Written submission from Alliance for Choice (ANI0370)

Introduction:

This document features the stories from people across Northern Ireland who felt they needed to be anonymous to share their experiences. What you will read is raw and unabridged and in the form that everyone wished to share. We have kept in the one person who felt the current law was adequate, but this is a woman who was coerced by her partner, rather than be allowed to make a choice. We also believe that this one story adequately reflects the balance of those hoping for change compared to those who wish to obstruct it.

We would like to draw your attention to the lack of stories from direct experience of accessing and taking online abortion pills; Alliance for Choice know that this is a common experience, conservative estimates are currently up to 1000 women a year, in the last 5 years. The absence of these experiences speaks to the fear felt by those who have chosen this method, in light of prosecutions both complete and ongoing, as well as anecdotal evidence of doorstep police questioning, and the continued scaremongering of the anti-choice lobby. Some of our activists have agreed to submit their own experiences of assisting in the accessing of the pills some of which you will find in here and some through your main portal for submissions.

The questions that people answered;

1. My personal experience affected by abortion laws in Northern Ireland.  
   (answers are separated by a bulletpoint)

2. My friends/family/colleagues view on abortion

3. An example of how views on abortion have moved on

4. What should the UK govt. do?

5. Why is devolution not a barrier?

1. What is your personal experience of the abortion law in Northern Ireland?

   - Recent crisis pregnancy led me to having to seek help online to access Misoprostol and mifepristone tablets. as a full time mature student in a health profession course while also working in healthcare and receiving no loans and minimum wage I could not afford a child, nor could I afford accessing abortion in England nor could my partner afford it. I took the tablets and had no support other than friends and searching online in hopes that my experience of the pills was okay. It wasn’t, no bleeding happened for 24 hours. If abortion was legal here I’d had not had to make the choice to spend money I don’t have on pills and I’d have had proper medical care and have known what was and wasn’t supposed to happen and been able to get an ultrasound to confirm if the pills worked.

   - I know of people who have had to travel & take pills in crisis pregnancy
5 years ago I made my own journey across the pond. I was 16 and in love but not yet ready to be a mother. My journey began 4 weeks gestation when I missed my period. I was on the pill however fell ill over the new year celebrations. It’s funny because even though I was on the pill it’s almost like I already knew I was pregnant and when I was anticipating taking a pregnancy test i knew what To expect albeit the shock still resonated within me. People always say finding out you are pregnant is joyful and a beautiful moment but I knew right away I was not ready and wanted to do everything in my power to make sure I wasn’t, it was total desperation and the feel of hopelessness I had was like no other. I wanted to travel, go to uni, better myself and my belief was that these dreams of mine would have been inhibited should I of carried my pregnancy to term. I panic booked an appointment at the Marie stopes clinic in London from my high school toilets with no one suspecting. The two weeks I had to wait for an appointment where the most harrowing two weeks of my life I just wanted it to be over. At sixteen I done all I could to ensure I could facilitate the cost of getting there and ensuring I could pay for the procedure. I skipped school so that I could work extra days in my part time job in order to make ends meet and lied to my family and forged fake letters to my school; I couldn’t sleep with worry incase of any additional costs as I could not have sustained this. Would I be refused treatment if I was £40 short? What would I do then? At the time my relationship with my mum was strained. I was a teenager pushing boundaries, and terrified of her reaction.

At this point in my life the consequence of my mum knowing I was even having sex far more outweighed the consequence of me having a baby. I made the journey from Belfast to London on my own and told my mum that I was doing a day trip to the amusement park in Scotland with my friends; not to worry I would be back later that night. I used the London Underground to get to Ealing. My boyfriend at the time broke up with me the night prior to me undertaking the journey so my day was already filled with heartache and despair. This was the only time throughout my short pregnancy when I contemplated carrying on to term. And this wasn’t for myself, this was to out of desperation to try and win back the boy I loved by essentially tying him to me through a baby; it wouldn’t have been fair on either of us and eventually I came to my senses. When I arrived in Ealing after using the tube, I approached the the clinics big blue foot and remember feeling shame due to the protesting and picketing of anti choice protesters outside the clinic (I am now aware the clinic have since took measures to ban this). I waited hours before finally being taken in, initially when they had scanned me they could not find anything which ended up me having to have an internal scan to confirm the pregnancy. I remember feeling a gush if excitement initially when the scan didn’t pick up anything and thought gosh maybe all 8 pregnancy tests I took was wrong. The internal scan confirmed I was 7 weeks pregnant.

I opted for a surgical procedure so that I did not have to wait for another pill the next day as my unsuspecting family were expecting me home that night. I was given general anaesthetic and can remember them inserting it via my wrist. I don’t remember the procedure however remember waking up drowsy in a room lying next to a crying woman. She had just had the same procedure because she had fallen pregnant several months after already giving birth and could not manage the pressures of two young children. I tried comforting her however remember explaining to her my own country’s policy and legislation with regards to women having a choice and remember discussing the motivations of the DUP Snd other political parties. I remember lying to the health clinicians advising that I would be resting and would travel back home the following day so that they would continue with my treatment however soon afterwards I had to make the journey home again. I didn’t feel the procedure, however was sore after and the bleeding continued for up to a week after.

The trauma of this has helped me to develop into the person I am and I have been able to take light from the situation in that I am in a good place and I done all that I said I was going to do. I moved away from Northern Ireland in 2014 at the age of 18 to study and haven’t looked back. I’m now a children’s and families social worker, working along side hundreds of women who have the autonomy to make decisions based on what is right for them and only wish the girls in my home country which I love one day have the ability to do so as well.

Regardless if you agree of the reasoning behind my decision, it is not ok that i as a sixteen year old girl, put my education at risk, and paid hundreds of pounds in which I didn’t have, for a health care
procedure that is accessible across the whole country, all the while having to travel away from home to access this. And it is not okay that other women in my situation do not always have as good as outcomes due to the horrifying experience that creates an often lasting shock.

- I have not been affected by abortion or the need to access one but if I did I would want it in Northern Ireland.

- I suffer from a mental illness and have for all my life. As a young lady who had sex from 14 and had a pregnancy scare or two the law on abortion left me with only one frightening option, to kill myself. The stigma around abortion was greater even a few years ago and my parents had always made it clear that their plan would be to help me raise it. I could not, in my mind, have gone to them and asked for money to go to England. I remember discussing getting pregnant when I was 14 or 15 with a friend who was always having sex. While we waited for the results of her first pregnancy test we talked about what to do if she was pregnant. We talked about wire clothes hangers, pushing each other down stairs, taking excessive drinks and drugs. When it came to my first pregnancy scare I cried for days, afraid to take the test, already planning my suicide if it was positive. As a young and vulnerable girl the lack of any option for an unwanted pregnancy caused me extreme stress and depression. To this day I am thankful I did not get pregnant but I still have those worries. I am now 23 and I do not want to have children. The thought of having to access illegal services to get early abortion pill, which people still get prosecuted for, or leave my home to get a incredibly hard procedure still fills me with dread and suicidal thoughts.I have never required an abortion, but have known a number of people through the years that have. I have first hand witnessed the traumatic effects travelling to the mainland, both emotional and fiscal, and how both the have left people scared for life. I have equally witnessed someone have to face the consequence of not being able to afford this journey, and have to go through a pregnancy she never choose as she had been the victim of abuse. I have known many who were forced by religious belief to have families way larger than they would ever have wished. I have literally seen women lose out, against their wishes, their whole working life, their post school education even their career choice, all because of unwanted pregnancy. Things have improved regarding general opinion ion, but whilst it still is a punishable crime to even buy the morning after pill, things will never be just and fair to the women of Northern Ireland, and they will remain second class citizens always relying on the demands of others. Never to choose for themselves what is best for them as individuals. This alone is why laws must change asap.

- I grew up in Northern Ireland. I feel alienated from the country by the lack of respect from my government for women's bodies. I don't feel welcome there as a young woman. I do not feel that I would be safe and supported if I were to have an unwanted pregnancy. I was taught to feel shame for my body. I am at university in London now. I do not intend to return home to Northern Ireland after I graduate because I don't want to live somewhere where I am not trusted to make decisions with my doctor about what is best for my body. I do not want medical decisions made for me by my government on the basis of their religion and not science.

- I was born and raised in England. I moved to Northern Ireland 13 years ago. I feel women are treated inhumanely here with archaic laws which would not even be imposed on animals. Women are treated worse than animals here, that's what it feels like. To have DUP harp on about NI being treated no differently in this Brexit sham to the rest of the UK and YET they use a peace process veto to oppose abortion and marriage equality. NI should have the same access to abortion and marriage equality as the rest of the UK. I am very much PRO CHOICE. The human rights of women and LGBTQ people in Northern Ireland are being obstructed and the UK is obligated to ensure we have the same Human Rights in NI as the rest of our UK family do.

- I have been working in the community education and women's sector since 2007. I have seen women born in NI and women who have come here as migrants and refugees penalised by these laws - raped, abused and unable to assert their own right to bodily autonomy by making a choice whether to continue a pregnancy or not unless they have the financial, physical and legal (pertaining to their asylum status) ability to travel to terminate this pregnancy. Meanwhile, should they go on to have the child, as many women are de facto forced to, the support system is lacking in funding and
strained to the point of non-existence in many cases so neither mother or child are supported or cared for. Women are humans, humans have rights, bodily autonomy is one of these rights. I was 15 when suddenly I became popular at an all girls secondary school in North Belfast. In a bid to help me with frequent, painful & heavy periods, my doctor had put me on the pill. I had told a few friends & from that moment on almost every week, young women from the age of 14-18 had wanted to speak to me during break & lunch. These young women or often girls, begged me for a strip of my pills, because they thought they might be pregnant. It was believed that an overdose of the contraceptive pill could force someone to have their period. Most of the women today would be considered victims of rape, but back then it wasn’t considered rape. Their boyfriends hadn’t been ‘able to stop themselves’, the girls had been plied with or simply had too much to drink. Because they hadn’t been capable of saying No, hadn’t said it enough, or hadn’t pushed the guy off, it was considered consensual. Today we’re taught not to blame the victim, yet it was accepted that if she was wearing a short skirt or had worn too much makeup, had turned him on, went to his house, was kinda ‘asking for it’. Despite best efforts, many people still harbour this view in NI. Sometimes, I gave the girls the pills, sometimes I couldn’t. As I got older, it wasn’t uncommon for there to be a ‘whip-round ‘ in the Common Room for someone who was scared she could be pregnant, for any pills or medicines that she could take. Some often threw in the suggestion of a hot bath & a half bottle of vodka. Some girls used to hang over the bannisters to put pressure on their stomachs & get their friends to push down on them. In two occasions I remember young women in their school uniforms lying on their sides asking her friends to ‘boot her in the stomach ‘ a few times because she thought her period was late. People say, why didn’t they go to their parents? Simply because, not only were they ashamed, but there was nothing their parents could do. It was a working class part of Belfast. They knew their parents wouldn’t be able to afford a trip to the mainland for an abortion. They knew they were stuck. This situation continued right up until I left school. Some girls I went to school with, had been ‘unlucky’, they left school to have their babies. Many very bright young women ended up as mother at 16/17. They had neither the time nor the money to get to college. Besides, it was their punishment for ‘being a slut/ drinking too much ‘.

Most, though they may love their children & couldn’t contemplate life without them, admit that they wish they’d had the choice. Some ended up living with the boyfriend who hadn’t been able to stop themselves. Besides, he was a ‘good dad ‘ for a while at least.

I’d forgotten about these things until 14 years ago. A 15 yr old girl in the area in which I live was found dead. Her mum couldn’t work it out. The young girl had been bright, bubbly & happy. But for some reason, she’d taken a large amount of her dads pain medication. She’d had a piping hot bath & said she was going on to bed. Her mum found her dead the next morning. Her death was ruled a suicide.

What the coroner didn’t know was that a fortnight before the young girl had been at a party. Being young & foolishness, she drank alcohol & tried a ‘tab’. She woke up the next morning, not remembering much about the night before. Within a week the rumours had started. Some at the party had claimed they had walked in on her with some guy, then someone else said they’d seen her with another. Whether she had been with anyone, no one truly knows. These rumours had been weighing on her for a few weeks & when she believed her period was late, she decided that she could possibly be pregnant. Ashamed & besides herself with worry, she decided to do something ‘just in case’.

A 15 year old girl, accidentally took her life because she believed she’d no option. And unfortunately, the truth is, she didn’t. She couldn’t go to doctor, as all they’d be able to do would be to book her in for her 12wk scan. There was no point going to her family, because they wouldn’t have had the money to get her to England to end the pregnancy.

That was 2004. This is 2018 & nothing has changed. Young women & girls can’t be prescribed the abortion pill, regardless of their circumstances. They could try & order the abortion pill on the web. But most 15,16,17 year olds don’t have a debit card. Even if they did, to where should they get it delivered? Their parents would want to know what was in their package, or what if the police intercepted it?

The archaic abortion laws in NI, are literally destroying women’s lives in NI. It doesn’t matter if we are victims of rape or assault. It doesn’t matter if our contraception fails. It doesn’t matter if we know we can’t mentally, physically, emotionally, if we’re in an abusive relationship. If we can’t afford the trip to the mainland, if we can’t get the time off work, if you can’t get a babysitter, we will be forced
to continue a pregnancy against our will. It’s our punishment for being able to get pregnant. I’m 41 now, but our abortion laws have not changed. I’ve two sons, age 13 & 11. I was relieved to have sons, as I didn’t want to have to explain to my daughters, that although they should never be forced to do something with their body they don’t want to do, that because we live in NI & not anywhere else in the UK they will be denied bodily autonomy if they fall pregnant. That although we in the UK, because we live in Northern Ireland we are deemed unworthy & incapable of making our own reproductive choices.

- Thankfully I have never been in a position where I needed to have access to an abortion (other than an early miscarriage requiring an "evacuation of the womb"), however, I feel sorry for any woman in N.I. who is facing a crisis pregnancy for whatever reason and cannot afford to travel for an abortion, a woman needs support and understanding in such circumstances and not be made to feel like a criminal.

- Growing up in a climate of fear and shame is harmful for NI society.

