

# Over 5,600 Irish women sought abortion pills online

Study finds many used service as they could not afford to travel abroad for a termination

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More than 5,600 women in Ireland tried to buy abortion pills online over a five-year period using a leading web supplier based in the Netherlands, according to a new study.

Pills were shipped by the Women on Web (WoW) site to 1,642 women in Ireland between 2010 and 2012, the research indicates.



The sale of prescription only medicines by mail order is prohibited in Ireland, including supply via the internet.

Follow-up data indicates a high level of satisfaction with the service, with 94 per cent of those who completed a consultation form saying they were “grateful” for the option of obtaining a medical abortion online, according to the study published in the *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*.

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Almost 2 per cent of the women surveyed gave rape as the reason for availing of the service. The main reasons given were contraception being used incorrectly or not working (54 per cent) and a failure to use contraception (44 per cent).

## ‘Cannot cope’

The most common reason for deciding to terminate a pregnancy, given by 62 per cent of women, was “I just cannot cope with a child at this point in my life”. Almost 44 per cent said they had no money to raise a child, and 23 per cent felt their family was complete.

Some 79 per cent of the women were under seven weeks pregnant, and the rest were between seven and nine weeks. The service is not available beyond nine weeks.

Just over one-third of the women had no children, while the rest had families of varying sizes. Less than 5 per cent were under the age of 20.

The vast majority of respondents said an at-home medical termination of pregnancy was the right choice for them, and would recommend the service to others. Seventy per cent said they had felt “relieved” afterwards; 17 per cent said they felt “guilty”.

## Money worries

One-third of women said they had difficulty affording the €70-90 donation requested by WoW, while one in four said they could not talk to family and friends about the issue or ask them for help.

Under the system operated by WoW, a doctor provides a prescription for a woman and the abortion-inducing drugs, mifepristone and misoprostol, are dispatched by a separate organisation. Shipments to Ireland are sent in the first place to a Northern Irish address. An online helpdesk provides post-abortion follow-up.

The authors, from US and Scottish universities, said women characterised the ability to choose at-home medical termination as an essential service in the context of their personal circumstances.

The experiences of women with few economic resources suggested a “grave inequity” in their ability to access a termination, they added. “Women noted their inability to afford travel abroad, to take time away from children and work, to arrange travel without their families’ knowledge, or to travel at all due to migrant status.”

Women also spoke about the stigma attached to pregnancy in some social circumstances, the stigma surrounding termination and the “psychological suffering caused by having no option but to continue a pregnancy they did not want or feel they could continue”.

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