

Demand for abortion pills highlights need for change in the law

Analysis shows women can decide for themselves the best reproductive choice

Mon, Oct 17, 2016, 01:00

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Abortion may be illegal in Ireland, but it is far from rare. Each year thousands of Irish women travel from Ireland to England and Wales to access abortion services. An increasing number of women are accessing abortion at home through online telemedicine. In the past six years, more than 5,000 women in Ireland and Northern Ireland have sought at-home abortion. These are often women who cannot afford to travel abroad, who are unable to take time away from work or family, or who cannot risk the journey for fear of being found out.



We are the authors of a recent study that explored the experiences of Irish and Northern Irish women who sought and obtained early medical abortion (up to nine weeks gestation at the time of request) through online telemedicine service Women on Web. Our findings provide a new dimension to the ongoing debate, as well as an indication of the impact a repeal of the constitutional ban on abortion – the Eighth Amendment – could have.

The most striking finding from our examination of at-home medical abortion is the clear benefits women reported for their health, wellbeing and autonomy. Virtually all women – 97 per cent – felt abortion using online telemedicine was the right choice for them and 98 per cent said they would recommend the option to other women in a similar situation.

Most women described a mix of feelings after their abortion. By far the most commonly reported feeling was relief (70 per cent), followed by satisfaction (36 per cent) and happiness (27 per cent). These positive emotions stood in stark contrast to the psychological trauma many anticipated if they had been forced to continue a pregnancy they did not want or felt they could not keep. As one woman explained: “The restriction of abortion in this country can lead to overwhelming distress, depression, despair. In that respect the law is a brutality against women.”

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The clear message from our analysis is that women can decide for themselves the best reproductive choice for their own individual situations. Moreover, abortion can be a positive, health-promoting choice.

Shroud of secrecy

Yet almost all women in the study shared one common negative experience: the shroud of secrecy behind which they were compelled to keep their abortions. After all, abortion in Ireland is a crime. And with that status comes fear, silence and isolation. Those with fewest financial resources are also the most likely to lack adequate support from friends and family.

It is for precisely this reason that maintaining the status quo on abortion will not resolve the harm Ireland's current abortion law does to women. Women are hurt by the law not because they cannot obtain abortions, but because they are forced to obtain and conduct them in a climate of isolation, anxiety, and shame. Only a repeal of the Eighth Amendment would finally allow Irish women to have the abortions they are already having, free from government-sanctioned stigma and suffering.

The stories of other Irish women who have been denied travel, who have suffered serious harm, and who have died as a

result of Ireland's restrictive laws have already prompted the United Nations to call on Ireland for abortion reform. But since many of these cases involved a diagnosis of severe or fatal foetal anomaly, some still favour only a narrow foetal anomaly exception to the current law.

Such a small step would be a grave disservice to Irish women. Why? Because there is this important fact: there is no one group of women in Ireland who needs abortion access.

The women who need and who have abortions come from all sectors of Irish society. They are married mothers who feel their families are complete; young women with dreams of completing their education; single mothers working to put food on the table; migrant workers starting new lives; and women who have survived rape and sexual violence.

The ongoing debates that will take place in homes, in the media and in the Dáil itself are critical to the future of reproductive rights and social justice in Ireland. The Irish women who risk financial insecurity, censure by their communities and even a possible jail sentence are courageous far beyond most of our own experiences. But they should not have to risk these things simply to ensure control over their own bodies, the wellbeing of their families and the opportunity for a brighter future. Simply put, it is time to trust women. It is time for abortion reform.

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TheVoiceofReason Rank 0

A nice attempt to change the goalposts, but the question isn't whether or not women can decide whether or not they want an abortion. We're well aware that many women in England are able to decide that they want an abortion because, for example, their baby is a girl and not a boy. The question is whether or not the unborn child has a right to life like a newborn child does.

And it does, by the way.

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TheVoiceofReason Rank 0

@MountainMan2 The same person to tell you that you don't have a choice whether or not to steal my car or break into my house. Just because you call something a "choice", that does not mean you have any right to it.

8 hours ago 0 Likes

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MountainMan2 Rank 103

@TheVoiceofReason

Rights are conferred on individuals by the community, through laws. Many people consider the right to abortion to be a human right. No community has the right to put a mother's life at risk in favour of a foetus (as happened to Savita) or to deny a woman a dignified death, as happened in the Midlands recently when a woman was refused the right to die because she was pregnant.

54 minutes ago 0 Likes

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HERMES Rank 30

The restriction of abortion in this country can lead to overwhelming distress, depression and despair. In that respect the law is a brutality against women."

Who exactly were the instigators and perpetrators of this outrageous injustice?

Yes, a society of half-cocked men using warped dogma to control their servile and unthinking brethren into believing women were second class citizens.

The nexus for such oppression is invariably a woman's body, her sexuality and her bodily integrity.

The... » more

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patrickDavey Rank 762

@georgemcnulty I presume you are talking of the story of the horrendous story of abuse. There is no suggestion that lack of abortion had anything to do with what went on. It would appear they were people of limited capacity and no self control and probably if you looked at their own childhoods they will have been seriously disturbed in a number of ways.

