

Northern Ireland Woman Receives Suspended Sentence for Inducing Abortion



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Although abortion is legal in the rest of the United Kingdom, its ban in Northern Ireland remains in place. And as a result, a 21-year-old woman was almost sent to prison for self-inducing a miscarriage.

According to the Guardian, the young woman “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 two years.”

The acts in question took place in July 2014, when the woman was 19-years-old, after her housemates reported her to the Police Service of Northern Ireland:

“Crown prosecutor Kate McKay said that on 20 July 2014 [the police] 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 fetus inside a black bag in a household bin, the court was told.

The court heard that the woman had told her housemates that she had 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 aback by the seemingly blasé attitude’ adopted by the woman, a crown lawyer told the court.”

However, as the woman’s lawyer told the court, if she lived anywhere else in Great Britain, she would “not have found herself before the courts.” The British Pregnancy Advisory Service claims that this 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.” BPAS demands, in the face of this trial, that Northern Ireland’s politicians “repeal these antiquated, Victorian laws and create an abortion framework fit for women in 2016. We deserve nothing less.”

Northern Ireland upholds the Offenses Against the Person Act of 1861—a law implemented during the reign of Queen Victoria—which dictates that “anyone carrying out an abortion in Northern Ireland,

except under some extremely limited circumstances, can be jailed for life.”

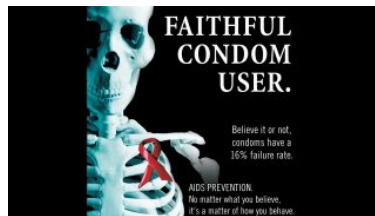
Since the self-induced abortion for which she has been condemned, the young woman has “had a baby with her partner” and, her lawyer argued, “trying to put her life back together.” When she went to drastic lengths in order to terminate her pregnancy, she “was 19 and living with people she barely knew.” “Isolated and trapped...with no one to turn to,” she felt she had no choice but to take “desperate measures.”

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