

Given the birth rate in NI for 2016 of 24076¹ and the low number of termination of pregnancies in NI for 16/17² and assuming that the pregnancy rate is comparable to the birth rate, the percentage of pregnant NI women opting to travel for an abortion is extremely low, circa 2-3%, and only 2% of that very low percentage are travelling for issues pertaining to foetal development.



There is no significant demand for abortion in NI. Our pro-life laws help to protect both women and their children. No woman has been refused medical treatment because of our pro-life laws.



In 2016 the percentage of NI women travelling to England and Wales to have an abortion is less than 1% of the total abortions carried out in England and Wales. Of those who do travel for an abortion, only 1.8% are for grounds wherein it is envisaged that the child will be severely physically or mentally disabled, and only 1 such abortion was for Downs Syndrome.



There are 4810 abortions carried out on non-residents of England and Wales; and of that 724 are from NI, hence: 15.1%.³

98.2% (711) of the abortions carried out on women from NI were for ground C alone, i.e. pregnancy is not beyond 24 weeks and that progressing would involve greater risk to the physical or mental health of the mother than if the pregnancy were terminated. 1.8% (13) of the abortions carried out on women from NI were for ground E alone, i.e. where there would be serious risk that if the child were born it

Of the total abortions carried out in England and Wales (190,406), those for women from NI (724) represent less than 1%.

¹<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/monthly-births>.

² <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/hs-termination-of-pregnancy-stats-16-17.pdf>.

³https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/679028/Abortions_stats_England_Wales_2016.pdf (table 12a).

would have serious physical or mental abnormalities. Of these 13: 1 for Down's Syndrome; 2 for Edwards' syndrome; 1 for Patau's Syndrome; 4 for anencephaly; 1 for encephalocele; 2 for other brain abnormalities; 1 for spina bifida; 1 for congenital malformations of the musculoskeletal system.



Compare this to the rest of the UK. In England and Wales there were 190,406 abortions; minus the 724 of NI women, that is 189,682, and in Scotland there were 12,063 for 2016.⁴ The percentage breakdown for grounds of abortion are roughly similar to those for NI women, with the vast majority being undertaken for the physical and mental health of the mother, and very few being taken for abnormalities of the foetus and risk to life or permanent injury to the mother.

Statistics for the use of abortion pills are difficult to acquire given their illegality. Campaigners for abortion often cite the use of these illegal pills as evidence for the need to change our abortion laws. However, if we look to mainland UK where abortion is legal we notice that 645 such pills



were seized in 2015/16, and that this is a rising problem according to BPAS; indeed Ann Fuerdi has stated that greater awareness of online abortion pills has resulted in greater numbers seeking them.⁵ This indicates that the legalisation of abortion is not the solution to the use of illegal abortion pills, and that citing the use of abortion pills in NI is no justification for changing our pro-life laws.

Conclusion

The UK abortion law is very permissive, with very few women opting for abortion in the extreme cases of foetal development (I here exclude terminations where there is risk to life of the mother because such can be obtained in NI). Whilst the percentage breakdown is similar between mainland UK and NI, when we consider the numbers involved, it turns out that comparatively very few women from NI are seeking abortion.

⁴ <http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Sexual-Health/Publications/2017-05-30/2017-05-30-terminations-2016-Report.pdf>.

⁵ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/abortion-pill-access-online-illegal-decriminalise-woman-british-pregnancy-advisory-service-danger-a7580566.html>.

The argument is often made that there is a need for more permissive abortion laws in NI because of women's lives are in danger or for issues pertaining to foetal development. Our pro-life laws here do not endanger women, and a very small percentage of NI women have opted for abortion in the case of abnormal foetal development.

The push for abortion in NI is ideology driven and seeks to implement in NI the permissive abortion culture that there is in the rest of the UK wherein in the region of 97% of abortions are undertaken for non-threatening risks to the physical or mental health of the mother

About the Iona Institute NI

The Iona Institute NI is a Christian think tank, research and advocacy group. We promote the right to life, the place of marriage and religion in society and freedom of conscience.

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