- As a woman living in Northern Ireland, like all women living in Northern Ireland, I cannot access adequate healthcare due to the continuing obstruction to a long-needed change in policy by a squabbling government getting paid by the hard working residents of NI (including those against whom they discriminate, for example, women, LGBT+, minorities) to do nothing. I have personally known too many women who have been raped by males and for whom adequate healthcare was not provided. Regardless of what the situation is, choice over what a woman does with her body is always *only* that: access to adequate healthcare and it it a right I and all women living here are denied.

- I have two sisters who needed abortions, one was in an abusive relationship and the other was 15. They could not go through with pregnancy for the sake of their mental health. These decisions were not made lightly and an already traumatic experience was made so much worse by the shame NI laws attach.

- I was unable to seek an abortion when I found myself pregnant with my 3rd child in a broken marriage.

- I became pregnant through a casual relationship when I was 19. I had not wanted to have sex but I was drunk and unable to stop it happening. I was studying at queens and did not want to have a baby. Particularly with the man in question. This was in 1987. Abortion was taboo. I did not, in fact I have never told my family. I had to navigate the weird system where my go told me he could not advise about abortion. I had to go to a phone box to book my abortion and luckily I had been given some money from my granny so I was able to pay for it and my travel. I told my best friend and she came with me to Liverpool. I felt like a criminal. I suppose I was. I got a taxi to the bpa centre to see the two male doctors to persuade them I could not have the baby. This was also grim I didn’t see why they had to give permission. I had to stay in a b and b and then go to the clinic. It was awful to think that the taxi drivers and b and b owners probably all knew what I was there for. My friend could not stay and had to go back alone. I remember walking past the anti-abortion protesters feeling angry and upset. I was then on my own in the clinic and went home on my own the next day. I had never travelled on my own before this it was pretty stressful. Kept being asked what was reason for travel ( security checks during the trouble) I had to lie. When I met my friend when I came home I realised that she had told one of her friends about it. I was v upset at that and we fell out over it. That was a terrible loss for me. I realise now it was too much to ask her to lie about where she had been. Having to go through all of this knowing it was unlawful and not being able to tell anyone because of attitudes. I still don’t tell anyone because I see it as personal to me at that time and also because I feel bad that I didn’t tell them at the time. I don’t feel traumatised by the abortion but the impact of having to go to England, the fall out with my best friend and having to keep it a secret all my life has I’m sure affected my ability to trust.
• I live in terror of the day my contraception fails as I don’t have the money nor can I take the time off work to travel as I don’t get sick pay. I have seen teenage pupils (I’m a teacher) pregnant in the knowledge that some of them wouldn’t be if they had the same access as everyone else in UK.

• I am shocked at how outdated and oppressive NI’s laws are. A woman’s right to choose is fundamental - my choices and rights should not be determined or limited by someone else’s personal beliefs.

• I had to travel for an abortion in 2007. Online services weren’t really available at that time, or weren’t to my knowledge. Had they been, legal or not, I would have used them. The distress and anguish that I experienced was not making the decision to have an abortion, it was travelling, and having to make arrangements for that travel and waiting the weeks until I could have a surgical abortion and borrowing money for the travel and operation that caused me emotional harm. I know that I am not alone in this experience, and so you can see that providing funded abortions in England or Wales or Scotland is not a solution to this problem.

As a lone parent to a 4 year old I had to organise childcare from 6am until 8pm, thankfully one of the two people I was able to tell could look after my child. The other person had to drive me the one hour journey to the airport and collect me again that evening. For lone parents or parents of small children or women in dangerous domestic relationships, or those who do not have rights to travel, making the journey can be extremely difficult or just impossible.

I know many other people have had to wait like me, from the time of finding out you are pregnant until finally being able to access an abortion. I found out early, I was barely 5 weeks pregnant, it was very definitely a crisis pregnancy. I had struggled alone for the previous four years through postnatal depression, poverty and the usual difficulties lone parents face. I had, however just completed an access to university course and I had secured a place to study for a degree. I could not continue with that pregnancy. If I had been forced to, I highly doubt I would be here today. Immediately I knew that I needed an abortion, but due to being a lone parent and not having enough money to stay over night in England I was not able to have a medical abortion, I had to wait 4 weeks to have a surgical abortion. Those four weeks of forced pregnancy that my government forced me to endure were hell, they were torturous. I withdrew from social life because of the secret I was hiding. I was isolated and stressed and worried and trying to parent my child and every day felt like a week until the day I travelled. I tried to induce my own miscarry, it didn’t work, but I was so distraught about the travel arrangements and leaving my child that I felt I had to.

You will hear from many women who have had to travel, you will hear about airport lounges and bleeding in airplane toilets and fighting with nausea and kindly air stewards who see the women every day. But I will tell you about my experience too because every voice matters, travelling is not ok. At 7am I entered the waiting area, I was ill with morning sickness, weak with hunger, because you are not allowed to eat and exhausted from worrying and not sleeping the night before. I continued to worry, if the flight was delayed would I miss my appointment? Thankfully I landed on time and after an awkward taxi trip made it to the clinic. I sat beside women from Liverpool who could not understand why I had to travel. The care I received was caring and compassionate, I was relieved after the procedure. Going home was quite terrible, for a start I had to sit in the airport for five hours, I hadn’t known how long it would take at the clinic so I had booked an evening flight. It was, as it was for thousands of other women, I had cramps, I was bleeding more heavily than I was used to as my periods are light, I was uncomfortable, I just wanted to be on my own sofa or in my bed with a hot water bottle and a cup of tea. The flight back was the same. Travelling for a medical procedure like this, is not ok. It is inhumane to force women on to flights after an operation.

• My experience does not centre around abortion but the medicines involved in abortion so you may feel my response isn’t relevant but I feel it has some merit.

In 2016 I had a missed miscarriage. My body didn’t realise my baby had died and over a month later I was given abortion pills to induce ‘passing of the products of conception’. The pills didn’t work, within 48 hrs they had no impact on me whatsoever. A full week later (2 days before I was booked in for d+c surgery) I had a spontaneous bleed. I had contractions and lost blood for 5 hours straight.
The pain and blood loss was unreal. I could not move from the toilet, my husband had to bring me a chair to lean on and hot water bottles for the pain. I vomited throughout. I passed out twice. My husband wanted to call an ambulance - I wouldn't let him. The following day I was scanned again and there was still 'products of conception left'. I still need the surgery and suffered a horrendous infection requiring several courses of antibiotics.

My points are twofold:
1) sometimes the drugs do not work. Women seeking abortion need to be cared for by professionals, not volunteers who have educated themselves to the best of their ability and put themselves at risk to help others. No woman needing abortion care should be forced to obtain medication illegally and worry about prosecution.
2) my physical experience of miscarriage was one of the worst of my life. I just cannot explain how horrific the blood loss and pain I experienced in my own bathroom was. No woman should be forced to go through that without proper support and medical care.

- Growing up, I didn't have strong views on abortion. I just thought there were better ways to handle a pregnancy. If you don't want the baby, give it up for adoption, things like that. It was something I never had much thought about. Until I fell pregnant at 18, and it all made sense. The fear is something I've never felt before or since. Me and the father were not together when I found out I was pregnant. We talked about abortion. I researched abortion and seen that it wasn't available unless I was in danger of dying. I felt like I was dying. I researched it in England. We had no money to get there and no excuse to give as to why we were going to a different country. Already suffering from depression and anxiety and struggling with self harm and suicidal thoughts I planned to kill myself. It was overwhelming and I couldn't hide it from my parents anymore as they knew something was wrong and I told them I was pregnant. We talked it through and I decided to carry on with the pregnancy. Even though we discussed abortion, the father got on board and so did both our families. I realised I had an amazing support network and I could get through this. I have a beautiful daughter. This may sound like a story supporting the argument to not have an abortion, but I disagree. There are women who are like me who do NOT have what I have. I know what it feels like to have an unplanned pregnancy. There are women out there who NEED these services. If I didn't have a support network I think I would be dead because I would have needed the proper access to a necessary medical procedure. Falling pregnant made me more pro choice than ever. Having a child is very difficult. There are women who are not physically, emotionally, mentally or financially capable of taking care of a child. There are women who do not want children. There are women who are not ready at the time of their pregnancy. There are women who conceive due to rape. We cannot force women to stay pregnant when they don't want to be. Women should not be forced to go through labour and give birth when they don't want to. It can be a traumatic experience whether the baby is wanted or not. I had a very difficult one, 26 long hours with some midwives expressing unprofessional and rude opinions about my age. Access to safe abortions is a human right. We should not be criminalised for it. My body, my choice.

- Knowing women are traveling to England on a daily basis is hard to deal with. Why enforce more pain in them.

- Ten years ago, I had to travel alone to Manchester to have a termination. My mental health was all over the place, I was in an abusive relationship and my last baby was only 4 months old at the time. Initially, I booked the appointment and travelled over with my partner to have it done. When I was scammed at the clinic I wasn't far enough into the pregnancy for them to accurately see the foetus. So they were unable to carry it out. I had to make another appointment to return in another few weeks. After the money we'd spent on flights, accommodation etc first time around, we couldn't afford the same again twice. So I travelled alone to have it done. I sat, bleeding and terrified in the airport later that same evening to catch a flight I'd been advised to delay getting but couldn't afford to. I didn't make the decision to terminate lightly, but it was the right one. What wasn't right was having to travel somewhere I'd never been before to have it done, to feel the shame of not being able to tell my own GP after I returned home and the absolute fear of recrimination if I had needed extra medical attention once I got home or had complications. This archaic law needs to change.
Please reform our outdated legislation it feels so unfair we are separate to Ireland and UK. On a personal level I am a mother who has accessed a termination in the UK. I also worry about my daughters access to safe termination services. I feel that any decision about a life needs to be taken by the person who it impacts.

I found out at 10 weeks I was pregnant. I went to the family planning clinic for guidance and a counselling session. They advised me on prices and told me which abortion clinics in England tended to be cheaper (London was more expensive). They told me of the procedure itself and I decided that I wanted to undertake the abortion before week 14 due to it being more complicated where the foetus is ripped apart in utero before being evacuated. I had no support network and no funds available to purchase my flights or pay for the procedure. I tried my bank for an emergency overdraft extension but was denied. I could not even afford the flights never mind be able to afford a child for 18 years or more. The father had to loan me the money. We took the first flight to England as we HAD to be in the clinic before 9am I think. They would not accept me arriving later if the flight was delayed. The flight took place on week 13, day 6. The cost of flights was about £200 each. The father and I were separated by the clinic due to some women potentially being the subject of abuse or rape. I had no support inside the clinic. I told the clinic staff I had a flight to catch in the evening and would appreciate being seen early. I was one of the last women treated at around 3pm. Women and girls from the city we were in were seen first. The procedure was quick and I was discharged 30mins after being knocked out. The giant pad I was given leaked so we had to get me a pair of tracksuit bottoms to change into as my jeans were covered in blood.

I took a reaction to the anaesthetic. I could not be inside for more than five minutes without feeling nauseous. Luckily this resolved itself by the time we were in the airport at 6pm. Had I been seen earlier there would have been no risk of being ill on the flight, but the clinic did not care at all about the Irish women who had to travel and undertake huge costs. We were judged.

I wanted to get my tubes tied - I do not want to be a mother. Doctors here have refused, forcing medical treatment on me; the pill which I can’t take because I get migraine; the injection which made me lactate; the Mirena coil which was so painful I had to have it removed within three days. Spermicide and latex irritate me. So I can abstain or run the risk of getting pregnant. Because doctors here seem to think women do not know their own minds over their sexual and reproductive choices and we might "change (our) mind(s) if a future partner wants a baby". Because what the man wants supersedes our rights as individuals over our reproductive organs.

Having to help a friend to order medicine on online website and keep it all in secret; knowingly that I was committing a criminal offence passed 1867....?

Friends have had to make probably the hardest journey in their lives to England to have an abortion.

As a GP, supporting women who have to travel to terminate pregnancies affected by FFA, having an extra layer of inconvenience and shame and expense added to an already horrendous situation. Abortion is healthcare and we need to be able to care for our patients rather than abandoning them in their greatest need.

I feel the extreme inequality as a woman in Northern Ireland due to the restrictive laws that exist. I feel it undermines my human rights and my personal autonomy, based on the sex I was born into and my reproductive abilities. I have had to play a major role in difficult decisions regarding my own autonomy and future, ones that impact my free will; the risk of prosecution.

As a young woman, I require protection from my government, support and respect. This can be evidenced in a change in the legal structure. I have encountered the trauma that can result from having an abortion in such a stigmatised, restrictive way. Feeling shame and emotional turmoil as a result. Requiring local professional emotional support systems that could have been avoided.

When I was 17 I was on the contraceptive pill, this destroyed my life and tested me down more than anything in the world but I knew I needed it even with a boyfriend of 4 years. One day I went to the doctors about not sleeping or eating, they then suggested pregnancy which
turned out to be true. Long story short, they gave me no option and didn't inform me of what I was able to do where to go for help or advice NOTHING basically just a good luck and off I went. THIS IS WRONG!! I never believed this was possible even using 2 methods of contraception but there you have it. After a long discussion with my boyfriend and my mother we decided I wouldn't be able to cope with a child as I was still one myself, better still I would never be able to give the child the everyday things that it would need and would have been no life for a child. I then made the decision I should go to Liverpool to have a termination which I got no help for. I was only able to go to a counsellor which resulted in me being pressurised again. My decision was made and I had to go to Liverpool to have my termination. Even though this was my choice and my choice only the journey and the experience itself was nothing like I've ever witnessed before especially in Northern Ireland. Having to travel across the water to be able to do something with MY body because of an ancient law? When I was in Liverpool I couldn't believe the support that was really available and how widely it was accepted. This SHOULD be available in my own country so I don't have to travel or go through that experience just because my contraception failed and I was offered no help. It's the 21st century not the 1800's. I want to help women like me who felt like they had no option and that they were a criminal just for not being able to have a decision about their own body and for contraception to fail or in any other situations that are necessary.

- I have horrific mental health and attempted suicide over not being able to access an abortion in Northern Ireland. I have severe travel anxiety so leaving the country was not an option for me. I ended up having to move my young son in with my mother so he could be cared for and was under daily psychiatric care for around a month and continue with counselling, medication and need support constantly. My suicidal attempts were because of the unwanted pregnancy and even though medical professionals agreed that I actually needed the termination I was not able to get one.

