

Call for action after women seek abortion pills



Pro-choice campaigners known as Handmaids protest in Ireland Photo credit should read: Brian Lawless/PA Wire

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The UK's abortion laws need to be overhauled to allow women to have an early termination at home, a charity has warned, as a study revealed that more than 500 British women tried to get abortion pills online from a website over a four-month period.

The British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) said that the current interpretation of the law, which prevents women from using medication for early medical abortion at home – once lawfully prescribed by a doctor to a woman who meets the terms of the Abortion Act – is creating “significant obstacles to care”.

They said that women experiencing domestic violence, facing long waiting times, or who are not eligible for funded care were being forced to turn to online abortion pills – which could put them at risk of a prison sent

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The study, which is published today in the journal Contraception, found that other women feared a breach of confidentiality if they accessed in-clinic services, sometimes due to working within the hospital or clinic themselves or having friends or family working there.

The report found that 519 women from Scotland, England and Wales contacted international abortion collector Women on Web, looking for pills they could take at home.

BPAS said that some women found it difficult to attend multiple appointments – a challenge for those with work or childcare responsibilities, or without transport.

Linda, 31, from Scotland said: “I am only two weeks pregnant, I already have three kids and I am a single woman. I am unable to go to the hospital as I do not have the funds to pay for childcare while I would be in the hospital. I am unable to take time off work and I can't tell my family so there is no-one I can ask to look after the kids. I really want to do this in my own home.”

Clare Murphy, director of external affairs at BPAS, said: “The numbers of women in Britain seeking abortion online documented in this study are quite staggering, particularly given that it covers just one service over a month period. 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 court, 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.”

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