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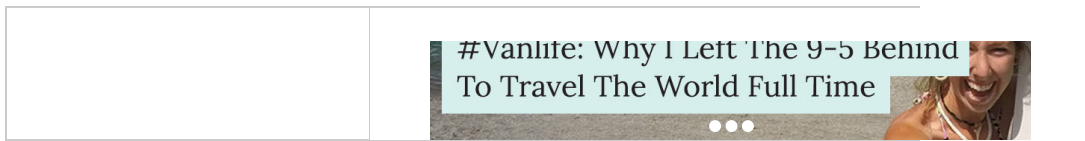
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This Is Why A 'Staggering' Number Of Women In Britain Are Seeking Abortion Pills Illegally

'I am completely alone and really need help.'

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Brogan Driscoll [f](#) [t](#)
Lifestyle Editor of HuffPost UK

A "staggering" number of women in Britain are illegally seeking abortion pills online to terminate an unwanted pregnancy, a new study has revealed.

The findings give "unprecedented insight" into the the reasons a growing number of women are doing so, according to the British Pregnancy Advisory

This Is Why A 'Staggering' Number Of Women In Britain Are Seeki...

The research revealed more than 500 women in Britain had contacted [Women On Web](#), a non-profit organisation that delivers abortion pills to women in countries where "access to safe abortion is restricted", between 22 November 2016 and 22 March 2017.

Clare Murphy, Director of External Affairs at the BPAS said: "The numbers of women in Britain seeking abortion pills online documented in this study are quite staggering, particularly given that it covers just one service over a four month period."

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The growing interest in purchasing online abortion pills in the UK [was revealed earlier this year](#), when government figures revealed an increasing number being seized en route to addresses in England, Wales and Scotland. In 2016, 375 doses were intercepted, compared with five in 2013.

The pills allow women to self-induce an early medical abortion. This is suitable for women up to ten weeks into their pregnancy and involves taking two drugs, mifepristone and misoprostol.

In the UK, abortions require medical approval from two registered practitioners. Both mifepristone and misoprostol must be administered at a registered clinic, with a recommended 24-48 hours in between. The second, misoprostol, cannot be taken at home.

Women accessing abortion pills online are therefore doing so illegally and risk life imprisonment under The Offences Against the Person Act 1861. Under the same act, anyone supplying could be jailed for up to three years.

The founder of Women on Web, Dr. Rebecca Gomperts previously told [The Independent](#): “We never break the law. People are allowed to import medicine for their use - that is how it works. It is sent with a prescription from one of our doctors. But of course, the law is not static. We push the interpretation of laws and put them in a human rights framework.”

See Also:

[Seven Women Share Personal \(And Very Different\) Abortion Stories](#)

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by Taboola

Almost half (49%) of the reasons women gave for accessing the service

related to difficulty accessing in-clinic abortion care. These issues include delays in service, getting time off work, childcare restraints and distance to abortion services - one woman, based in England, reported being 100 miles from her nearest clinic.

Lisa*, who is 25 years old explained: “Unfortunately, my local area is somewhat out of the way. I do not drive and cannot afford the public transport to attend the 3-4 appointments that they require to complete the abortion. I also have a young child at home who requires a lot of attention due to being premature.

“I’m really desperate and I’ve been told there is a three week wait, I’m really distressed and I just want the procedure over and done with.”

Women who are ineligible for free, non-emergency NHS services faced the additional issue of not being able to afford abortion care. These women tended to be either undocumented immigrants or have been admitted under a visa program. The minimum cost of an abortion would be approximately £545.

Leila*, who is 22 years old and living in England explained: “I completely lack the money for services and I am not a resident of UK. I am completely alone and really need help.”

Almost one third (30%) of reasons for seeking abortion outside the formal health care setting were due to concerns about privacy and confidentiality - often linked to perceived or experienced stigma - and preferences for at-home abortion.

Olivia*, a 30-year-old woman living in England said: “I have had one medical abortion six years ago and I didn’t like the fact I had to stay in hospital where I wasn’t at all comfortable. I would much rather be in my own home with my partner there to support me.”



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Study author Abigail Aiken told HuffPost UK that allowing women to access abortion pills in their own homes is necessary and she urges health services to take note.

“We tend to think of Britain as a place where abortion is easily available, but for a woman who can’t leave her house because of a controlling partner, or a woman who cannot get to a clinic, even one that’s close by, because she has no-one to cover childcare or she cannot afford transport, abortion services are as good as unavailable.

“Most importantly, this inequity in access in something that can be fixed through woman-centered solutions such as telemedicine provision of early medication abortion. The women in our study have already identified such a service as an option that is accessible and acceptable. Now the medical and health policy communities have to listen to them.”

BPAS are using the findings to call for an “overhaul of our abortion laws”.

“It really underlines the need for a thorough overhaul of our abortion laws so that no woman faces clinically unnecessary obstacles in accessing care. It also concerns us deeply that women using pills bought online are at risk of life in prison if caught.

“Ultimately if we do not think that a woman who turns to online pills to end her own pregnancy should go to prison, we should no longer accept a law that says she should. As we prepare to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Abortion Act next month, it’s high time to create a framework that meets the needs of women today, respects their ability to make their own decisions about their own pregnancies, and provides them with accessible high quality healthcare services to exercise that choice.”

A Department Of Health spokesperson told HuffPost UK: “All women who require abortion services should have access to high quality and safe care.

“It is a widely available procedure that is safe and regulated, with around 180,000 women accessing abortions a year. All abortion providers must have protocols in place for helping vulnerable groups.

“In addition to information on NHS Choices, there are also helplines set up to provide advice.”

*Names have been changed to protect identities

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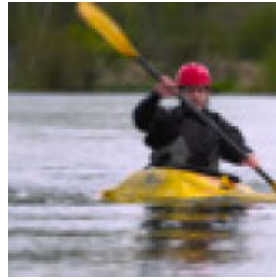
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