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More than 100 abortion pill packets seized by PSNI

Ellen Coyne

March 27 2017,
12:01am,
The Times



Abortion pills bound for the Republic are often first sent to Northern Ireland

SAM BOAL/PHOTOCALL IRELAND

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More than 100 packets of illegal abortion pills

have been seized by the Police Service of Northern Ireland in a recent crackdown, it has emerged.

Files are being sent to Northern Ireland's public prosecutions service

Mifepristone and misoprostol, pills that induce miscarriage, are often ordered online by women in Northern Ireland and the Republic who cannot afford to travel to terminate a pregnancy.

Irish customs routinely seize such packets so activists and women seeking illegal abortions often use Northern Irish addresses as the initial delivery point. Last month the PSNI started raiding the homes of activists and seizing the pills.

The PSNI said that a "small number of people" had been interviewed in the past six months. It is understood that there were 15 cases in the first two weeks of March with more women and couples being contacted by the police each week.



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Police are using the addresses on the packages that they intercept to track down those suspected of ordering the pills online or assisting in their delivery.

In some cases, parents of young women who tried to secretly terminate a pregnancy were alerted to the situation by the arrival of the PSNI at their home.

Last year three women were brought before the courts in Northern Ireland in separate cases facing charges relating to abortion pills.

In June 2015, more than 200 pro-choice activists signed an open letter saying they had helped women to get the products and inviting the PSNI to prosecute them but no action was taken.

Activists in the Republic had previously depended on the assistance of those in Northern Ireland to get the pills for women who wanted them. Using the addresses of Belfast activists, Irish pro-choice groups ordered the pills online to be delivered to Northern Ireland before transferring them over the border.

It is understood the groups are now sourcing pills from pharmacies in European countries where they are registered for legal sale.

Others have started to collect the addresses of sympathetic activists in England, Wales and Scotland who are willing to risk posting them to the Republic. In order to avoid pills being seized, women in Northern Ireland and the Republic have also started renting PO boxes in the UK to forward the pills to Belfast.

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Mark Wood Mar 27, 2017

My Irish niece told me that in Dublin you can get the ferry as a foot passenger to Holyhead for €15 return. Just saying.

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Mara Clarke Mar 27, 2017

It's not always €15. Plus you need travel documents, someone to watch your kids if you have any, if you are a migrant or a refugee you need to pay €100 for a visa, cost of transport from the ferry to the clinic and the cost of the abortion which is £330-£1350 depending on gestation. Just saying www.asn.org.uk

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