

BuzzFeed

News Videos Quizzes Tasty DIY More Get Our News App



Charity Says Northern Irish Women Are "Putting Their Freedom At Risk" To Access Abortion

As the supreme court considers whether the NHS should fund legal abortions for women in Northern Ireland, a charity says many risk jail by taking abortion pills instead.

posted on Nov. 3, 2016, at 1:26 p.m.



Laura Silver
BuzzFeed News Reporter



Prison Guards Reveal How Bad The Safety Crisis In UK Jails Is Right Now

by Patrick Smith

Connect With **BuzzFeed** UKNews

Like Us On Facebook

Follow Us On Twitter

More News



British Towns Are Burning Effigies Of Donald Trump



Revealed: Trans Women Locked In A Years-Long Battle With The Government To Get Their Pensions



Mass Graves On The Road To Mosul Show The Horrors That Lie Ahead



Abortion rights activists rally outside City Hall in January 2016 in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Charles McQuillan / Getty Images

Women in Northern Ireland who can't afford to travel to England to legally access abortion are increasingly having to resort to putting their health and freedom at risk by purchasing abortion pills online, a leading women's reproductive charity has said.

"The number of women who are travelling to England for an abortion is falling, and the numbers requesting abortion pills online is increasing," Katherine O'Brien, a spokesperson for the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), told BuzzFeed News.

Abortion is currently illegal in Northern Ireland unless the pregnancy is considered to be a direct threat to the mother's life.

O'Brien said that while some Northern Irish women will pay to travel elsewhere in the UK and get an abortion at a private clinic, many who can't afford to do so are using

the internet to buy abortion pills – which is also illegal in Northern Ireland.

“This is something affecting women lacking financial means – vulnerable women who don’t have family support or feel like they can reach out to family members for money,” she said.

The comments came following a [supreme court hearing](#) over whether the NHS will be required to pay for women in Northern Ireland to access free abortion services in England.

The supreme court challenge was brought by a girl, named only as “A”, who, aged 15 in 2012, travelled to England to receive an abortion at a private clinic, and her mother, known as “B”. The cost of the procedure and travel was £900, and they argued that the cost of the abortion itself should have been covered by the NHS, as it would be for women in the rest of the UK.



Abortion rights activists rally outside City Hall in January 2016. Charles Mcquillan / Getty Images

Last year the mother and daughter lost their case to get health secretary Jeremy Hunt to extend NHS abortion services to women from Northern Ireland, but they have won the right to appeal.

“I think it’s really worrying that against this backdrop of the secretary of state refusing to fund treatment, we are seeing women in Northern Ireland prosecuted,” O’Brien said. “As we argue here as to who should be paying for what, women are putting their freedom at risk.”

In April, a 21-year-old woman, who said she couldn’t afford to travel to England for an abortion, [was sentenced to three months in jail](#) for taking abortion pills she purchased online. O’Brien worried that women’s health was also compromised as a result of the legal restrictions around abortion pills in Northern Ireland.

While the pills are available from reputable sources such as online network [Women on Web](#), which provides the same medication that can be obtained from registered clinics in England, Wales, and Scotland, it can be hard to guarantee the safety of drugs that are not purchased through official channels.

“Where there’s a demand people will provide drugs, and sometimes they won’t be reputable and won’t be providing the medication that women think they’re ordering, which of course does carry a risk,” O’Brien said.

What’s more, because of the illegality of the drugs in Northern Ireland, women who experience adverse side-effects, from pills obtained from reputable sources or

Playboy Playmate Charged Over Body Shaming Incident



Why Turkey Is Entering A Dangerous Phase After Arresting Kurdish Opposition Leaders



This Is Where The Sky Is Dark Enough To See The Milky Way In The UK



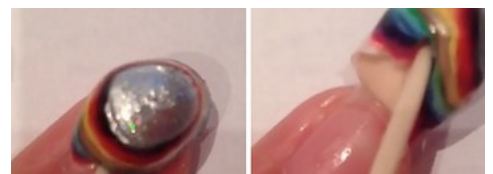
How Scientists Are Fighting Bias In Research By Writing Down Their Theories In Advance



The Big Challenges Facing London's New Night Czar

[More News >](#)

Now Buzzing



17 Tips To Help You Achieve A Rihanna-Worthy Manicure



18 Absolutely Ridiculous Recipes From The 1970s

[More Buzz >](#)

otherwise, are likely to avoid seeing a doctor.

