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Health

How women in Ireland and Northern Ireland feel about home-abortions





by

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When a woman in Ireland or Northern Ireland is faced with an unwanted pregnancy, she has three options. She can have the baby, travel abroad for an abortion, or, increasingly, order abortion pills to take in her own home.

People against abortion have claimed that these pills are the modern version of the backstreet abortion – but they take place in a woman’s home.

But the vast majority of women in Ireland and Northern Ireland who have bought abortion pills online have had “a positive” experience that they would recommend to others, new research suggests.

More than one thousand women who had abortions using pills bought online between 2010 and 2012 said they felt they’d made the right choice and would recommend home-abortions to a friend, according to a paper published in the [International Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology](#).

“I was not going to be banished from my country in order to make the choice that was best for me.”

Woman who ordered abortion pills

“The feelings women most commonly reported after completing a termination of pregnancy were ‘relieved’ (70%) and ‘satisfied’ (36%). Women with financial hardship had twice the risk of lacking emotional support,” the report carried out by Abigail Aiken and colleagues at the University of Texas at Austin concludes.

Abortion is illegal in both Ireland and Northern Ireland except to save a woman’s life or to prevent her permanent physical or mental health



Abortion in Ireland and NI facts

5,650

The number of women who requested at-home medical termination of pregnancy through the website [Women on Web](#) between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2015.

97%

Of 1,023 women surveyed who said they felt they'd made the right choice.

98%

The number who would recommend it to others in a similar situation.

85%

The percentage of those women between 20 and 30 years old.

63%

The number of women who had home-abortions who were already mothers.

3,451

The number of women who travelled from Ireland or NI to another country to seek abortion services in 2015.

165,438

The number of women who travelled to mainland Britain to access abortion services between 1980 and 2015.

Are home-abortions safe?

Medical abortions performed in the first nine weeks of pregnancy have a low risk of complications. "Adverse events are extremely unlikely, but women may not seek help as they know they are committing a criminal offence," according to the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (bpas).

A home abortion consists of taking two pills: mifepristone and misoprostol. They cause a process very similar to a spontaneous miscarriage. Mifepristone detaches the pregnancy from the lining of the womb and then misoprostol causes the womb to contract and ...

“This risk is the same as when a woman has a natural miscarriage. These problems can easily be treated by a doctor,” according to **Women on Web**, a Netherlands-based website providing home-abortion pills on a donations basis to women in countries where it is banned or severely restricted.

The **NHS gives the option** of taking the same or similar pill-based abortion that is available on Women on Web and patients sometimes go home after they’ve taken it, before the pregnancy has come away.

The procedure is likely to be painful and bleeding can go on for weeks afterwards. Some women report feeling contractions, similar to those in childbirth, while others report only minor discomfort which can be managed with pain relief.

Women are advised only to perform at-home abortions if they live within an hour’s reach of medical help.

The emotional toll of an abortion should not be underestimated. Women in countries where abortions are banned might suffer particular anguish as they may feel unable to be open about their feelings to friends or family, for fear of disapproval, or even, arrest.

What women say about home-abortions

Women who have had home abortions told Women on Web:

“The process itself was really painful, but with the safety of my own home instead of a hospital, where you can’t be sure how you’re looked after, was great. It made it a lot easier. I had a friend over with me so that if any complications occurred I could be taken to hospital immediately. But there was no need for it, the pills worked effectively and I was good as new the next day”

Lucille

“The bleeding was very manageable but after the two week mark it started to get heavier. I had episodes while in work where I was getting dizzy, lost all sense of where I was, vomiting and collapsing. I decided I needed to go to the doctor, told her I had had a miscarriage and she sent me to hospital for a scan. The scan found the that it [the pregnancy] was gone, but some lining remained. It has been four weeks and my bleeding is as heavy as ever” –

Unnamed

“When my partner and I looked into abortions it was so expensive to travel to the U...

Martha

"I don't regret what I've done. The abortion itself was scary, but no more painful than a bad period. Everything went fine and I was so relieved when it was over. I am angry that I face prison for what I have done" –

Suzanne

Where are women buying home-abortion pills?

The [NHS website](#) warns against buying pills yourself because "you will not know if these are genuine and they could be harmful".

But the [bpas](#) suggests only buying abortion pills from reputable, not-for-profit sites such as [Women Help Women](#) and [Women on Web](#).



Pro-choice campaigners take part in a demonstration through Belfast city centre on April 30, 2016. (PAUL FAITH/AFP/Getty Images)

you were hoping for. However, we know that organisations like Women on Web are providing an excellent service for women in difficult situations, and abortion medication is in and of itself very safe. It is quite simply the case that unattended home abortion is much safer than ongoing pregnancy and childbirth.”

Is it legal?

It is not illegal to buy or sell the drugs. But in both Ireland and NI it is illegal to use them to bring about an abortion.

Earlier this year a woman was arrested and received a three-month suspended prison sentence after being reported to the police by her flatmates for using a home abortion kit.

The case sparked a wave of protests with women coming out in solidarity with the woman, many of whom admitted they too had taken abortion pills and challenged the police to arrest them.

In Britain, where abortion is legal, it is “illegal to cause your own abortion” through buying pills online.

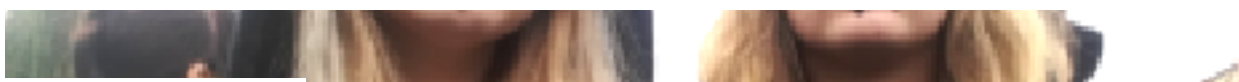
bpas has launched a free helpline for women who have taken abortion pills in countries where termination is restricted. From Northern Ireland: 0800 077 6049; from Ireland: 1800 910 049; from the Isle of Man: 0800 077 6049

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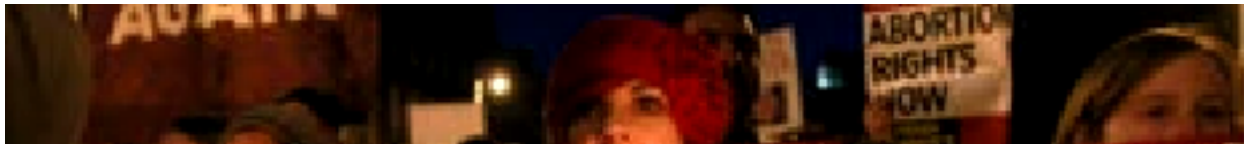
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