AWARD GIVEN BY THE VERNON PRIZE COMMITTEE FOR VOLUME 33 OF JPAM

Tal Gross, Jeanne Lafortune, and Corinne Low

“What Happens the Morning After? The Costs and Benefits of Expanding Access to Emergency Contraception”

Over the past 15 years, a series of changes in state and federal policy have expanded access to emergency contraception, capable of preventing pregnancy after sex. This paper uses a difference-in-difference approach to study the impact of this expanded access on birth rates, abortion rates, method of obtaining emergency contraception, and reported sexual assault. The analysis, motivated by a helpful theoretical framework, is comprehensive, nuanced, transparent, and carefully executed. The authors overcame significant challenges in assembling a national dataset. While the analysis shows no significant impact on birth or abortion rates—consistent with the ambiguous theoretical prediction—it reveals a potentially important, policy-relevant, and unintended consequence of expanded access on the reporting of sexual assault. This article credibly and convincingly expands our understanding of both social scientific models of sexual behavior and the implications of an important national policy change.

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