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Online abortion services 'alternative to unsafe methods'

By Marie-Louise Connolly
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2 hours ago | [Northern Ireland](#)





Online abortion services can offer an alternative to unsafe methods to end a pregnancy, research has suggested.

The findings, published in the British Medical Journal, follow research carried out by an American university.

Some 1,000 women, who purchased abortion drugs online, were questioned in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The anti-abortion group, Precious Life, criticised the University of Texas survey, saying it has "no credibility".

The survey indicated that almost 95% of the medical interventions or abortions were "successful".

However, almost a tenth of the women who responded said they had to seek some form of medical attention, including blood transfusions and being prescribed antibiotics.

No deaths were reported.

The survey concludes that the results support growing calls in some countries for reform of restrictive abortion laws.

Researchers analysed self-reported data provided by the women four weeks after they used mifepristone and misoprostol to end an early pregnancy. There were no face-to-face interviews.

The data was gathered by an online organisation that issues abortion pills to women.

Taking abortion pills without medical approval is illegal throughout the UK, but doctors can legally prescribe the pills to patients in Great Britain.

In Northern Ireland, the abortion law is much stricter, and it is a crime to terminate a pregnancy unless a woman's life or health is at serious risk.

Abortion is only legal in the Republic of Ireland if the mother's life is at risk.

- [Why are Northern Ireland's abortion laws different to the rest of the UK?](#)
- [Northern Ireland abortion guidelines for medical staff](#)

The use of any abortion medication - without medical supervision - can endanger women, with risks including heavy bleeding, blood clots and infection.

Woman travel to England or further afield to access termination services.

According to the academics, the results of the survey provide "the best world evidence to date" about the effectiveness of using an online service.

The findings also reveal that women were able to identify potentially serious complications and seek medical attention when advised to do so.

According to the researchers, the results highlight for the first time that rates of adverse effects after using drugs to induce terminations were low.

'Lives at risk'

But Precious Life's director Bernadette Smyth said there is "no such thing as a safe abortion".

She added that the group that provided the date on which the study was based was "putting the lives and health of pregnant women in Ireland at risk by promoting self-use of abortion pills".

Another anti-abortion group said it was concerned that the study was based on "self-reported outcomes of self-sourced and self-managed medical abortions".

"Nobody should be taking medical pills of this kind without first contacting their registered GP or health provider," said Marion Woods of Life NI.

In Northern Ireland there has been recent controversy over the availability of abortion tablets, and a number of people have been charged in connection with buying and using the pills.

It is understood that one of those women was reported to police after she requested medical help.

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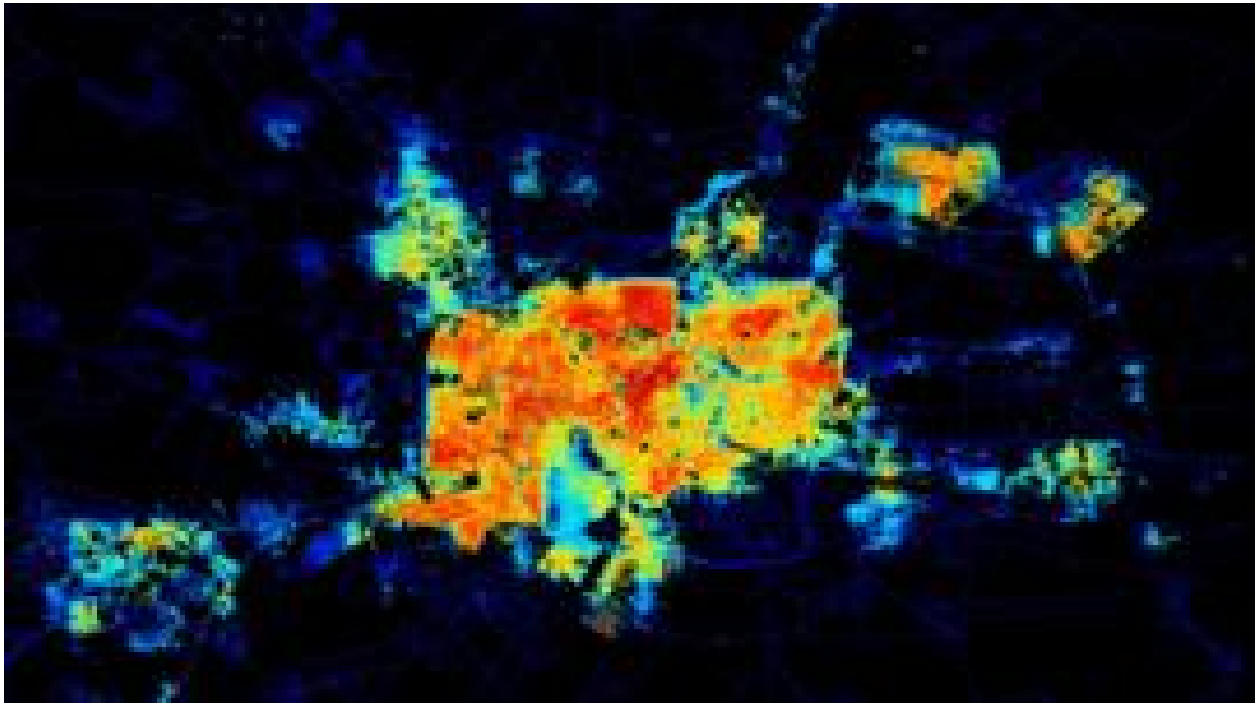
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