- A close family member had to make the difficult decision to have an abortion. Our family was in debt as we scrambled to get the money together for the procedure and for the price of flights etc. Once the procedure was carried out my relative was in emotional distress and in allot of pain she then had to make the journey back to Belfast. Unfortunately she had complications and no after care she ended up in the Royal. It should be a woman's right on what happens to her body. If the service was available in NI proper care can be provided to every patient before and after. Me and many of my friends and colleagues believe we should be in line with the rest of the UK and Ireland. Abortion is not a decision made lightly by any female but the option and availability is a human right.

- Unexpected pregnancy - contraception failed. Took the morning after pill. It also failed. Looked into abortion but the costs were astronomical. Eventually miscarried but I could have been left with a baby none of us really wanted.

- A family member had to go to England for a termination due to fatal fetal abnormality.

- I had an abortion some years ago when I was 19. Being pregnant was terrifying and there was no one I could talk to. I just wanted it over. I had to wait until I was 10 weeks before the abortion due to money issues. I actually had to wait until my student loan came through so I could afford it, plus the cost of flights. Going to a different country for such a huge event in your life makes a difference. Even little things like the nurses not understanding my accent at times made me feel more isolated. I left fairly quickly after the operation, and extreme cramping began in the taxi to the airport. I lay on seats in the airport doubled over in pain. It was so bad I was afraid they wouldn't let me fly. As I got off the plane in Belfast I lost a lot of blood. I could feel it was soaking through my jeans. All I could do was wrap my jacket around me and get to the toilets. In the toilets there was blood everywhere. I remember lying on the cubicle floor crying. It was scared that it wasn't normal, that something was wrong. But I couldn’t go to the hospital as I thought they might phone the police. I didn't know if I could be arrested for what I had done. Looking back, I think it affected me psychologically. I started drinking a lot and staying in bed most of the day. I stopped going to lectures and eventually dropped out of university. I pushed my closest friends away, and made new ones. It took a long time to get back on track again. Abortion is such a taboo subject here that I couldn't talk about it. I often wonder
if I’d felt able to properly discuss it at the time would things have been different.

- I’m 39 and a mother of two daughters. It took 4 rounds of IVF and thousands of pounds for us to make our family. You cannot believe how lucky we feel to have our children. We feel complete. Five months ago I fell pregnant. After spending 20 years completely infertile, I was suddenly pregnant. Five years ago, I would have been ecstatic. This time I was devastated. My husband and I hadn’t planned for another child. We couldn’t afford to bring up another child. We couldn’t imagine how another child would fit into our world. We didn’t have the energy or capacity to have another baby. We just couldn’t go ahead with it. The guilt I felt about booking in an abortion was immense. But I was confident about my decision and I didn’t feel shame. Before I was able to travel, I was suddenly in excruciating pain. I called an ambulance and taken to hospital. They diagnosed ovarian torsion (twisted ovary) and had to have emergency surgery. Before the anaesthetic, the surgeon told me that even though he knew I didn’t want to be pregnant, he wouldn’t be able to terminate my pregnancy due to the law in Northern Ireland. When I woke from the surgery, I had one less ovary but I was still pregnant. The pain had gone, but I was incredibly sick. They had found clots in the blood vessels serving the ovary that they had removed, so I was put on a course of anti clotting injections for a month. When I got home I was in bed for a week, being sick and recovering from the abdominal surgery but I knew I still had to travel to England for the termination. Because we have no family in Northern Ireland, my husband had to stay at home to look after our two little girls and I travelled alone. The experience was awful. It was lonely and frightening. It was disorientating and exhausting. It was messy and uncomfortable. I felt every step of the process was designed to make you feel shame and remorse. And to top it all off, I was still recovering from my surgery and had to go through another procedure. But I am lucky. I could afford to travel. I was able to stay with family in London. I am confident about flying alone. I can navigate big cities. I have supportive friends and family I could confide in, and ask for help. And thankfully someone was able to collect me from the clinic after the procedure because I wasn’t allowed to travel home alone. I cannot imagine what it would have been like for someone who is not as lucky as me. Someone who didn’t have the support of their family. Someone who had never been on an airplane before. Someone who felt overwhelmed by shame. Someone who didn’t have the life experience required to navigate the logistics while at the same time feeling terrified about what lay ahead. I came back home to Northern Ireland feeling relieved, but furious. It’s not right that when women and girls are most vulnerable, they should also be put through the added trauma of having to travel. Having a termination is hard enough, please don’t make us suffer more.

- As a 16 year old I had to secretly travel to England to get an abortion. I have never regretted my decision (I’m now 56). It was absolutely the best choice for me and my family. But it appals me that 40 years later women still have no access to safe, legal, affordable abortion in NI. No one should be forced to continue with an unwanted pregnancy.

- While I do not have personal, firsthand experience of the abortion laws in Northern Ireland, many of my university students do. They have been inadequately prepared for adulthood because they do not get sufficient sexual education in this repressed society, and therefore, when they become sexually active, they do not know how to safely protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy. The end result is that they either have to raise funds to fly to London for the procedure, or they have the babies. In either scenario, they generally drop out of university, which sets them back financially and severely limits their future opportunities. Northern Ireland is behind the rest of the world on this.

- Having to travel to England for an abortion at 19 years old meant spending my little bit of student loan money on flights and accommodation, it meant travelling alone, it meant lying to my tutors and my wider circle of friends about where I was. Travelling to England for an abortion at 19 years old is the trauma I attribute my ongoing mental ill health to and the reason that anxiety has riddled my subsequent pregnancies. I did not WANT an abortion but had one for medical reasons. Travelling alone for an abortion in secrecy deprived me of the support I needed. Local access could have changed my physical and mental health then and now, 11 years later.
• I have witnessed the pain and distress caused to women by our outdated abortion laws.

• I am fortunate in that I have not personally endured the trauma of having to travel to access an abortion. I have been living in England for my studies for three years and am so lucky that I don't even have to consider the logistics of having an abortion because I know it would be available to me locally here, along with accompanying support and advice. I have had friends still living at home who have had terrifying pregnancy scares, made much more stressful than is necessary because of the possible consequence of travelling for access to a basic medical right. I have offered to be a base in England for friends who could have needed it. The current situation causes mental strain for anyone who can get pregnant, regardless of age or socio-economic background, although it is important to note that both of these factors can render the experience significantly more fraught and in some cases simply impossible to follow the course of action they would choose.

• Having to borrow money from the credit union to help my friend pay for flights to go to England, alone and scared.

• In 2011 I discovered I was pregnant. I was in the final throws of a long term relationship that did not need the additional complication of a baby. I had been sexually active for 16 years at that point in my life, always careful, always responsible, and this was the first time I had even experienced so much as a pregnancy scare. I chose to have an abortion and have never for one minute regretted my decision. It was a terrible experience however and I don’t mean the procedure. I mean having to phone around clinics in England convenient to accessible airport. I mean having to coordinate suitable dates and times around flight times, work commitments and other scheduling concerns. I mean having to fork out £450 for the procedure plus travel costs for me and a friend, all in all about £700. I mean having to come up with a convincing lie to explain to my partner (co-contributor to the foetus) why I was taking a day trip to Liverpool. I mean having to wait two weeks, knowing, feeling, doubting, questioning, shaming, hurting, worrying, feeling sick to my core. I mean having to sit on a flight looking around and wondering how many of the other young women were in my situation. And knowing that they were looking at me wondering the same thing I mean having to endure the unsolicited opinion of the “pro-life” taxi driver who judged me the instant I gave him my destination address. I mean the having to sit in the waiting room for an additional two hours after the procedure because I wasn’t supposed to fly home immediately. I mean having to sit at the airport for a further two hours, bleeding, cramping, crying, again paranoid that everyone knew exactly why the emotional girl from Northern Ireland had made a whistle stop visit to their city. It was my choice to have an abortion. I have never regretted it and I don’t believe I suffered as a result of this choice either mentally or physically. I did suffer because I was forced to travel and pay for a medical procedure that would have been freely available to me on my doorstep had I lived anywhere else in the United Kingdom.

• Having lived in Glasgow and England during my university and early working years, I feel ashamed to have moved back home to a country which treats me like a second class citizen. My rights and basic health care needs are oppressed because I’m a woman. In this day and age we should put faith and trust in our women that allows them to make an informed decision about their body. If men could get pregnant, abortion in NI would already be in place. It’s time to trust us, it’s time for a change. The views of the backwards ‘government’ that run NI (and I say that with irony considering they aren’t currently running anything) DO NOT represent the views of the majority of the public here in Northern Ireland. The politics in this country make me hate living here. We don’t have equal marriage, we don’t have abortion rights, we don’t have a government. You have the power to make change happen. Please help the oppressed.

• I work as a doctor and have had to turn away women who have come to me for help in times of desperation after a rape or unplanned pregnancy because the law does not allow me to help them myself or even direct them to abortion services.

• I had an abortion at 18. A simple teenage error and found myself with an unwanted pregnancy. I did not want to be pregnant. I had to travel to the UK for an abortion. I was lucky to have the support of
my family. We were also fortunate enough to be in a financial situation to be able to afford to travel. So many young women aren’t in this position. I was a young girl in education and did not want to be pregnant. It would have been a simple process if I had had access to healthcare in Northern Ireland. Instead I had to travel to the UK for termination. Other girls in the clinic had only to travel a short distance from their home. I am a British citizen and it is unfair that I do not have the same rights as my fellow citizens. Please change the law so my daughter can have reproductive rights.

- I haven’t had a personal experience of abortion myself, however cannot fail to be moved by the stories that have been shared by thousands of women all around the island this year. I cannot fail to be angry at the gravity of the situation, that women are criminalised in this country for taking ownership of their own bodies and making the decisions that are right for them, socially and economically. I cannot fail to be furious at the inaction from the government at Westminster. Although I haven’t had a personal experience of abortion, the reality of the situation has had a severely negative effect on my mental health. Enough is enough and it needs to change.

- I am a woman born and raised in Northern Ireland and I should have full control over my own body.

- I had to travel to Manchester for an abortion in 2014, travelling to a country I was not familiar with, to be treated by doctors who didn’t know me and to be made feel like I was doing something so shameful that my own country had to turn it’s back on me was awful. Had I been able to under go the process at home, where I feel safe, I wouldn’t have struggled as much as I did in making a choice. My family had to go without money to assist me in affording the travel, a place to sleep and the procedure, it was not just me that suffered unnecessarily.

- I discovered I was 4 weeks pregnant. I already have children and was only a few months into a new relationship. I have a chronic illness which means contraception makes symptoms worse. Condoms failed. I was very ill after my children and the stress on my body made my chronic illness permanently worse. Aside from this I didn’t want another child. Even if I did I was already living in unsuitable housing and although I work I rely on tax credits to get by. A new child wouldn’t have been eligible for tax credits. So I was a few months into a new dream job and a new relationship. I knew I couldn’t go ahead with this pregnancy. I tried to figure out how I would get money to travel, how I’d arrange childcare and how I would lie. I don’t live in a big city with easy access to an airport even. I couldn’t tell anyone but my partner, surrounded by pro life friends and family. The guilt stigma and fear were overwhelming. I remembered hearing about the pills. I searched online and found women on web. I paid the money even though it would make the next few weeks difficult financially. I had a few weeks wait. It was terrifying. What if customs got them and the police came for me? What if I bled badly and the hospital would know and report me? After they arrived and I took them I cut the packaging up into tiny pieces just incase someone saw it in the trash. The abortion itself went ok. I felt relief. But the weeks and months that followed took their toll. I don’t regret my decision. But living in a place which makes me feel like a murderer has impacted my mental health and sense of belonging. The repeal campaign exposed peoples views of women. I feel disgusted that my daughter will grow up in such a heartless judgemental place. I did find out in time, especially with repeal, that a lot more of my family and friends are pro choice. The DUP do NOT speak for me. I still haven’t told anyone else. I attended counselling but was afraid to tell them incase they reported me. I feel like I have a secret that will stay forever hidden, even though I know so many women I know have also secretly gone through the same thing. We deserved a space, a voice, a right to support and care.

- I found out I was pregnant when I was 19 in the summer between university semesters. I was in Belfast at the time and immediately felt trapped. I felt like a criminal. My mum is liberal and immediately took me down to Dublin the next day where I had to lie to the nurse and say If I didn’t get a termination I was going to kill myself as soon as I got home. I lost my job because I couldn’t tell them why I had to leave the country last minute. I couldn’t tell my dad because he was an Irish catholic and my mum and dad would’ve broke up. I was allowed an abortion but unfortunately wasn’t able to go to Belfast. I had to go to Edinburgh with no family, and stay at my ex boyfriends house to get my termination. I went through the most painful experience of my life without any family, and with my ex who blamed me for ‘killing our baby.’ Straight after despite being supportive
before. I was trapped at 19 years old because of the stigma and backwards view of Northern Ireland. I felt I had no one to turn to in Northern Ireland for advice on how to safely have an abortion. I fell pregnant with a man I hadn't known very long. He was a soldier. I was 19. I did the pregnancy test literally the day before he departed for Iraq for a 6 months tour. It was traumatic for us both as he felt useless and I was living at home with devout catholic parents. I made the decision for me, that I would terminate the pregnancy however I had no way of doing so safely. He and his non religious parents were more open minded and they agreed to help me. He paid for my flights to stay with his parents and paid for the abortion. I flew to England and his parents took me to a private clinic. The nurse wasn’t pleasant, I recall feeling at the time that if she had issues regarding abortion she shouldn’t work in this clinic. I was fortunate to be so early along I could take a handful of small pills to terminate but other girls, some probably younger than me had to undergo surgery. They told me that my asthma inhalers May pose risks and I could fall ill, I felt as though they were trying to talk me out of it or make me feel guilty. My asthma is very mild and well controlled (and in fact I had no symptoms with regards my lungs at all). They made me sign a disclaimer that I wouldn’t return asking for help if something untoward did happen. I think they probably do this for all Northern Irish girls, I’m not sure I just know they did not put me at ease or make it more pleasant, they were judgemental and cold. Once I took the pills his parents brought me to a restaurant, here was a long drive home ahead of us. Fairly soon after taking the pills I felt incredibly nauseous, I threw up at the restaurant. Back in the car I had terrible pains and nausea and all I really remember was writhing about in the back of the car and them looking at me, feeling helpless and worried. I took ibuprofen and managed to fall asleep for the rest of the drive. At their homelod there was somewhere safe to rest, unlike many girls from NI in my same position. Others may not have slept with a man decent enough to pay the financial costs involved. Other girls may not have had a ‘family’ to bring them. Support them and take them home to a safe place. When I returned to NI I had to pretend it never happened. It shouldn’t be this way.

