruited over 600 new OC users over an inclusion-period of 16 months, mainly among teens aged 16 through 19 (> 80%). Among teens 17-19 years, the relative abortion rate decreased by 34% and the relative birth rate decreased by 24% from the years 1996-98 to 1999-2000 between the intervention and control municipality.

**Conclusion:** The study has demonstrated that young women seek contraceptive counselling and advice at youth clinics when the providers have professional competence. The significant decrease in teenage pregnancy as shown in this study lead the Norwegian government to introduce OCs free of charge to all women 19 years of age or younger from January 1, 2002. Furthermore, the results may give public health nurses/midwives the right to prescribe OCs on general terms. The Norwegian government will make a decision on this issue later this year (2002).