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5,650 women used abortion website, Women on Web, between 2010 and 2015. 85 percent of these women were between 20 and 30 years old and 63 percent were already mothers.

Women on Web was set up in 2006 and provides women safe access to a medical, online consultation and sends out abortion pills mifepristone and misoprostol. It can help women up to the 10 week point of pregnancy and the website asks for a suggested donation to costs of between €70 to €90.

Abortion is illegal in Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland unless the mother's life is at risk. In Northern Ireland, abortion is also permitted to preserve the mother's physical and mental health. Protesters are calling for a referendum to repeal the abortion laws in the Republic.

Some pro-life groups favour the Irish abortion laws: "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?" said Precious Life member, Bernadette Smyth.

Women may travel to the UK to have abortions. But a recent study published in the British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology showed that many of the women who opted to go online for help with abortions could not afford to travel, take time off work or pay childcare costs.

"These barriers create a stark health inequity: women with financial and social resources can access offshore termination of pregnancy, while women who lack such resources cannot," states the paper.

Packages sent to Republic of Ireland are stopped so women often travel to Northern Ireland to collect the pill packages. It is not illegal to buy or sell the drugs but using them to have an abortion is illegal.

"There is a very negative perception of home abortion. People regard it as a desperate and a last resort. But women say it is very helpful for their health, wellbeing and autonomy. The only negative thing is that they have to do it outside of the law," said Irish-born, Lead Author of the study, Professor Abigail Aiken.

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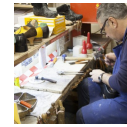
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