- My wife had a termination after severe foetal defects were discovered in a series of scans at 21 weeks. Our choices were limited. The thought of placing my already distressed wife on a plane to England was not only unthinkable but a denial of her basic human right to make a decision about her own body or face a humiliating, medically dangerous and deeply upsetting journey to another country and a strange hospital with little or no support as I would have had to remain at home with our other child. That the laws surrounding this issue are determined by faith and politics, rather than science and simply providing a choice to women, is still thoroughly shocking and archaic. Northern Ireland is embarrassingly behind the rest of the UK which the loudest of our politicians claim to demand parity with in all cases except providing a choice to women over their own bodies. A hypocritical disgrace.

- While I’ve never personally had to try to access abortion, I remember the fear of a pregnancy scare when my partner and I couldn’t afford a baby, I have a daughter and nieces and I believe they should have the same rights as other UK citizens under the NHS.

- As a British citizen I expect to be afforded the same rights as every other British citizen regardless of which part of the UK I happen to live. The DUP are very keen for NI to be treated the same as all other countries within the UK. So let’s have EXACTLY that. Abortion is healthcare. Denying it is denying a basic right.

- A family member who’s life was virtually destroyed by being forced to give birth which in turn led to a forced and abusive marriage of over 20 years.

- As a healthcare professional, I have had to nurse women through avoidable extended periods of complete distress and pain during miscarriages and in instances where the foetus has a fatal abnormality. Risking the physical and mental wellbeing of mothers in NI because of questionably religious based laws is extremely distressing for all involved and a breach of human rights.
• Supporting a friend who has never recovered mentally after being put on a boat and sent to England as a teenager to abort her child.

• I was 18 had spent most if my teenage life looking after my mentally ill mother and working full time, when I fell pregnant I was so frightened and scared at how I would have ever been able to cope, I had never had my own life, I wanted to finish college. My boyfriend at the time was not supportive of going though with the pregnancy and became increasingly abusive. I went to England alone on a plane on a cold winter rainy morning, my boyfriend didn't want to come, I didn't have or tell anyone else. I went through the procedure woke up and was in pain and in a country alone away from everything I knew. I would have given anything to crawl in to my own bed or have a shower in my own house or a hug. I went to the airport a few hours later. I will never forget that lonely scary journey, I have never regretted my decision. I know I would have endured much less trauma if I had of accessed this medical care at home. I have went on to have my own life and 3 beautiful little girls. I never want them to be forced to travel for basic medical care. We deserve equal access to abortion in Northern Ireland as the rest of the UK and Europe. We can no longer live as second class citizens in our country. It is time for us to have our right to decide. I wish this wasn't still happening, its been over 15 years since my experience...please don't let this continue.

• I knew I was pregnant at 4 weeks. I had unfortunately been the victim of sexual assault before coming back to NI from where I studied in mainland UK. Despite the fact that I knew, I was not able to access any services for another 4 weeks before returning to the mainland. During that time I had to register with a GP where I studied to be able to access the service otherwise I would not have been able to afford it. I was finally able to have an appointment and access an abortion at 11 weeks. This had traumatic effects as it prolonged my pregnancy after sexual assault. The worst part of this is I consider myself lucky. I was able to register with a mainland GP, access a free service on the NHS (which I would not have been able to do as a woman registered in Northern Ireland at that time), have a place to stay afterwards, and not have to make the emotional effort of a journey for this purpose. But I still should have been able to access this the moment I knew while in NI.

• In 2006, I had a crisis pregnancy and chose not to go through with an abortion. I was brought up in a churchgoing family with pro-life views and did not feel as if I could turn to them. I was aware that my only option was to travel to GB. At the time I was very sick and could not face the journey to a strange place. I also had no idea of who to turn to for advice on termination. I was in a very poor relationship with a man I didn't love and hated having sexual relations with. I wanted to leave and was on a social housing waiting list and I was devastated by getting pregnant. We were using BC but there was an interaction with meds. Looking back, I feel that an early termination would have been my best option. There was such a lack of info in NI that I thought abortion involved an operation and a two-three day stay in England. I had no idea of how I would have explained this to my ex partner or employer - I had just started a new job and it was very awkward. While I love my son, he is disabled (a genetic disability) and I have been left alone to raise him. Twelve years ago I had a job, now I am reliant on benefits. I don't think unplanned parenthood has worked for me at all. I pushed myself through a crisis pregnancy due to a combination of guilt, fear, ignorance and a lack of other options. Having raised a child alone, I now have a more realistic view of parenting and how much it asks of the individual. I have struggled with depression for years and my son's father has zero interest in him. I doubt whether my son would have been successfully adopted due to his complex needs so I do not see adoption as a realistic alternative to abortion.

• My personal experience is documented here https://twitter.com/homerather
• My husband and I were expecting our second child. We were told at our 12 week scan at the end of August 2018 that there was a problem. They suspected that it was anencephaly. This is a fatal condition where the babies skull and brain do not develop. Most of these pregnancies will continue to full-term and the babies will die during labour or within hours of being born. I couldn't fathom continuing with a pregnancy for another half of a year. How could I try to continue parenting my toddler, continue working and functioning normally while growing a baby that was doomed to die? We had to wait for over a week to see a consultant to confirm the diagnosis. Only then could we start
the process of trying to access care in England. Living in Northern Ireland I was told by my consultant that abortion was illegal - he would not even consider the impact on my mental health or the fact that I have a family history of severe mental illness. He didn't even ask. The law here is so restrictive and professionals are so afraid of threats from previous health ministers that they would be subject to murder charges if they participated in an abortion. The law here also gives those who would personally object to performing or participating in an abortion a means to deny care without any compulsion to refer a woman to an alternative provider who might interpret the law differently. They would not discharge me despite knowing that another hospital would have interpreted the law to allow me to be cared for at home. I was left entirely on my own and had to figure out how to access care in England, where to go, what options were available, trying find out the difference between medical termination, surgical termination, feticide - terms I’d never heard before and had no professional support to guide me. They washed their hands of me. I made countless phone calls and had to explain my situation over and over and over again before finding a hospital that would care for us properly as grieving parents. The journey to England began on a Friday morning and ended on Monday evening. It is documented from start to finish on twitter. Please consider those posts to be part of this submission. I shared our journey so that people would understand the impact of this law, not in an abstract sense, but the real lived experience of what our country put us through. Every moment of that journey was torture. I have missed out on opportunities since returning to work because I can't bring myself to go through that airport again. I haven't returned my hospital notes yet because I couldn't cope with returning to collect my child's ashes so the notes are the only physical evidence I have that he existed. Even though we desperately want another child I am afraid to conceive as there is a risk that we would have to go through that torture again. I will never forgive the people who put us through that journey. I will never not feel the impact of being exiled and discarded by my home. Every moment of inaction by Westminster is another moment of torture for me and families like mine - and believe it or not, we are lucky. We had the financial means to travel, a journey that cost us over £1,000. Even though we no longer have to pay for care in England it still costs us. We had the support of family to look after our firstborn while we traveled, others don't. We do not have any restrictions on our movement, either as a result of physical disability, a controlling abusive relationship or travel restrictions as a foreign national, others don't have that freedom. Please act now.

- I was the father to a baby that was diagnosed as having a fatal foetal abnormality at 12 weeks during the routine scan. This was a heart breaking and devastating outcome to what was supposed to be an exciting and happy occasion. This was our second child so we were not expecting anything like this as the first child is perfectly healthy and that pregnancy was without incident. As it sunk in over that weekend as to exactly what the diagnosis meant, both my wife and I were adamant that we could not continue with the pregnancy. We knew that there was little to no chance of us being offered a termination in Northern Ireland, but we still hoped that the potential mental damage to my wife might have qualified us for treatment in our own home. Far from being offered treatment at home, we were not even offered advice by the medical staff at the hospital. There was a wall of silence, partly due to fear of prosecution but also from a genuine lack of knowledge on the part of the staff. Apart from a few individual medical staff that tried to help us as best they could, we were on our own. This meant in terms of the support and advice that we were offered as well as financially unsupported. After a lot of internet searching and phone calls to various organisations and treatment centres in the UK, we finally chanced upon a hospital that would give us the treatment we wanted, and treat us as the grieving parents we were. Our experience of Northern Ireland's current law is that it is one devoid of compassion. Yet the proponents of upholding the status quo claim to be "pro-life" and use Biblical quotations to masquerade as caring Christians. The reality is that our trauma, losing our child – and let me make this doubly clear - there was NO chance of survival for our child – was made far far worse by the inhumane laws that are imposed on the people of NI. We had to go to a foreign land, for treatment that we cannot get in our own country, and leave our child behind, to be cremated and to have his ashes scattered all alone. We couldn’t afford a return trip to be there for the cremation or the scattering of the ashes. He was alone. We were forced to leave him all on his own by our government, in the name of some outdated notion no longer held by the majority of people in Northern Ireland.
• In 2013, at my 21 week scan, it revealed that my much longed-for baby boy had a bilateral ventriculomegaly and a severely underdeveloped heart. After further tests it was discovered that he had a chromosomal disorder. My husband and I made the heartbreaking decision to end my pregnancy and on the 21st May under the care and guidance of midwives at Hillingdon Hospital in London I gave birth to my stillborn son. He was 23 weeks old. I was 42. It was made clear to me that my age WAS a contributing factor and made further pregnancies "high risk". However, it was also made clear that if I was to get pregnant again I would be closely monitored from the start of my pregnancy and all available tests would be carried out before my pregnancy progressed too far, to save me from further heartbreak. So, having moved from London to Northern Ireland in 2014 and got pregnant, imagine my abject HORROR when I discovered that the tests, freely available to women in the rest of the UK, are not even offered to women in Northern Ireland. I was "high risk" and yet I could not get ANY help or support here. I had to get on a plane and fly to London to have a blood test done privately (£300), a test that is free to women outside of Northern Ireland. Luckily, this test revealed no fetal abnormalities and I went on to have a healthy baby boy in July 2015. However, I can NOT imagine how any woman feels having to travel away from home to end a pregnancy. For some, an abortion is a compassionate end to a very difficult, life altering situation. For others, like myself, ending a pregnancy is a heartbreaking decision but an informed decision that is made to avoid further pain and suffering. For me, having the full support of the medical & midwifery team at Hillingdon Hospital was not only comforting but it made the whole heartbreaking experience a little less traumatic. EVERY woman should have that level of care & support when ending a pregnancy. Stop making the women of Northern Ireland suffer.

• When I as 16, my friend was 17. She became pregnant and wanted an abortion. Her father was an abusive man. Her family had previously left the family home due to the violence he dealt out on them. But her Mum frequently returned to him due to having too many children and not enough money to feed them. My friend knew her father would kill her because she was pregnant to a man whom he didn't approve of. She was not in a relationship with him. I phoned a helpline for her from a public payphone. I was told it would cost £500. We were both unemployed students and this type of money in 1997 was impossible for us to raise. The weeks went on and time was running out for her. She thought if she ignored it, it would go away. We went out on a night out and she took ecstasy to try to bring on a miscarriage. The foetus may have been 14 weeks gestation. She had never taken this drug before and thought being dead was better than being pregnant. We had both watched the news about Leah Betts and knew the dangers. We lived in an area run by paramilitaries. Being in possession of this drug would have resulted in a punishment beating or public shaming with a placard. The miscarriage plan didn't work and she was forced to continue the unwanted pregnancy and suffer a beating from her father for bringing shame to him.

• I have worked with girls and women for over 20 years who have been sexually abused and raped. For those who conceive as a result of rape must have access to the full range of choices that other girls and women have in GB. No girl or woman should be made to continue a pregnancy she can not tolerate. The current legislation denies women and girls dignity, respect and agency over their own bodies. We need legislation which is sensitive and compassionate to the needs of women who find themselves in difficult situations of being pregnant when they do not wish to be.

• I have no personal experience with abortion, however I have supported others who have. I work as a trade union equality officer with Unite and my women's committee and other trade union members feel very strongly about the lack of provision for women in N. Ireland who decide to have abortions. I was part of the recent research group who surveyed our members to ensure that they supported the availability of abortion in Ireland because it has been one of our main equality campaigns for ten years.

• As someone who has lived in both of the jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, and has had to travel to access abortion care. I have helped friends and friends of friends, access abortive drugs from using friends and families addresses in northern Ireland after ordering them online. Criminalizing abortion
does not prevent it from happening. What criminalization does though is make women take precarious risks because they are so desperate for abortion care.