"If women have any concerns about their symptoms and side-effects after taking this medication, because of the criminal law, they are afraid to seek medical help, and that's really concerning," O'Brien added.

"Women are putting themselves in quite an isolated situation where they'll be too afraid to go to a hospital if they have any concerns, and that's really worrying.

"They should still be able to seek medical follow-up, but women in Northern Ireland would be too afraid to do that given the prosecutions that are going on."



Abortion rights campaigners take part in a demonstration through Belfast city centre in April 2016. Paul Faith / AFP / Getty Images

The supreme court judgment on whether the Department of Health will be expected to pay for women from Northern Ireland to access NHS abortions is due at a later date that is yet to be announced.

During Wednesday's appeal hearing, lawyers for "A" and "B" said that women in Northern Ireland "find themselves in desperate and stressful practices and become second-class citizens in abortion".

Lawyers for the Department of Health suggested that women from Northern Ireland may be able to temporarily register with a GP in England in order to access abortion services on the NHS.

But O'Brien, who was present at the hearing, told us the court did not seem convinced by this argument. "When a supreme court judge is saying, 'I couldn't do that, I don't know how you expect a 15-year-old girl from Northern Ireland to come across and achieve what I can't do,' I find it quite spurious," she said.

Supreme court deputy president Lady Hale has indicated that women from Northern Ireland not being able to access the same health services as women in the rest of the UK is a breach of their human rights, and in November 2015, the high court in Belfast ruled that abortion restrictions in Northern Ireland were "incompatible with human rights".

Regardless of the outcome of the appeal, O'Brien said that BPAS will continue to campaign for women in Northern Ireland to have the same access to abortion as women in the rest of the UK.

"I think the secretary of state has made it very clear that he does not want to fund these women," she said.

Omo kekere @Larose419 · Oct 31
just got my nails done



This Girl Took A Photo Of Her Nails And Became An International Meme



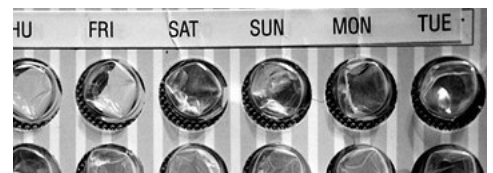
Michael Bublé Has Announced His Son, 3, Has Cancer



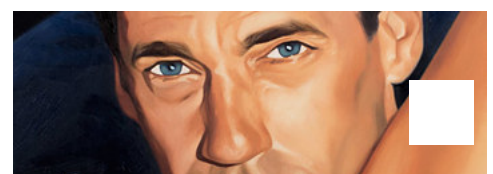
17 Beauty Products Everyone In Their Early Twenties Should Try



The "Hamilton" Mixtape Has A Release Date And Oh My God The Tracklist Is Incredible



Here's What Everyone Got Wrong About That Male Birth Control Study



An Artist Painted A Bunch Of Famous Celeb Men Going Down On Women And It's Really Something



There's a lot of oestrogen. It's like Ryan Reynolds Annoyed Blake By Revealing The Sex Of Their Baby On TV

"These women are forced to travel, and the least that we can do is to pay for their treatment," she continued. "On top of having to pay for travel and accommodation, for them to have to pay for treatment just seems morally wrong."

The Department of Health told BuzzFeed News that it was unable to comment while the case was ongoing.

Laura Silver is a reporter for BuzzFeed News and is based in London. Contact Laura Silver at laura.silver@buzzfeed.com.



23 Things You Know If You Aren't A Native Londoner

[More ▾](#)



NEXT ON NEWS ›

Win Or Lose, Trump Supporters Say Things Will Never...

Tagged: [abortion](#), [northern ireland](#)

Facebook Conversations

1 Comment

Sort by



Add a comment...



Liam Tipler

FFS n.ireland. get your arse in gear. this is 2016 no 1916

Like · Reply · 8 · 3 November 2016 16:13



Attia Rante

Wow Liam - I like your comment!

Like · Reply · 1 · 3 November 2016 18:23



Liam Tipler

Attia Rante im not always an asshole 😊

Like · Reply · 4 November 2016 19:57

Facebook Comments Plugin

[Advertise](#) [Jobs](#) [Mobile](#) [Newsletter](#) [Shop](#)

[UK Edition ▾](#)

[About](#) [Press](#) [RSS](#) [Privacy](#) [User Terms](#) [Ad Choices](#) [Help](#) [Contact](#)

© 2016 BuzzFeed, Inc