

Cookies on the BBC website

The BBC has updated its cookie policy. We use cookies to ensure that we give you the best experience on our website. This includes cookies from third party social media websites if you visit a page which contains embedded content from social media. Such third party cookies may track your use of the BBC website. We and our partners also use cookies to ensure we show you advertising that is relevant to you. If you continue without changing your settings, we'll assume that you are happy to receive all cookies on the BBC website. However, you can change your cookie settings at any time.

[Continue](#)

[Change settings](#)

[Find out more](#)



Health

Irish women 'access abortion pills online'

17 October 2016 | [Health](#)

[Share](#)



SPL

The study looked at women who had obtained pills online to terminate a pregnancy

Women aged 25 to 35 are the most likely group in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland to access medication online to end a pregnancy, a study suggests.

Data provided by Women on the Web, which offers abortion pills online, showed 5,650 women from both countries accessed the service from 2010 to 2015.

Most already have at least one child and a majority said taking the pills had been the right choice for them.

Laws in both countries ban or restrict access to abortion.

Abortion is legal in both countries if the mother's life is at risk. In Northern Ireland, it may also be permitted to preserve her physical or mental health.

Accessing pills which will terminate a pregnancy, or helping others to do so, can lead to a criminal prosecution in Northern Ireland, with the maximum sentence being life imprisonment.

Protesters are calling for a referendum to repeal the laws in the Republic. Later this month, Prime Minister Enda Kenny will hold a citizens' assembly to discuss whether a vote should take place to change abortion laws.



J
W
S



I

F
S
U



D
Ita

F
I
U

REUTERS

Campaigners recently demonstrated in Dublin against abortion laws

Since 2001, the number of women travelling to England and Wales for abortion services has fallen.

'Could not cope'

In a paper published in the British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology (RCOG), researchers from the University of Texas in Austin in the US analysed information provided by women using Women on the Web.

They say it is the first picture of women who obtain abortion pills online.

Of the 5,650 women who used the service, 25.8% were aged between 30 and 34 and 24.1% were aged from 25 to 29.

The lowest percentages were among women under 20, who made up 4.6% of those using the service, and over 45s who accounted for 2.6%.

Three-quarters were seven weeks pregnant or less.

Data from 3,500 women who used the site between 2013 and 2015 found slightly under two-thirds already had one or more children.

The most common reason for terminating their pregnancy was that they could not cope with a child "at this point in my life".

Having "no money to raise a child" was the second most common reason, followed by a feeling that their families were complete.

Contraceptive failure was the most common reason cited for pregnancy.

Prof Abigail Aiken, who led the study, said: "The findings of this paper contribute new and important evidence to the abortion policy debate in Northern Ireland.

"Northern Irish women have described in their own words the benefits of access to safe early medical abortion for their health, wellbeing, and autonomy. The current abortion law, which dates back to 1861, harms women by creating a climate of stigma, shame, and isolation."

However, Bernadette Smyth, of the pro-life group Precious Life, said: "Abortion is a criminal offence in Ireland and if women are accessing these dangerous pills online and have an adverse reaction that could endanger their life, who will take

responsibility?

"To ensure the safety of women and babies these illegal online sites must be closed down.

"I want women with crisis pregnancies to be fully informed of the dangers of these pills and, more importantly, I want to provide help and support, because abortion is not the answer."

Related Topics

Republic of Ireland

Share this story About sharing

More on this story

Irish abortion laws: Protests held across the world

24 September 2016

Abortion: NI ministers agree to publish guidelines for clinicians

25 March 2016

Related Internet links

BJOG

Precious Life

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external Internet sites

Health

Q
Th
sr



Su
6 c
Fric

M
Re

Tru
Me

Ex
sc

Tru
by

Ba
sch

Healthy mice from lab-grown eggs

17 October 2016 | Health

Three-person baby 'race' dangerous

12 October 2016 | Health

Investigation over cancer 'cure' GcMAF

16 October 2016 | Health

More Videos from the BBC

Recommended by Outbrain



The Malawi teen fighting sex initiation customs



Woman's Hour 70: Nigella Lawson



Photos of mixed race Irish challenge preconceptions



The London hairdresser who offended Kim Jong-un



Who lives here now? The story of a £1m+ London terraced house



How Thais are mourning their king

Elsewhere on BBC

Recommended by Outbrain

Prime

News

What will

London

UK Se

Du chi

From

Prom





BBC News

No charges over filmed Tamworth schoolgirl attack



BBC Travel

India's biryani wars



BBC Sport

How Mercedes dominated the fastest sport on earth



BBC Culture

The most famous letter never sent?



BBC News

Brexit: NI food firms express concern at impact of immigration clampdown



BBC Future

The reasons why we get 'middle-aged spread'

BBC News Services

On your mobile

On your connected tv

Get news alerts

Explore the BBC

News

Weather

Earth

Capital

Autos

TV

CBBC

Food

Bitesize

Arts

Taster

Local

Sport

Shop

Travel

Culture

Future

Radio

CBeebies

iWonder

Music

Make It Digital

Nature

Terms of Use

Privacy Policy

Accessibility Help

Contact the BBC

Ad choices

About the BBC

Cookies

Parental Guidance

Advertise with us

Copyright © 2016 BBC. The BBC is not responsible for the content of external sites. **Read about our approach to external linking.**