- Up until I needed an abortion I had never given the abortion laws in Northern Ireland any thought and as a result knew nothing about them. My plan had been to get married, get fairly stable financially and then have a baby. This all changed in February 2014 when I found out during my 20 week scan that my baby had a condition that appeared to be incompatible with life. I was referred to the foetal medicine unit at the Royal hospital in Belfast for a second opinion. There were delays on this appointment due to specialists on annual leave so it wasn't until 10 days after we initially had the 20 week scan. That consultant said that he agreed with what had been seen at the previous scan however he advised us to have a follow up appointment the following week to have another opinion. Again, this follow up appointment was delayed and I wasn’t seen for another 10 days. The consultant at that appointment was much more clear and firm in her diagnosis, said that our baby did have a condition that was incompatible with life and that she would be happy to sign off on a termination. However, as this was not the hospital that I was under I had to have a further appointment back at my own hospital to discuss the next steps. This was arranged for the following day. My husband and I discussed what we believed to be our options at length that evening and after many hours and tears we decided that the best option for us was to have a termination. We got to our local hospital the following day and we told the consultant that we saw that we wanted to have a termination. She replied, "Well that's not going to happen." I told her that the consultant from the Royal that we had seen in the foetal medicine unit said we could have one here and the consultant said, "Well I have friends in the Royal and that doesn't happen." I asked her what our options were and she responded, "Well the pregnancy would continue as normal." I was extremely upset and frustrated that we had been told one thing by one doctor who seemed to want to help us but couldn’t yet a doctor that could help us didn’t appear to want to. The consultant finally conceded, "Well you could go down the Marie Stopes route." That was as much information as she gave me. We left that appointment distraught and frustrated because we felt that we had arrived at the heartbreaking decision to have a termination of a much-wanted baby, an option that we didn’t want to have to take but felt it was the best option for us, only to have that option snatched away from us coldly and without compassion. Following that awful appointment, my husband and I talked and agreed that we would scrape together the money for the procedure and travel costs to England and have a termination there. This was extremely upsetting as I was terrified of travelling to a strange hospital in a strange town for a traumatic procedure and being separated from my support network of family and friends. I googled Marie Stopes England and rang the first number that came up. I said that I needed a termination. The person on the other end of the phone asked me how many weeks pregnant I was, I replied I was 23 weeks and 6 days. The person on the phone said, "I’m so sorry but we can’t help you, the procedure has to be carried out before you are 24 weeks pregnant." I started to cry and hung up the phone. I had just been told that I had no other option but to continue with a pregnancy that was doomed. Any hope that I had that this nightmare would soon be over was gone. At that stage and at that time in my life I did not know that for fatal foetal abnormalities there is no time limit on when an abortion can be carried out. I did not know and not one medical professional that I saw during the course of that pregnancy told me. So I was forced to continue with the pregnancy until my daughter was stillborn at 35 weeks. I was signed off work by my GP following the 20 week scan in February and didn’t return until October that year. The pregnancy itself was not only mentally very difficult but physically I had a number of complications. My daughter’s condition meant that she was unable to process the amniotic fluid and as a result the fluid built up and up and caused me severe pain to my ribs and back. I was prescribed morphine to help manage the pain. The physical pain made it difficult to leave the house so I spent a lot of time at home alone. Mentally, the 15 weeks between the initial diagnosis at the 20 week scan and my waters breaking at 35 weeks can only be described as torture. I woke up every day and wondered if that would be the day the hellish limbo would end, I willed my daughter’s heart to stop so that I could begin the grieving process normally. I dreaded having to leave the house because people would notice my swollen, pregnant stomach and ask me questions like when was I due and did I know what I was having. I found that it was always easier to just play along and lie to them rather than tell them the truth. I broke down when I got home.
I moved to Northern Ireland from England in 2015. I didn’t need a passport. I remained within the same country. But in the hour it took to fly from Birmingham to Belfast, I lost my right to make my own decisions about my body. I lost my right to decide whether I would become a mother. I changed from being a woman with bodily autonomy to being little more than a potential carrier for a foetus, whether or not that foetus would survive outside of the womb. I want my bodily autonomy back. I want my right to choose back. I want power over my uterus back.

I feel as a 24-year-old woman from Northern Ireland we are denied the right to choose what we can do with our bodies. Even though we have no government, the DUP is hell-bent on blocking abortion laws. Even though the DUP what to be intrinsic with UK, our laws are catastrophically different. If a woman the same ages of me in England has an unwanted pregnancy for WHATEVER reason, she can avail of healthcare, aftercare and support from her family or friends right on her doorstep. If I needed an abortion, I would have to plan it over the phone or internet, book time off work in order to travel, pay for flights and/or accommodation, fly to England probably alone and very scared/emotional, get a medical procedure done in a strange environment, attempt to recover in time to get a flight back to NI and pray nothing goes wrong as the lack of aftercare I would get would be evident. It’s shocking. People are going to have abortions, abortions aren’t going to stop. Women in NI WILL get abortions. I just sincerely hope NI will be pulled into the 21st century and allow women in NI to have safer abortions, with more emotional and physical support. I am terrified of having an unwanted pregnancy as I don’t know if I would be able to afford to travel to England for an abortion.

I have helped comfort a close friend after the termination of her pregnancy. It affected her greatly and changed everything in her life. I’m certain it contributed to her mental health problems resulting in her suicide. There needs to be more support for women and frankly the complete lack of a rape crisis centre is appalling and inhumane. Likewise seeing help from a family GP who simply doesn’t care or know how to guide women in need is almost hateful in its inadequacy when it comes to women’s physical and mental health. Not only this but I was personally attacked by a grown man in a public place for wearing a Repeal sweater in solidarity with the Together for Yes campaign in the South.

I have had three healthy children and one pregnancy which ended in a late miscarriage. I needed the support of my friends and family around me at this time; had my pregnancy required a termination and for me to travel I could not imagine the emotional and physical pain of this. I would have had to leave my children with other people, pay for airfares etc all at a time of having received the most devastating news. I consider myself lucky that I did not have to endure the added trauma of this but it could have been a possibility. I want to ensure that healthcare is available for my daughter and all other women in the future. These issues are never straightforward and decisions are never easily taken and it is time for change. Women and their families deserve better from a system we are all paying into.

I have risked persecution by providing an address for abortion pills to be ordered to for friends and for friends of friends. I have put myself into debt helping a friend get to England for a termination for a FFA.

I got pregnant at 21. I told my parents and then said that it was entirely up to me and they would support me with whatever choice I made. I went for counselling to try and help me decide but left the counselling session in tears and distraught by the anti-abortion views that were thrown at me in that session. I thought it was going to be an impartial counsellor but it most certainly wasn’t. I decided to have an abortion as it wasn’t the right time in my life to have a baby. My mum travelled with me to Manchester and on the very day of her 50th birthday I had the procedure. She commented that when she saw me walking down the stairs afterwards she could see the weight that had lifted off my shoulders.

While I was trapped by my abusive ex, I tried to leave. I reached out but no one listened. When he raped me he knew I could end up pregnant, unable to support myself due to severe depression as a
result of the abuse I would be forced to end the pregnancy. With no safe method to end the pregnancy, my only option was to end my life. I almost died because I live in Northern Ireland. If I lived on the mainland I would of had a safe back up option. I live with the trauma every day. There is no support here, if I speak up I'm met with "it wasn't that bad, someone else had it worse"

* I was 17 and it was 2000 when I found out I was pregnant. I phoned my doctor and they weren't able to advise me on anything related to a termination. I didn't even know how many weeks pregnant I was. I used the local library to look into abortions in England and we saved for weeks as well as borrowed money to be able to afford travel and the cost of the abortion. It was approx 700 for the abortion and 300 for travel. I was 17. He was 18. We travelled to London and when I got to the clinic I was starving as we couldn't afford to spend any of the money on food. It all had to go on the abortion. I had a scan at the clinic and I couldn't look at the screen. The nurse then disappeared from the room and came back in with a doctor. They told me I was 5 weeks further along than I'd calculated. It was going to cost an extra £600 to have a termination as planned. I broke down in tears, I couldn't afford it. What would we do? I asked was there any way to set up a payment plan or agree to pay by a certain date. They refused. I left. We went to the airport and changed our flight to get home earlier. I wrote my parents a letter to tell them as I couldn't face it. My mum went mental. Why didn't I tell her? By this stage I was 14 weeks pregnant. My mum phoned the gp surgery and they could offer no advice. Eventually a receptionist gave us a page number of the yellow pages to look up but wouldn't tell us what we were looking for. We phoned Marie Stopes and got an appointment. My mum borrowed £1000 from the bank to put towards covering the cost and my parents paid the rest from what they had in their bank. It was horrendous. The journey, the return visit to the clinic, afterwards on the plane I was in so much pain. So much of it is now a blur. I put it down to how people who experience a huge trauma block it out of their mind. I was the same. I returned broken with no self esteem, ashamed and absolutely lost. My parents were amazing. I am not sure what I would have done without them.

* A number of my friends have had to travel for abortion or have an abortion with pills. I’m a student and so are most of the friends that I know have had abortions. We’re all broke and we work part-time around classes so ordering abortion pills is the only realistic option within our budgets and unpredictable work schedules. Travelling to England under the new funding scheme would be better, but travelling for an abortion isn’t something you can openly ask your boss to get time off for. Having a safe abortion with pills when you have 2 days off work coming up is the best case scenario for ending a pregnancy when you’re a student on a low income who can’t travel.

I know a person who helps women access abortion pills via Women on Web. (I’m very conscious that prosecutions have happened in Northern Ireland so I feel I have to be vague to protect the person in question and the women they have helped: I will call them A.) A has helped numerous people who approached them and asked how to access abortion pills. From what I know, they come to A’s house after confirming their pregnancy and ordering the pills via Women on Web. With A’s support, they take the pills according to the telemedicine instructions. They stay with A until the abortion is complete. A is the only person I would trust if I needed an abortion in Northern Ireland. After the case where a woman was reported to the police by her housemates, it feels very unsafe to tell anyone that you are pregnant when you know that you will have an abortion (either by travelling or with pills). How do you know whether you can trust your own family, housemates or GP not to report you to the PSNI?

It feels as though the only people you can really rely on during a crisis pregnancy in NI are the people within the abortion pills network and other pro-choice activists who keep things confidential. It's quite pre-Roe v Wade in 2018 Northern Ireland, except the illegal abortions are safer and politicians can pretend the status quo is acceptable because women aren't dying of sepsis after trying to end a pregnancy with a sharp instrument. As I see it, Women on Web, Ryanair and a core group of activists are keeping desperate women and girls in Northern Ireland alive. About 9 years ago, the mother of a close friend travelled for an abortion while we were still at school. From what I remember, the father was abusive and they divorced a couple of years later. My grammar school kicked girls out (“asked them to leave” was the euphemism) when they got pregnant. It was an open secret that well-off girls would travel with their parents to England for an
abortion, while working class girls didn't have any choice but to stay pregnant. The hypocrisy within our school and the wider community seemed normal when I was a teenager (in the mid '00s). Our sex education was dreadful: it focused on abstinence and any real discussion of contraception was shut down. The evangelical Christians leading the sex education class emphasised that abortion didn't happen in Northern Ireland and told us that it was a sin anyway.

I have received messages and phone calls late at night from acquaintances who have found out they are pregnant and don't know who else they can ask about accessing abortion. I think they come to me because I am vocal about being a feminist and I have supported pro choice campaigns. I feel angry and heartbroken that I am the first person they can safely call about abortion, rather than a doctor. I have seen friends become very isolated after having a crisis pregnancy and ending the pregnancy in secret with pills: they feel they cannot tell friends or family because they will shun or report them. I haven't experienced a crisis pregnancy myself, but I know what I will go through based on what has happened to friends of mine. I worry about the acquaintances who called me once to ask for advice and then didn't call me back. That worry shouldn't be placed on me: they should have been able to go to their GP rather than a random woman they met once.

I have had family members denied proper obstetric care as an indirect consequence of the abortion laws in Northern Ireland. The lack of legal access to abortion on the Northern Ireland NHS means that pregnancy scans after 20 weeks are rare: a close relative of mine was denied an ultrasound scan after 20 weeks and endured preventable serious complications during birth due to an undiagnosed breech presentation. I have seen that the abortion laws in Northern Ireland create a climate of fear and paternalism in the healthcare system, that affects not only abortion but obstetric, gynaecological and contraceptive care. I have been refused a copper coil as a form of emergency contraception because the doctor believed that the insertion of the copper coil could possibly end a (days old) pregnancy and this would break Northern Ireland's abortion law.

- I know at least 6 people who have had to travel to England to receive healthcare that should be available in NI. I have a daughter of almost 18 yrs, I would want her to have all necessary healthcare available in her own country. This is ridiculous that politicians decide what they believe is right for NI, despite the majority of people believing women should have the right to decide.

- I was taught in in sex education in school that if you were "legitimately raped" your body would shut down and you could not get pregnant. This is an incredibly dangerous thing to tell teenagers. I also obtained abortion pills for my friend who became pregnant after a one night stand and couldn't afford to travel to England (we were students).

- I am in my 40s, live in Belfast and am married with one child. At the end of 2014 I was ecstatic to find out I was pregnant. We had been trying for a while for a brother or sister for my daughter and I had already been through a devastating and painful miscarriage.

At the 20-week scan (which took place a week late due to scheduling problems) I was told that there appeared to be fluid on the brain. It took a week to get a cancellation with a foetal medicine consultant and she carried out an amniocentesis which showed a severe chromosomal disorder. As you can imagine, this was utterly devastating for us. She gave us some information on the condition and suggested Googling it to learn more about the prognosis, which is that 80-90% of babies with the condition do not survive the birth and the rest die within days or weeks. We said we wanted to consider termination but the only thing they were able to offer us was a cardiac scan later in the pregnancy as many of the babies have heart conditions.

I have since learned that previously families in NI diagnosed with a fatal foetal abnormality (FFA) diagnosis were offered induction (as you can see from Gerry Edwards's experience - http://www.thejournal.ie/readme/terminations-medical-reasons-experience-3233583-Feb2017/)

However, in 2013 DUP health minister Edwin Poots published revised abortion guidelines which threatened 10 years’ imprisonment for medical staff who carried out abortions that were not in line with the very strict laws in NI.

My consultant has since told me that following legal advice on those guidelines, medical staff were not allowed to provide any information that would help anyone to get an abortion, including recommending organisations that could help or advising on the most appropriate procedure.
We felt utterly cut adrift from any medical support and left to fend for ourselves at the worst moment of our lives. At this stage, we only had a week and a half before the 24-week cut-off point. I have since been told that that cut-off may not apply in FFA cases in England, but due to the rule about providing information I wasn’t made aware of this. So as far as I knew I only had a week and a half from diagnosis to arrange flights and a surgical abortion somewhere in England. I didn’t know who to go to. Surgical abortion at that stage of pregnancy is carried out in very few clinics. The clinic told me I would need to book a hotel room for the night after the procedure as it would not be safe to travel.

My husband and I left our daughter with her granny and stayed in a tiny hotel room in England the night before. I cried myself to sleep. We had to pay £1,100 ahead of the procedure, not including the costs of flights and accommodation.

There were complications during the procedure which left me with a punctured uterus and small intestine and I had to be rushed to hospital from the clinic. I had to undergo an emergency bowel section and a hysterectomy, before being moved to the high dependency unit and given 3 units of blood. It was more than a week before I was able to fly home. It was months before I was able to return to work and the experience has taken a toll on my long term physical and mental health. The impact was made immeasurably worse by having to travel so far from home and away from our own healthcare practitioners.

My consultant apologised to us afterwards and explained why we had been given so little information. She said we had received a second-class service because of the law here.

