

'Home abortions' using pills and online support are 'safe and effective'



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An online “home abortion service” can be an alternative to other unsafe methods of ending pregnancies, a study of women in Ireland concluded. Stock photo



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An online “home abortion service” can be an alternative to other unsafe methods of ending pregnancies, a study of women in Ireland concluded.

A majority of women who opted for a medical abortion in their own homes - using online support - had outcomes which were safe and effective.

The findings released today throw light for the first time on such “home abortions” which involved women taking medications sourced from the Women on Web online group.

This is an online-only abortion service that conducts free medical consultations, posting out eligible women the pills.

The purchase and use of these medications is illegal in the Republic, although no woman has ever been prosecuted.

The researchers, led by Abigail Aiken at the University of Texas, analysed questionnaire responses to a telemedicine clinic by 1,000 women from the Republic and Northern Ireland. They had used the drugs

mifepristone and misoprostol to end an early pregnancy four weeks earlier.

Most were under seven weeks pregnant and the rest were up to between seven and nine weeks. Almost 95pc of interventions were "successful".

However, seven women had to have a blood transfusion and 26 had to be administered antibiotics. Also, some 93 women had symptoms that needed medical attention and 87 of these went to a doctor.

International researchers analysed data showing that rates of adverse effects after using drugs to induce terminations early were low.

A study published in the 'British Medical Journal' (BMJ) said: "For the millions of women worldwide living in areas where access to abortion is restricted, the findings show the vital role played by self-sourced medical abortion in providing an option with high effectiveness rates and few reported adverse outcomes."

However, the findings are sure to fuel intense debate as the country prepares for a referendum on the issue of abortion. There are campaigns for women to be allowed access to abortion, particularly if their unborn child is diagnosed with a fatal foetal abnormality or in cases of rape and incest.

Dangers

In Northern Ireland, abortion is legal only if a mother's life is at risk.

The researchers in the latest study acknowledged its limitations because the women self-reported, and this could introduce bias. However, key strengths include the large sample size and high follow-up rate.

While Women on Web is seen as a safe source for these medicines, health authorities in Ireland have repeatedly warned women about the dangers of buying them over the internet from other outlets which may be selling potentially dangerous rogue pills.

In a linked editorial, researchers in Canada said while findings from self-reported data must always be treated with some degree of caution, these "reassuring study data support growing calls for reform".

They said repeal of legal restrictions would support the safest and most equitable abortion care for women in Irish jurisdictions.

"Until then, for the first time in history, women of all social classes in a legally restricted yet high resource setting have equitable access to a reasonable alternative: medical abortion guided by physicians through telemedicine," it said.

Irish Independent

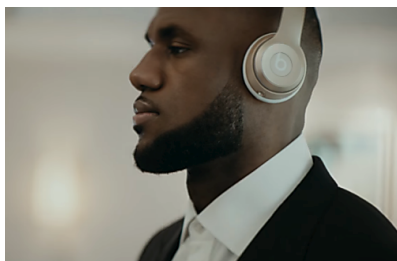
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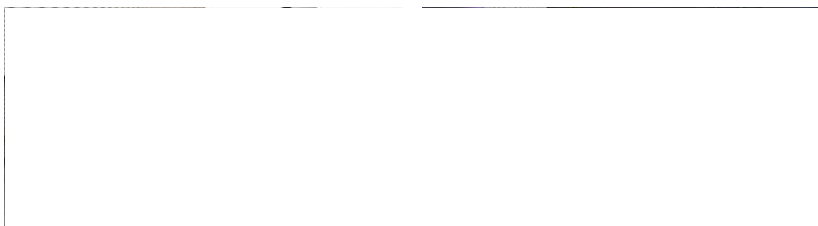
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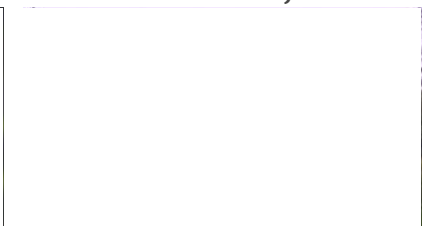
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