

Top publication honor awarded to Tulane SPHTM center

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Faculty from the [Mary Amelia Douglas-Whited Community Women's Health Education Center](#) (MAC) were honored with the Charles E. Gibbs Leadership Prize for the best paper published in the journal *Women's Health Issues* in 2017. MAC is part of the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

The manuscript, entitled "[The Status of Women's Reproductive Rights and Adverse Birth Outcomes](#)," was authored by [Dr. Maeve Wallace](#), research assistant professor of Global Community Health and Behavioral Sciences, and co-authored by Dr. Melissa Goldin Evans of the LSU School of Public Health and [Dr. Katherine Theall](#), MAC director and associate professor of Global Community Health and Behavioral Sciences.



Maeve Wallace, pictured with award.

Reproductive rights afford women the ability to decide the number, timing, and spacing of children, access to the information and resources needed to exercise voluntary choice, and the right to the highest attainable standard of health for themselves and their children. The study focused on the relationship between state laws that shape the breadth and scope of women's reproductive rights and two adverse birth outcomes (preterm birth and low birth weight) in every US state. The

authors examined six policies that dictate access to comprehensive reproductive health care services including abortion, eligibility for Medicaid family planning services, and sex education in schools.

In order to assess the strength of reproductive rights in each state, the authors developed a reproductive rights composite index to combine these policy indicators and score states based on the presence or absence of the policies in 2011. Lower scores indicated weaker reproductive rights while higher scores indicated stronger reproductive rights. The authors found that women in states with the most restrictive (weakest) reproductive rights climates had greater odds of delivering a preterm or low birth weight infant in the following year (2012) when compared to women in states with the strongest reproductive rights.

“States that support and promote women’s abilities and resources to make reproductive decisions for themselves and their families have healthier maternal and child populations,” the authors report. The paper was published in *Women’s Health Issues* Volume 27, Issue 2 (March/April 2017).

The Charles E. Gibbs Leadership Prize is awarded annually to recognize excellence in research on women’s healthcare or policy. Priority is given to manuscripts that report the results of original research and that improve understanding of an important women’s health issue.