I am devastated that we were abandoned by our own healthcare system at one of the hardest moments of my life. My healthcare decisions should be between me, my husband and my doctor. I have spoken to a number of elected representatives who have been privately very supportive of my wish that women should not be forced to travel and are trying to work within their parties to move the issue forward. I see there have been a lot of calls for a referendum but this is the last thing we need. It only happened in the ROI because it was the only way to change the measure in the constitution and it was a hugely damaging and re-traumatising experience for many women who had to put their private stories out in public and experience horrific abuse. The UN CEDAW report has already said that the UK is in breach of human rights by allowing the near-total abortion ban in NI. Human rights are not a devolved matter and it is the responsibility of Westminster to legislate on this. I was in tears of relief when the first 8th referendum exit poll came through earlier this year and I wish with all my heart that a similar change could happen here. But it seems there just isn’t the political will and compassion for the thousands of women who have been left to fend for themselves when they most need help. We were cut adrift from our health system when we needed it more than ever. But my experience barely even registers on the health records in NI as it happened in another jurisdiction. I have never felt so utterly faceless and abandoned by the government that is supposed to look after me. I shouldn’t have been kept in the dark by my own medical staff and left to Google abortion clinics. I wanted my baby more than anything, but once we were told the diagnosis, we wanted to get past it and move on. Instead, I was expected to go through months of anguish carrying a dying baby and it seems as though a large number of people in my own Assembly are devoid of any kind of empathy for what I was going through.

- I was born and raised in Australia and have lived in Northern Ireland for the last 5 years. Whilst I haven’t been personally affected by the laws here, I know many women who have obtained abortions in Australia and I’m aware of how critical the ability to make that choice was to their quality of life, their futures and their lives as a whole. I find it deeply distressing that women are denied this choice and fundamental human right in this country.

- It has been really difficult to see friends and family members worry about having to travel to England in order to seek medical attention.

- My education in Northern Ireland was Catholic - therefore, naturally, I was told abortion was wrong. I remember at the age of 16, in Religious Studies class being taught about how pro-life was the correct view, feeling incredibly uncomfortable. This teaching did not sit well with me. On top of that, sexual education was basically non-existent. We were taught about sex in science class in First Year
and the next it was mentioned was in a talk for girls which was frankly poor. Consent was never taught. Abortion was never promoted as an option for women to not be ashamed. Sex was never openly discussed. I have always been pro-choice and I feel this even more strongly as a 22 year old woman living in Northern Ireland. It breaks my heart that women here have to TRAVEL OUT OF THE STATE to receive safe and unbiased healthcare; I am ashamed of Northern Ireland. I myself, being in a relationship with someone I love dearly, would not have an abortion. But I have no right to prevent others from doing so.

- Abortion is a fact. I have experience going back thirty years when I helped a friend raise the money to travel to England it was so difficult. The worst thing was that she had to make the journey alone shrouded in guilt and shame. Restricting access to abortion does not prevent them. Please do the right thing and end discrimination against women in Northern Ireland. Thank you.

- Thankfully I have not been in the position where I have needed an abortion. Yet knowing that I am not only denied the option but could face imprisonment for seeking it terrifies me. I have always practiced safe sex, but there have been occasions when I have missed a period, or had an upset stomach and was paranoid my contraceptive pill hadn’t been effective. On those occasions (which have happened more than once) I immediately rushed to get the morning after pill. I do not want children and the thought of a forced pregnancy terrifies me. I have suffered from poor mental health, and I can honestly say if I were unable to get an abortion elsewhere and was forced to grow a life inside me, carry it to term and endure childbirth, I would strongly consider taking my own life. Denying abortion healthcare is forced pregnancy and it deeply saddens me to know strangers have more rights over my body than I do. Morality is subjective - there is no decide all fact for when a fertilised egg is a recognised human life. It is opinion. I am a living breathing woman - an unborn foetus, in my opinion, has the potential for human life but until later stages of pregnancy cannot be considered such in the same regard as I. To afford full human rights to an unborn foetus at the expense of mine is a gross injustice. If you don’t agree with abortion don’t have one - but please, please don’t deny me of choice.

- As a Dutch woman living in Belfast, I cannot have access to the abortion and care I required facing an unwanted pregnancy. For something to be so restricted, when where I am from it is my right to decide, is mind blowing to me. Especially when the UK as a whole allows abortions, trusts women to make their own decisions and Stormont just goes: Nope, we’re not trusting women. To be so let down by the country that is now my home, is heartbreaking. I love, love, love Northern Ireland, but having laws here that do not allow me to decide over my own body is terrifying. Having to keep my pregnancy a secret, have to ‘flee’ out of the country pretending to go on a ‘nice’ weekend abroad, having to fly back bleeding the remains of my pregnancy out, it is demeaning, dehumanising and utterly, utterly horrendous.

- It was never talked about as a health issue in sex ed. We were fed the pro-life propaganda, that the man should be involved in the decisions, etc. I was never told about the legal side, that as a woman in Northern Ireland I do not have the same rights as a women in England, Scotland or Wales. Doctors here are afraid to even speak of it to their patients, leaving them on their own to 'sort it' as they would say. A woman is currently awaiting prosecution for procuring abortion pills for her 14 year old daughter who was in an abusive relationship. How is that in 2018 a woman can stand trial for exercising their right to choose? I have a complicated maternal history and the law here does stop me from wanting to have children. I want the doctors to do whatever they need to do save my life and not worry about the law. Also if I ever do decide to have children it will be my own choice and not be use of a law that treats people like an incubator.

- My niece told me through tears and stress that she was pregnant by a member of a para military organisation. She said she was frightened of him and did not want to continue in the relationship but felt trapped and had no way out. She did not want to stay pregnant and if he found out she was pregnant he would beat her up. She asked me if I could help her get an abortion. I didn’t know where to go or what to do. I asked her to tell her parents but she refused saying they would kill her if
they found out who she was going with. This was probably true as her father was very strict and despised the type of people she was going with. I made contact with some people via social media and they directed me to women help women. From there it was very straightforward but I was scared the whole time that I was going to be arrested or that the police would intercept the parcel at tomb street and ask me to come down to claim it. I was all nerves till it came. The prescription, tablets and instructions were all inside. I was very worried that something would go wrong and my niece would end up bleeding to death. She was scared. I brought her round to my house for a "sleepover". She took the first tablets at 6 pm and the rest the next morning. At first she was okay and then she started to get cramps. She was all sweaty and pale and feeling sick. I warned her if she passed out I was not phoning anyone as we could be jailed. She laboured for a few hours and then when it passed she was okay. It was terrifying for both of us. She screamed at one point why this could not be done easier in hospital. I had no words to comfort her. When it was over we were both drained. she stayed with me for a couple of days. she wrote an email to women help women to thank them for providing the pills. She wrote an email to her mp asking why they did not change the law in ni. she got very angry in that email. she let rip on the so-called religious morals of politicians and their interference in women's bodies. she told her experience. the pain. the secrecy. the cost. the shame - not from those closest but from those who should know better. the inability to talk to her doctor for fear of being arrested. the inability to talk to her closest friends because of the stigma. she didn't send the email. she sent a donation instead to women help women.

- Close friends had to travel to England or back to their countries to have an abortion. A friend was diagnosed with FFA and forced to give natural birth to a stillborn baby under horrific complications. The trauma will never live her and her partner. Any pregnant person should have the choices to stop a pregnancy.

- My sister became pregnant at the age of 16. My parents were unable to financially support another child, and together they decided that it was best for her to travel to England for an abortion. The stigma that surrounds abortion here because of our antiquated laws, meant that my sister felt she could not tell anyone, not even her closest friends, what was happening. The guilt and shame she felt because of the negative perception of abortion in Northern Ireland has stayed with her since then; over the last 10 years I have seen her lose nearly all of her friends because she has closed herself off emotionally from other people, worried that they might find out and judge her. When the law criminalizes abortion, and the rhetoric from our governing party is that abortion is murder and that all women who have abortions are sinners who must repent, it creates a culture of fear. A fear that friends won’t understand, parents won't understand, your partner won't understand. A fear of being found out. A fear of having to do it all alone. A fear even, of being prosecuted. This must stop so that people like my sister don’t have to carry the scars of 10 years with them every day, living in fear, guilt, and shame.

- Still at school and with a widowed mother already caring for three younger siblings and a teenaged boyfriend as the father continuing with the pregnancy was not an option. A kind GP (not my own) referred me to a Marie Stopes clinic in England. I travelled on the Liverpool ferry for assessment and the following day had a termination under anaesthetic. I woke up in a different country, paid £500 and was sent bleeding and in pain back to Northern Ireland. I could talk to no one.

- When I was 16 I worked in a shop part-time. My colleague, also 16 fell pregnant. In work we tried to support her as best we could, covering to her parents, the manager allowed her the time off so she could fly to Birmingham to have an abortion. (Pre 9 weeks). She never regretted the decision to have an abortion but she was psychologically traumatised at having to go through it, alone, in a different country and having to lie to people around her about where she was. If she had been able to access the abortion services in Belfast, then she could have stayed at home when she was ill from the tablets and had the support of her family and friends around her. Financially it was a struggle and in work we gave her what money we could in order to scrape together the money she needed for flights, accommodation, etc at such short notice.
- I found myself in a situation once in my twenties and once in my early thirties (20 and 30 yrs ago) of needing to access abortion services. To this day it’s a part of my like that reminds ‘under wraps’ bc of the associated societal shame. Both times I accessed information about Maria Stopes clinics in England, and raised the funds. The first time I travelled with a sister and the second time I travelled alone. The second time I was so cross with myself that I allowed myself to get into ‘this situation’ I still can’t bear to think about it. I choose to have local anaesthetics so I could recover quicker and so I’d remember the feeling (as some kind of punishment to myself). My one views is that I made the best choice I could at the time. That as women we get to carry all consequences - men can walk away and do - and I think it’s no one’s business and no one’s decision but my own. I still am cross with myself around the second time I needed to access abortion services bc I do personally feel I was a little irresponsible myself - but this is a separate issue. Many years on I wish I could be open about these interventions as I do want to take care of myself and think openness is important for ongoing health care and well being.

- There are many reasons why I, or someone I care about, or anyone physically capable of conceiving might need an abortion, whether it is a lack of physical or mental capability to carry the child to term (or care for them afterward), whether the child has not developed properly or has some illness which means that they will not survive to term, or will not live very long after delivery, or any of a number of other reasons which have been well documented by medical professionals, women’s groups and others. If that were the case, it is hard to be sure whether one could raise it with one’s doctor and, even in the case where a doctor is willing to engage and have the discussion, it is still likely that the patient must raise the means to travel, and make arrangements - with their work, with their family, childcare, etc - which, depending on their particular circumstances, may be difficult, or impossible. This is a constant background concern and stress for all of us, and it is entirely unnecessary for it to exist in this way.

- I had a friend who had to access services in Liverpool which she should have been able to access here.

- I moved to England last year, and one of my friends from home became pregnant against her will. I helped her out and let her stay at my London flat while she got herself sorted with an abortion. This shouldn’t happen. Women shouldn’t have to travel for basic healthcare. One of the main reasons I moved to England aside from work was so I could have control over my own body.

- I am currently not ready to be a mother because of financial and emotional reasons. If I became pregnant I would not be able to afford to travel therefore I would have to access abortion illegally risking jail time and my health.

- In 2014 I discovered I was pregnant. I chose to go to Marie Stokes clinic in Belfast as I couldn’t trust my own GP given I had decided an abortion was the right decision for me - single, just started my own business, bills to pay and just about surviving myself. I flew to Manchester a few weeks later because my best friend lived there and she would be supporting me, another best friend flew there and back with me too. I was lucky, I had an emergency fund I could use and best friends I knew would never tell. I have still not told my GP, given the legal status of abortion in NI and societal shame. Although I am a very confident and open person about menstruation, mental health issues in my family etc abortion is such a taboo I can’t ever see me telling my GP, or anyone. Given how women have been fighting since time began to be treated as human beings and not an object/possession, I feel so let down that we in NI are still being treated this way. That we have no autonomy over our own bodies, that legally we are still objects subject to controls set by men long ago who’d be horrified at the many rights women have today. I was lucky because I had the money, friends and knowledge to do what was right for me, and suffered no complications from the procedure so I didn’t have to disclose anything. Denying women in NI this right is ensuring women in poverty stay that way, women who can afford it will still access them, regardless.
I would have loved to have been able to go to my GP and have my procedure at home, been able to return home to my own bed, not have to then get a flight home the next day while still bleeding, passing a large clot of tissue when the seatbelt signs were on and had to sit with it in my knickers until I could disembark and get to the public toilet then wait until I got home to change into clean knickers...zero dignity and self respect. And I'm one of the lucky ones...I've I had lived anywhere else in the UK, this wouldn't be an issue. We're second class citizens in NI.

• Every person who can get pregnant is affected by Northern Ireland abortion's law - because the fear of getting pregnant at a time when you don't want to be pregnant is ever present when abortion is almost entirely illegal. I had very little sexual education at school. I was taught the basics of reproduction and reproductive health (very basic information) in science classes and the only other environment learned about it was in Religious Education classes. Here we were taught the morality of why abortion was "wrong". I remember us being asked to publicly share our opinions on abortion and it was clear that there were right and wrong answers. I went into the world reliant mostly on friends for information about sex and relationships, and terrified of the idea of getting pregnant.

I have had friends reveal to me that they've had an abortion. They told me that they had an abortion in the Marie Stopes centre in Belfast and protesters chased them down the street shouting insults at them - considering that abortion in Marie Stopes could only be carried out if in accordance with the law (that termination of the pregnancy is only permitted if continuation would result in severe damage to the person's mental or physical health) it's clear that hatred and intimidation by anti choice protesters is rife, ever present and affects even those going through devastating times.

I have recently been diagnosed with a heart condition and it's been made clear to me by my doctor that it would be ill advised for me to carry a pregnancy to term without first having a pacemaker inserted. A large part of my decision to elect pacemaker surgery next year (even though it's not required) is down to this. I live in a country where I have no faith the law to protect me if my life is at risk, I do not believe that I would be deemed high risk 'enough' to get a termination if necessary, and due to my condition I would be nervous about either taking at home abortion pills or travelling. I've lived with fear of getting pregnant for long enough without that fear also being about whether a pregnancy could kill me. I don't deserve to live like this. None of us do.