We are learning so much about the importance of early childhood that it is clear that the most cost effective intervention we as a society...

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georgemculty Rank 10

@patrickDavey Looks good on paper.

14 hours ago 0 Likes

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Supergran Rank 569

The Irish Electorate is well able to make its own decision re this issue.. They do not need the advice or money of so called experts and multi millionaires to enlighten them. There are countless reasons why a woman may feel that an abortion is her only option. But that is not what the law is about. It's about whether she has a legal right to decide that her life is more equal than the life of the child in the womb. The vast majority of women during their reproductive years will have... » more

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georgemculty Rank 10

@Supergran Now Gran , you do know the difference between unproven accusations and hard copy facts.

13 hours ago 0 Likes

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Supergran Rank 569

@georgemculty

In Trumps own recorded words he says more or less that it's ok to grope women , you ok with that. As for Clinton it may turn out to be another watergate as the media are only covering what suits their agenda. Remind you of another campaign here wouldn't it .

11 hours ago 0 Likes

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tomnewnewman.org Rank 32

70%+36%+27% ?

22 hours ago 1 Like

Like Reply Share

noeleenmurphy Rank 29

@tomnewnewman.org

It's not either/or - one woman could express all three feelings of relief, satisfaction and happiness

20 hours ago 1 Like

Like Reply Share

Govinfos Rank 0

@noeleenmurphy; Tom's not exactly the sharpest pencil in the case when it comes to understanding statistics. I'm not sure whether it's a problem with numbers per se or if it's down to his black/white view of almost everything.

18 hours ago 0 Likes

Like Reply Share

Guillaume Rank 0

Article 40.3.3 remains while the state hold its female slaves.

Repeal this draconian piece of legislation which is little more than a monument to tyranny against our women.

19 hours ago 3 Likes

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Govinfos Rank 0

"Abortion may be illegal in Ireland, but it is far from rare."

This is the single most important sentence in the entire abortion debate in Ireland. This article clearly delineates the situation facing Irish women seeking abortions within both jurisdictions on the island. While abortion in most circumstances is illegal here, you either go overseas for one, or bring the abortion-inducing medication here. Although thousands of Irish women make the decision each year not to travel - for various... » more

19 hours ago 5 Likes

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Govinfos Rank 0

@patrickDavey; no one is talking about medical inspections of anyone and if you bothered to read my post properly you would have seen that this is not what I'm talking about either. They do stop quite a lot of pills getting through no doubt, but with names and addresses on each and every packet, it's interesting that no arrests occur. Hypocrisy in action on a grand scale. Now if you were illegally importing garlic, or not paying the VAT on it, you'd be in serious doo-doo.

17 hours ago 0 Likes

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georgemcnulty Rank 10

@Govinfos Progress is a wonderful thing. I spent some time in Germany years ago. on importing DVDs (5 dollars) by post from the US they had someone employed to attach a sticker informing me that I was breaking EU law. Then the stickers vanished. Now one just double clicks to download movies free of charge. You cannot stop a tsunami with an old rusty bucket.

16 hours ago 0 Likes

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patrickDavey Rank 762

The implication in the article that if abortion was openly available and society was neutral or supportive then the pain suffered would be done away with is simply untrue. Post abortion trauma was not recognised in repressed Catholic Ireland but in Japan probably fifty years ago, a country fully accepting of abortion. and as most would know, not a Catholic Country.

"Most women described a mix of feelings after their abortion. By far the most commonly reported feeling was relief (70 per cent),... » more

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@patrickDavey; "women should be made fully aware of this before making a final decision"

Vacuous comment. Women in Ireland cannot make this decision (legally) regardless of how much information they get. It's break the law or travel.

15 hours ago 0 Likes

Like Reply Share

georgemcnulty Rank 10

@patrickDavey While you are waffling about 'your' 30 years layman experience of abortion at least 12 women are leaving their homes and travelling to a destination in the EU to have one. Spouting the old chestnuts is a denial of reality and so out of touch with the public mood in the Ireland of today.

13 hours ago 0 Likes

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Govinfos Rank 0

The majority of the reviews of the literature conducted into abortion and psychological effects have come to the same conclusion: that legal and voluntary termination of pregnancy rarely causes immediate or lasting negative psychological consequences in healthy women including among adolescents. When psychological effects do occur they are in the main mild and transient. More pronounced psychological effects occur only in a minority of women and are usually the continuation of symptoms which had...

17 hours ago 2 Likes

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@Govinfos; above is taken from Psychological Effects of Abortion on Women:

A Review of the Literature (TCD, 2007) <http://crisispregnancy.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/20.-Psychological-Effects-of-Abortion-on-Women-a-review-of-the-literature.pdf>

17 hours ago 2 Likes

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Aodh Rank 0

I wonder if the police either north or south are actively investigating this criminality.

17 hours ago 0 Likes

Like Reply Share

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georgemcnulty Rank 10

@Aodh You are only outlining the ridiculous and unjust nature of that law.

13 hours ago 0 Likes

Like Reply Share

Aodh Rank 0

@georgemculty I don't like this law but I do believe in the law. That's why I'm wondering why aren't these people being prosecuted?

10 hours ago 0 Likes

Like Reply Share