

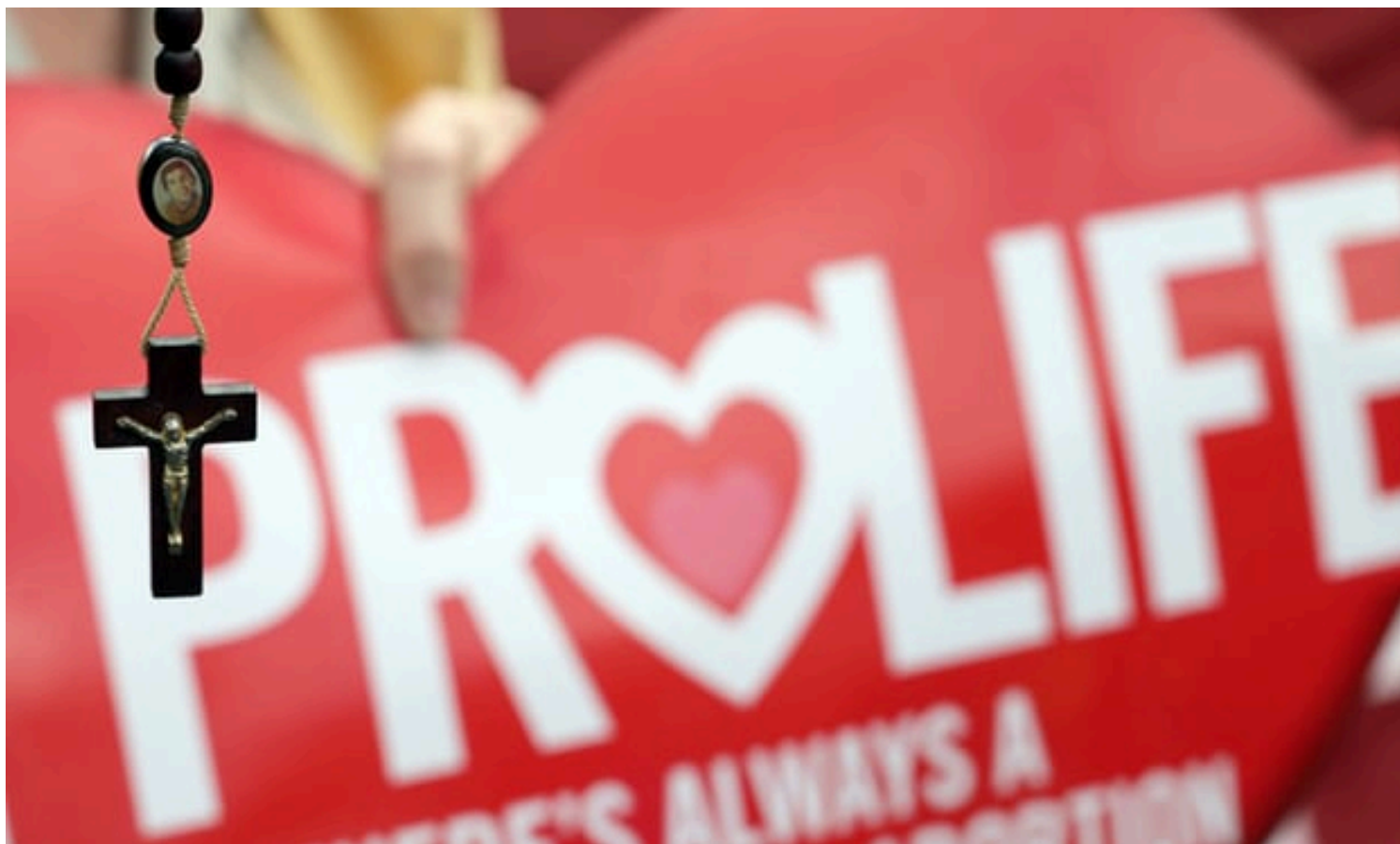
The Guardian

Northern Irish woman given suspended sentence over self-induced abortion

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acted police eight days after she induced miscarriage using

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A pro-life rally in Belfast in 2014. Photograph: Paul Faith/AFP/Getty Images

A Northern Irish woman who bought pills over the internet to induce an abortion has been given a suspended prison sentence.

The 21-year-old pleaded guilty to procuring her own abortion by using a poison, and of supplying a poison with intent to procure a miscarriage, and was given a three-month sentence suspended for one year.

Her barrister told Belfast crown court on Monday that if his client had lived anywhere else in the UK, she would “not have found herself before the courts”. Northern Ireland is the only region of the UK where abortion is still illegal.

Crown prosecutor Kate McKay said that on 20 July 2014 the Police Service of Northern Ireland were contacted by the woman's housemates. The police were told that she had bought drugs online that had induced a miscarriage eight days earlier.

PSNI officers sent to the rented accommodation in south Belfast found a male foetus inside a black bag in a household bin, the court was told.

The court heard that the woman had told her housemates that she tried to travel to England for a termination but could not cover her costs. She had then been told by a clinic about mifepristone and misoprostol, two drugs available on the internet that would induce a miscarriage. The housemates were "taken back by the seemingly blase attitude" adopted by the woman, a crown lawyer told the court.

The defence barrister said that at the time the woman was 19 and living with people she barely knew. His client felt "isolated and trapped ... with no one to turn to" and resorted to "desperate measures".

The barrister said the woman had since had a baby with her partner and "was trying to put her life back together again".

The judge Mr Justice McFarland said the advice given to the woman about the pills had been delivered "without knowledge of her background, and details were perhaps inappropriate".

The British Pregnancy Advisory Service said the woman "is a victim of Northern Ireland's draconian abortion laws and the refusal of politicians to act to protect the health of their constituents. A BPAS spokesperson added: "We call on all politicians to repeal these antiquated, Victorian laws and create an abortion framework fit for women in 2016. We deserve nothing less."

Under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, anyone carrying out an abortion in Northern Ireland, except under some extremely limited circumstances, can be jailed for life.

A number of other women in the region face prosecution for procuring pills from pro-choice organisations such as The Women on the Web or Womenhelp.org.

. This article was amended on 6 April 2016. An earlier version said the jail sentence had been suspended for two years; that has been corrected to one year.

Topics

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