• I don't live in Northern Ireland but the fact that women from the UK, our country! Are living without a human right accorded to every other woman in the UK is appalling to me. I have had miscarriages and what is called a missed abortion, where the foetus dies but does not spontaneously abort; this required medical intervention and was extremely traumatising. My healthcare needs were taken care of at my local hospital; I can only imagine the added trauma women experience when they have to travel across the Irish Sea to a place they do not know, and live in hotels while waiting for, or having treatment.
I feel very strongly this must be made available in Northern Ireland.

• I am so thankful for the abortion laws in NI. I discovered I was pregnant in Scotland the father on finding out I was pregnant threatened me and coerced me to have an abortion, I was really frightened. He made it sound so easy. I went to a clinic in Glasgow. I seen my baby on screen. I packed my bags and now I’m the safety of Northern Ireland. My baby is now 6 months old. Please please keep the law.

• I went to an all girls school in Belfast, it had a mix of girls there from working class and middle class backgrounds and what sex education you got depended on the teacher you got. We were lucky but literally only us out of four classes got a good person in, our teacher had a job outside education for years so maybe she had a more real view of the world. I helped two of my friends try and access abortions, and countless others through (mostly false) pregnancy scares. I think perhaps because of this and because I would stick up for girls being shamed for lots of boyfriends - I found out there was a rumour about me that I’d had sex with a boy that wasn’t my boyfriend and had an abortion. I’d not even had sex with my boyfriend yet so absolutely none of it was true, but at by the age of 15 I’d already been sexually assaulted by two older boys and faced a long period of sexual assault by a
grown up friend of the family (a policeman). I suppose I knew what it was like not to feel in control of your own body and maybe helped people because of that, but the rumour about having an abortion was obviously the WORST thing to accuse anyone of, such a huge shame attached to it. One of my sisters also had to have an abortion, my parents were both very understanding but it was clear the financial aspect was a huge worry for them. As was trying to get the time off work. It was me that found them the number of a clinic from the phone book in the hall, I was told in no uncertain terms that I was to hold this secret and tell not a soul ever. When I was a bit older, I had a scare when the condom me and my boyfriend were using, split. We were terrified. We went to try and get the morning after pill from a clinic but they were closed because it was a bank holiday Monday, so when we went on Tuesday it was too late for the morning after pill to work. I was devastated. I already had hopes dreams that didn't include being a young mum, I wanted to get out of Northern Ireland. I hated the politics and living in fear of what you said all the time. I hated the macho-ness and I hated that I couldn't be open about my sexuality either as a bisexual, whatever it didn't include babies. Although the woman who helped us was pretty judgemental about us having sex - she said that she could offer a coil to be fitted for a while to stop implantation. I had no idea this was even a thing!!! I still tell people about it because still women here don't seem to know it's an option. In hindsight we were very lucky that this women offered me this and it worked. I didn't have to travel for an abortion but I knew for certain that's what my plan was if the first two didn't work out.

A number of my friends had abortions in their 20s, some were more comfortable with it than others, but all of us had poorly paid jobs and were living in house-shares in awful damp houses (standard really for recent graduates) so none of us would have been in a position to bring up a child. Every woman I ever was friends with all loved in mortal fear of becoming pregnant - right up until the point they wanted a family. The pure nightmare of having to try and get the morning after pill or an abortion just didn't bear thinking about.

Fast forward a few decades and I'm trying to have a family with my partner and it isn't working. We go for testing at the fertility clinic and they can't find anything obvious beyond some Endometriosis and Fibroids. I had coils for years after that so my endo was hardly symptomatic at all. I had two miscarriages. The first one was at 10 weeks and it was incredibly painful, both in my heart and in my belly. It was raging searing hot poker cramps. I couldn't straighten up - it was the 3rd of Jan and it was hard to find a doctor or know what to do, by the time i felt i could leave the house and go to the hospital I was sure I'd passed the pregnancy. I could see a tiny wee white sac. I was so gutted, physically and mentally. When I got to the hospital I was shouted at for going to the maternity ward but I'd never had a miscarriage before and I didn't know what to. When the doctor scanned me he scolded me for being dramatic - said I shouldn't be in any pain "even if really had been pregnant" (i'd done 6 tests - we were eager for this pregnancy and I knew!). He scanned me and said I wasn't pregnant, there was nothing there. He was just awful how he treated me. I was so upset.

I've since become successfully pregnant and bore one child. The pregnancy was hard work, I was sick up to seven times a day for 22 weeks of it. I couldn't eat at all some days and sipped tea, my weight was lower at 14 weeks than it was before I was pregnant. Again, my symptoms were diminished and dismissed. Sometimes I was so depressed about the pregnancy I didn't know if i could carry on, But i wanted a child so much. Some days I couldn't leave the bed. I had to miss a lot of work and as a freelancer it cost me a lot of money- also my maternity payments were stuck in a web of bureaucracy by the department of communities. I was finally able to feel almost normal again at 22 weeks but by then although the sickness stopped I’d developed hip displacia and every step was agony, getting in and out of a car, going up and down stairs. All of it was so painful. I knew that if I survived this pregnancy that I would never ever be pregnant again. When people ask if I want another one I always say only if i don't have to make it and they think I’m joking.

Even later i developed pre eclampsia, I asked for an elective Caesarean but was told they were too busy and i would have to be chemically induced. I really didn't want it. I expressed my concerns and I wasn't listened to. I am traumatised by my birth experience. I went into shock at one point because the pain of the extreme contractions you get with induction caused my already super high blood pressure to go over
200, I went cold and almost blacked out, I had to have an emergency team, I saw my partner with fear in his eyes and I began to have an out of body experience. I’d also been sexually assaulted by a security guard in a hospital in London and I had already told then it was why I wanted to feel in control of what was going on, then suddenly I was given an epidural and put on my back with a magnesium drip when every fibre in my body was telling me to get on my knees.

It was the 3rd most horrendous experience of my life - and I have been sexually assaulted multiple times by strangers and people I have known and raped. No woman needs to go through what I went through and no woman needs to wake up crying months after giving birth, or be afraid to have sex or to cry every time she thinks about bringing her child into this world. I know 100% if I were to find out that I was pregnant tomorrow I would have an abortion. I love babies but I never ever want to have anything close to that experience ever again. At the minute that would mean I would have to find the money to travel to England all of a sudden, book flights and a hotel to stay over in (unless I wanted to bleed everywhere on the plane home) or buy the pills online and do it myself but be scared to go to the hospital again but this time because i’d be scared about the police being called. It's barbaric, cruel, frightening and completely unnecessary.

My experience is one of tens of thousands. I know so many people who have had awful treatment. It can't go on like this.

- I believe all should have a choice

- My personal experience of abortion actually happened in England in 1987. It was straightforward, it was done without judgement and only few questions (under the 1967 act of course), it was done with sympathy. 31 years ago.
Since moving to Northern Ireland 16 years ago I’ve been appalled to discover how hard it is for people in crisis pregnancies to access the same healthcare. I’ve heard so many stories of women having to travel under great hardship, often because their life is one of great hardship already, to get an abortion; women whose wanted baby stands no chance of survival being forced to remain pregnant and give birth if they cannot travel; women in abusive relationships having to coordinate abortion access overseas while trying to stay safe from further harm. Abortion access needs to be free, safe, legal and LOCAL, for everyone who needs one, without judgement.

- In 1967 (r 1968?) I found myself pregnant. I wasn't ready for motherhood, wasn't ready to face my family who would have wanted it and me hidden away so I went for a back-street abortion, a doctor who needed the money for an alcohol problem. The procedure was carried out with a tool that looked like a car starting handle. The pregnancy proceeded nevertheless and by then I was worrying about what damage had been done. By then I had moved with friends to London looking for typing jobs. The 1967 Abortion Act, which I had not known anything about, was being introduced and eventually I found my way to a GP who said I satisfied the criteria and I had an abortion in a NHS hospital in London, mightily relieved.

Some years later (in the '70s). I worked for Belfast Welfare Department and would have been aware of abortions being made available on occasion for a particularly vulnerable girl or woman with the support of social and health services

All that has changed with the influence of DUP Health Ministers in Stormont  Health Minister Poots was responsible, as far as I remember, for the introduction of regulations for the behaviour of medical professionals around abortion. They have reason to fear losing their licenses if they are known to be involved in advising a patient even regarding how to access an abortion. (The Midwives representative in Northern Ireland is an exceptional person who has spoken out fearlessly in support of women needing an abortion due to a crisis pregnancy.

This came home to me when a young vulnerable woman friend of mine became pregnant several years ago. She was extremely distressed at the thought of pregnancy and birth, talking of "going to the river". I contacted her G.P. and asked her could she help her patient to access an abortion as given her vulnerable condition I understood she might be given special support. The G.P. replied hat
all she could do was refer her to Cara Friend, a R.C. volunteer support organisation for pregnant girls. No referral elsewhere was offered. I was well enough off to pay travel and clinic expenses in England.

For years in my home town of Derry women will collect money from women they know to be supportive for travel and clinic costs in England for women with a crisis pregnancy, no questions asked.

The arrival of abortion pills found women offering the use of their addresses for postal delivery of abortion pills ...to avoid detection by a hostile family member or police who will take criminal proceedings if they can link abortion pills to a particular pregnancy.

All this when recent research revealed that 70% of the population of Northern Ireland (that means 70% of DUP voters, SDLP voters etc... regardless of party. It is very evident that the DUP leadership is not representative of their constituents when it comes to issues such as gay marriage, abortion etc.

- Friends & family traumatised by cruel & draconian laws that actually come down to healthcare not law.

- I have always been pro choice. Feel very strongly it is for the individual woman to make the decision that is right for her. That nobody else have the right to dictate their so called morals or religious belief. Recently a friend of mine revealed that she was pregnant. This was a wanted and planned pregnancy. However, there was a problem with the pregnancy in that the baby had some dirt if syndrome, some kind of chromosomal abnormality. Not downs but I can't remember the name of the syndrome. My friend decided that this was not for her. She knew that having a disabled child it would impact on her life in ways that she was not prepared for or want. It would impact on her working life, their household economy, future children, their marriage etc. She decided that she would terminate the pregnancy. Unfortunately she had to go to Manchester to have the termination. She knew that this decision was best for her. Shame shame shame that she had to go to Manchester to access healthcare.

Another friend had a similar situation, when her second pregnancy was a baby with Down's syndrome. She also chose to terminate the pregnancy. She also has said she knew the decision was right for her. She has however expressed fears that she can not disclose the diagnosis of downs as she feels people will judge her for this. The thing is, this was her choice, right for her. Another person might choose to keep a baby with Down's syndrome, and that decision will be right for them. Shame shame shame that there is such stigma around abortion.

- I had to stay in NI while my daughter and her dad went to England. It was the longest three days I've ever had to endure. This was before everyone had mobile phones so contact was not very frequent. The information of how to avail of the facilities was practically nonexistent. We had to rely on our other daughter to help us. The feeling of helplessness at such an emotional time is just horrible. We are a close family and look out for each other and we still found it a very harrowing time.

- I have never sought an abortion but nonetheless feel that the lack of provision has directly affected my life. And the lives of all women here. When I was a teenager my mum worked in the newly opened Brook advisory clinic. Myself and my sister would go there after school to meet her some days and would walk a gauntlet of "pro life" campaigners who would photograph you as you made your way past them to the door. Sometimes they would also address you verbally, though I can't remember anything they said. I just remember how intimidating it was to be photographed by a group of hostile adults, even though I was there to meet my mother. I can imagine how threatening this would have been if I were there to seek advice or was in crisis.

When I was a slightly younger teenager, in the early 90s, we received "sex education" at school: we were told, by an elderly nun, to "eat lots of vegetables to prepare [our bodies] for pregnancy". This is not a joke. There was no guidance or discussion on healthy relationships, consent or contraception.
(This was a Catholic grammar school where, incidentally, I was sexually assaulted in the corridor by a boy my age (14). For various reasons I did not feel able to tell anyone, so I didn’t).

I have been an various types of contraception my entire adult life (until 3 years ago). I wanted to avoid any and all possibility of unplanned pregnancy. I feel that the restrictions on abortion here affect everyone. They undermine all women and all mothers - everyone has a mother, so this affects our culture and society in so many insidious ways. It contributes to a culture of misogyny. Talking about female sexuality is deeply taboo here. Just this week I was in a tutorial at Queen’s University (providing note taking support to a deaf student). The subject under discussion was “feminism”. Gender roles were discussed and students referred to women carrying babies “in their stomach”. This is at a prestigious “Russell Group” university and my point is that young people don’t know or don’t use the correct terminology for the female reproductive organs. I have noted this in other contexts also: reference to women’s bellies or “down below”, when what is being talked about is the womb, the uterus. This taboo permeates almost everywhere. I believe that the restrictive abortion laws maintain a wall of silence around a central aspect of female (and just human) experience.

• A friend contacted me in a very distressed state. Her 18 yr old daughter had been raped by a nightclub doorman. This happened about 8 weeks ago and she had told no-one. When she discovered she was pregnant, she confided in her mum. Her mum wanted her to report the assault to the police but the woman refused. The rapist was a member of a paramilitary organisation and she was frightened that if she told anyone he or those connected to him would kill her. She needed an abortion and asked her mum to help her to get one. She did not know about the law here and thought she could just go to hospital and have one. When her mum explained that was not possible, her daughter became extremely upset and distressed. She wanted an abortion as quickly as possible. That was when her mum contacted me. Through a network of women activists, I was able to access abortion pills for her daughter. I met with them both and explained how they should be taken, the usual symptoms and what to do if they became concerned. They were both very frightened at the thought of being arrested should anyone find out. I warned them that if anything went wrong and they ended up in hospital that they should say that the daughter is having a miscarriage and not to speak about the pills at all. The doctors in hospital cannot tell whether you have taken pills or not. If you do tell them then they will report you to the police. In the end I stayed with them and reassured them while the daughter went through the abortion. She was fine and very relieved when it was over. She is also very angry at the situation for women in NI and wants the law to change so women can access free, safe and legal abortion here at home. Without any fear of a knock at the door.

• A close family member had to travel alone to England to access abortion services in the 80s. It was terrible having to let her go alone. I didn’t know where she was or how she was. A family member refused to let her stay with them in England because he judged her. I was distressed and panicking the whole time she was away. I thought she might have to go through an induced labour. I didn’t hear anything till she got home again as she couldn’t ring home. It was a terrible time. She should have been able to have that service at home earlier on in the pregnancy.

