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## I endured an illegal abortion under the Eighth Amendment in Ireland

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Rita Harrold could have gone to prison for 14 years for terminating her pregnancy. Today that might change for women across Ireland

Today, people in Ireland are voting to decide if they want to repeal the Eighth Amendment of the constitution which would legalise abortions up to 12 weeks of pregnancy.

Rita Harrold took illegal abortion pills to terminate her pregnancy. If she had been caught she would have been given 14 years in prison. In order to get the pills she had to get them delivered to Northern Ireland, as the post is screened down south. She couldn't even have a consultation from her GP.

Since her abortion, Rita has been campaigning with ROSA (for Reproductive rights, against Oppression, Sexism and Austerity), a socialist feminist and pro-choice activist group who have played a huge role in the #RepealThe8th movement.

I spoke to Rita to understand what repealing the Eighth means to her and the rest of Ireland.



Rita at the polling station today

**What does this vote mean to you personally? Have you experienced having an illegal abortion in Ireland?**

Yes I have. I ordered an abortion pill from [Women on Web](#).

**How did you go about doing that?**

When I found out that I was pregnant I knew about Women on Web which was quite lucky actually. I went on the website, I did a consultation which is the same medical questions you would be asked in a face to face consultation, but it was illegal for me to go and ask my GP for help so I had to do it on the website.

I got the abortion pill posted to Northern Ireland because they screen the post here. Then I went up and collected them, brought them home and took the pills. They're safe to use at home without directly having a doctor with you up to 12 weeks, but the law says that technically I should be imprisoned for 14 years.



Rita campaigning for ROSA

**Do you know lots of women who have had to deal with the same situation?**

Yeah absolutely. There's a campaign called Rosa, who campaign with Women on Web and have taken a lot of action to highlight the importance of the abortion pill. Once you start talking to people about this you start to realise how normal it is to need an abortion. How, actually, so many people are affected by this.

It's not one type of woman, it's not a particular lifestyle or something that leads you to need an abortion, it's all kinds of people. From people who have children, to very young women, to people in their 40s. All kinds of people who are able to get pregnant could possibly have crisis pregnancies and might need to have an abortion.



ROSA have travelled the country to campaign

**Can you run me through what you've been doing to campaign for the yes vote?**

So we've had the campaign, ROSA, the pro-choice campaign to highlight why abortion is necessary, to explain the reasons why people have abortions. It's one of those issues that's not fully talked about in Ireland.

It's well-known that people travel, kind of what we've been highlighting is that it's a reality. It's not some sort of invisible person you would never meet or never have heard of, which is the way people might think about abortion, because it's so under-discussed, as though it's not actually a reality. But there's a reality that one in three women face a crisis pregnancy.

Our poster campaign – we've had a huge number of posters we've put up all around the country – highlights one in three women have a crisis pregnancy and that those people should have a choice. So we've been outlining the possibilities for someone who goes against this law.

We have also tried to make sure people are aware of the danger of the Eighth Amendment and we've highlighted the Savita Halappanavar case. She was ejected to Galway and she was pregnant and having a miscarriage and she asked for a termination multiple times but the doctors felt they could not intervene because of the Eighth Amendment because the foetus still had a heartbeat even though they knew it was an inevitable miscarriage. She died in 2012.



**Has the reaction to your campaign been positive?**

Extremely positive. We've seen an appetite for change. Obviously young people are at the core of the 'Yes' campaign and that's really very important.

They're angry about the fact that you know people don't have choice. They're very concerned about the fact that so many schools are so controlled by the Catholic Church and that they don't get proper sex education, that contraception is so expensive.

There are so many people that aren't actually old enough to vote, so this is the first generation in the movement for society and to empower people to make the best decision for themselves.

With the older generation, it's actually extremely heartwarming the support that we've got. A huge number of older people have said that they're voting yes because when they were young life was so difficult. They've said they knew women who went to doctors for an abortion and got turned away and they knew people who travelled and they want to end that stigmatisation, they want to empower people to make their own choices.



Campaigning to repeal the Eighth

**That's brilliant. Are you optimistic about the result?**

Most of the campaign work I've been doing has been in Dublin and we're definitely going to get a big yes vote there. We think that we can win a yes vote in a lot of places, particularly in the cities, but the reality is we need a huge turn out for the Yes vote in Dublin in order to get the win.

This will be seen as a victory for women globally.

*If you're in Ireland today and eligible to vote, get to a polling station before 10pm to repeal the Eighth Amendment.*

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