• My own mother suffered the indignity of a backstreet abortion when she was a teenager in Belfast in the 70’s. The laws have still not changed. It is a disgrace that the status quo has not changed for Northern Irish women. Northern Irish women are not second class citizens. I decided not to move back to NI after graduating university in England - the repression of women’s rights and LGBT rights was behind this decision.

• I live in Northern Ireland and have not got the same human right as others in the UK and Ireland.

• Six recurrent miscarriages made me realise that my own country Northern Ireland, does not care for the rights and needs of women. Coming to terms with this reality will haunt me forever. After four years of trying to conceive and carry a baby, of having had six devastating losses with all the hope I had for expanding my family completely devastated. You would assume that campaigning for abortion reform would not be at the top of my list of goals. But, here I am actively campaigning for free, safe and legal abortions; trusting women and trusting the medical professionals to make
these difficult decisions. I am begging for Westminster to please act! Protect the women and girls in Northern Ireland the same way that is done in the rest of the UK. Living in a country that constantly argues over religion, culture, flags and other issues as such, our government does not adhere to the ideals of the population (65% of the Northern Irish population would vote to decriminalise abortion), which only further infringes on the fundamental human rights of women across this country.

I am reopening wounds to tell my story because I refuse to be complacent in allowing any other women and girls to go through the same experiences that I have had without at least trying to create change in legislation.

My partner and I began to try to conceive a baby around 4 years ago, we were so understandably excited and overjoyed when we found out we were pregnant 7 months later. I unexpectedly suffered a miscarriage of that very much wanted pregnancy which was truly heart breaking for myself and partner. I was extremely isolated during this time and little did I know this feeling was only the beginning of was ahead of me. Once I began to suffer the physical symptoms of bleeding, I was propped onto the revolving conveyer belt of the Early pregnancy unit, then the intervention of internal ultrasound scans, blood tests and other medical procedures, I was sent on my way and I found myself with no real mental or emotional support. I do not blame the medical professionals, as I understand they are so busy in that unit. But, it is a clinical. Because I was miscarrying so early in my pregnancy they wouldn’t confirm if the pregnancy was going to be viable and I was told return in 10 days.

My pregnancy symptoms started to disappear, and I started naturally miscarrying before the 10 days. As I was coming to terms with what was happening to me, I realised that miscarriages are common but yet so shamed and stigmatised. I actively tried to break the stigma surrounding baby loss, as there is such guilt around miscarriage but, then again women have been shamed no matter what we do. The Ulster rugby rape trial just shows the misogyny and attitudes towards women, we see time again how the blame is always shifted onto the woman. 823 rapes were reported to the police in Northern Ireland. Only 15 cases resulted in conviction – a rate of just 1.8%. Northern Ireland is the only region in the United Kingdom and Ireland without a single Rape Crisis centre. This is the same country where abortion is illegal even in cases of rape. So, if I was raped and had no access to travel abroad to use safe but illegal abortion pills I would face more time in jail than the person who raped me. I would not have access to a rape crisis centre and getting justice would be at an extreme low. It’s 2018 how is this allowed to happen?

I rushed into another pregnancy quite quickly, and my emotions went straight into fear. I wasn’t having any reassurance if this pregnancy was going to be viable and, the lack of emotional and mental health support was abysmal, the medical professionals at this stage told me I would just have to “wait until a booking scan in 10 weeks time”, so began a cycle of fear and worry, when my pregnancy symptoms started to disappear just like the previous pregnancy at around 6 weeks, I was petrified that I was losing this pregnancy too. I was checking constantly for blood to appear because I just knew in my body that I was going to miscarry. Unfortunately, I started bleeding, my GP referred me to the Early pregnancy clinic and I had to wait two days for the appointment. I was holding onto hope and reaching out online, reading stories from other women in my situation where bleeding doesn’t always mean losing the pregnancy.

When I went back into the Early pregnancy clinic, were I just felt like a number as before, blood taken, internal scans performed showed a pregnancy was there, I was so early on they couldn’t see much, no support, no one to talk to and sent on my way. I was told to come back in 10 days but it was the same story, I naturally started miscarrying and didn’t need intervention, but was told at the next scan another much wanted pregnancy was lost. When you experience losing your very much wanted pregnancy but the way you are made to feel that it is a common medical condition is absolutely earth shattering. I was just so desperate for a baby and was in such turmoil.

I fell pregnant quickly again. Unbelievable fear and every type of emotions were flooding through
me. I didn't even give myself chance to grieve, and was a completely ruled by my hormones, to be honest I felt a mess. My care and treatment, my basic human right to control my own body, my dignity and being able to trust my body and my mind to make decisions for myself was all ripped away while pregnant this time. This pregnancy was the same pattern as the other two but yet was different. This third pregnancy will haunt me forever. I was able with this pregnancy to go to the Early pregnancy clinic at 6 weeks pregnant because of the history of miscarriages I now had, the first scan showed very little, I then got to 7 weeks, further than I ever had before. Scared to feel hopeful but allowed hope to still flood in after all we were receiving medical intervention, we were taking aspirin that made us feel we had a better chance at a viable pregnancy. When I went for another appointment in the same clinic waiting in the small room my heart pounding and pure fear waiting for my name to be called. Fifteen minutes of waiting, which felt like a lifetime then finally my name was called. I was lead in by a midwife who scanned me, we saw the flutter of a tiny heartbeat. I felt like my heart was soaring, starting to think we were finally going to have our much-anticipated rainbow baby. The midwife then began to measure the dates of the pregnancy with the rate of growth, but when she said what the dates were, I knew something wasn't right. I knew because I know my own body more than anyone else, I explained to the midwife that I had been doing ovulation tests which meant that I knew when I was ovulating and I also knew when I got the positive pregnancy test. The dates were not matching up. She proceeded to say I should listen to her since she was a midwife with 12 years' experience. Rather than follow ovulation tests and pregnancy tests I should follow her advice. I attempted to calmly explain that I know my own body, I have been charting my cycles for a long time, and all that I wanted and needed was real, honest information on if I was correct about my dates. Did that mean the pregnancy was looking like it wasn't going to the viable?

I just wanted to prepare myself in case the pregnancy was not going to be viable. Holding onto hope is torturous. The midwife then asked will I ever be happy? It wasn't that straight forward I knew within my own body that something wasn't right. I was told again come back in 10 days. I learned a new coping mechanism to deal with the snail like pace of waiting to see if a pregnancy was going to be viable or was I going to miscarry when waiting? Besides my constant checking for blood, I did pregnancy tests constantly to see if the line on the test was getting darker as I knew the hCG hormone was going up, but the line started getting lighter. I was also using clear blue pregnancy tests which went from 3+ weeks down to 2-3 weeks. I could feel the pregnancy symptoms starting to disappear. I knew this pregnancy was not going to be viable. I had another appointment, I sat alone and scared in the same dull box of a waiting room, with other women, no one talked. I started to feel like by this stage I was becoming a part of the furniture of the Early pregnancy unit. I was called in, they performed a scan and there was no heartbeat. I asked for a D&C, emotionally I was crippled, I needed for this pregnancy to be over, my pregnancy was gone, I couldn't wait for the blood to start any longer. While still trying to hold a full time job down and just waiting to miscarry a much wanted pregnancy was agonising it was torture. I also wanted the pregnancy tissue tested for genetic to see if we could find a reason for the multi pregnancy loss. I was refused any help and was told to come back in another 10 days! I explained everything about my dates, about there being a heartbeat. But because the midwife didn't note there was a heartbeat which I don't know why. It meant that because of the abortion laws in Northern Ireland my doctor's hands were tied as because I was so early they couldn't say if it was viable or not and couldn't help. I was sent on my way told to come back in 10 days. This was the day I lost the right to determine the course of my own reality. Though my government doesn't yet recognise it, my body is mine alone. I am the only person who should set the standard for its treatment. A week later, a few weeks before Christmas which made it even worse I was out for Christmas dinner with my family I just had to get out of the house, I started miscarrying, I was in complete agony. And then started bleeding rapidly it got worse and worse as I got home. I was passing large clots at this stage, and finally needed to go to the hospital as I knew from previous miscarriages this was not normal. I was rushed straight in my blood pressure was dropping and was terrified doctors were trying to get a line in but my veins had all collapsed, finally they got a line in and starting giving me medication to make my blood clot and after some time the bleeding stopped. Then a D&C operation was part of the conversation, what I needed in the first place. But then in talks with the doctor he felt, and I agreed that my body was going through enough and a surgery could be dangerous. I was given internal scans throughout the night to make sure the
miscarriage was passing and discharged the next day but it still wasn't over and the torture got worse. A few days later I had another appointment with the early pregnancy clinic, they performed another internal scan, and the miscarriage still wasn't complete. I begged that I just needed it to be over, and I was given the abortion pill to complete the miscarriage. At the time I didn't know it was the pill they use for abortions. To speed up the process I thought this would be a good decision it was getting closer to Christmas, and my mental health so was so poor through all of this. This appointment was at noon, I had to collect my son from school at 3 and I was told the pills could start working within 30 minutes. How on earth was I going to take this pill and go collect my son at 3 and get home so I could have some privacy. The tablets started to work quickly. I was nauseous, the cramping was almost unbearable and I thought I was going to pass out with the pain. I sat outside my sons school in agony waiting in the car begging that the blood didn't start leaking through my underwear while having to walk to the school gates in a complete daze of agony wearing a mask of normality. I just couldn't wait to get home, I finally got home just in time before the bleeding got worse. I learned through research that there is no medical reason to stop women from taking the pill at home. My doctors lied they made me feel this was to protect me, but this all boiled down to the laws in Northern Ireland controlling women. I should have been able to take these pills in the safely and in privacy, in the comfort and privacy of my own home!! Not rushing home from an appointment, not on someone else's time. I should have been allowed to control this, what I know now I wish I would have ordered abortion pills online because although it is illegal I would have felt my dignity and privacy wasn't ripped away, I would have control over my own bodily functions.

Throughout this miscarriage I was denied treatment because of the beliefs of other people. And the torture was still not over, I finally passed the actually pregnancy tissue near a week later, it smelled and looked like it was disintegrating which is was, rotting tissue which was inside my body. When the repeal in the republic we heard of the tragic story of Savita Halappanavar, who died due to complications of a miscarriage that went septic. That could have easily been me, this miscarriage went on and on and on, weeks of torture for a pregnancy which I knew for weeks it wasn't viable. Once I had the tissue I rang over to my local hospital to ask if I could have testing done, I was asked when my next appointment was and I said in two days I was then told to keep the pregnancy tissue in the fridge in a Chinese container until my next appointment. How disgusting and vile, but I had no choice I wanted testing done. About a month later I was told that the testing couldn't be done as the tissue was so decayed.

If I was given a choice for a D&C or even the choice of abortion pills when I knew my pregnancy was gone this could of prevented a lot of suffering. How come a corpse has more rights than I do? We have the right to keep our organs and be buried with them. I am an organ donor but I respect that right, it is such a personal decision and I wouldn't impose my belief that you should donate organs. But can you please tell me why I can't control my body even when I die and keep organs that could persevere life, life that is on this planet, children who are on with planet. But I can't control my own body when I'm alive because of a pregnancy which in my case wasn't viable?

I went on to have another 3 miscarriages the forth one I went to the Early pregnancy clinic which was the same routine of scans and waiting no support naturally miscarried. I went to a private recurrent miscarriages specialist had more testing but they were coming back clean. I was advised to just keep trying. Two more miscarriages followed I couldn't face the early pregnancy clinic with these pregnancies I knew I wouldn't get no support anyway. I naturally miscarried these two pregnancies also. After the sixth miscarriage I was mentally exhausted, I begged for more testing to be performed. Through research I became aware that Northern Ireland doesn't even have a recurrent miscarriage specialist. It's in the mainland where all the detailed tests are but they won't refer me. So in such a 'pro-life' country women like me have no access to a recurrent miscarriage specialist through the NHS women who are going through much wanted pregnancy losses, and this country fails us. When I asked to sterilised I was told I'm too young to make that decision!! So my alternate no more treatment or more losses, or being forced to take hormones to prevent pregnancy until I menopause. I have not one right over my own body!

I really was keen to get genetic testing done. This can be done through testing the pregnancy tissue or through parental blood. However, I was told that they didn't perform the test with parental blood
as it was expensive. My doctor lucky agreed to attempt to send me and my partner blood for genetics and the lab accepted it. And we finally got a diagnosis.

This whole time I had a unbalanced translocation I was given 25% chance of a successful pregnancy. I had to go through six recurrent devastating losses to finally find a reason. If I had been given a D&C when I asked on miscarriage number 3 and tested the pregnancy tissue, I would have already had this diagnoses! I wouldn’t of had to suffer all the trauma while trying to complete miscarriage number 3, my life wouldn’t have been put on the line and then wouldn’t have kept trying and suffered three more miscarriage. The pro-life rhetoric does not care that I could have lost my life.

By saying life begins at conception and women in Northern Ireland having no right over their own bodies because of someone else’s believe makes no sense many of hundred and hundred of eggs are fertilised than become humans. When sperm and egg met that is not enough, the cells have to attach to the womb. If your going to say if an egg gets fertilised it has then same rights as an individual whom are you going to imprison every woman who has had an fertilised egg pass through her and didn't even know she was pregnant and every man who’s sperm fertilised an egg that didn't become human. Are you going to then also imprison me because my body failed and miscarried 6 pregnancies. I don’t understand why my government who are purely ignorant to what criminalising abortion laws do to women. Science and fact support me, why does my government not?

Because my politicians would rather argue about flags. And they have no understanding of pregnancy, stop letting them tell me what to do, over their deeply religious beliefs and because of their perception on life, this is supposed to be a democratic society, where is my voice? It is pathetic that women and girls in 2018 in Northern Ireland have been left behind this long. This country continues to remove basic human rights with a law on abortion, which dates back to 1861, before women were even allowed to vote. Every week women fly overseas or take things into their own hands to carry out a medical procedure because this country condemns them for taking control of their bodies. Young women are taking abortion pills online which are safe but with no one to turn to. I know how physically scary a miscarriage can be and how much blood there is which is the same process as taking abortion pills, and how these poor individuals have no one to turn too. These outdated and disgraceful policies and laws have never stopped abortion they have only made things more difficult, more problematic and more shame for countless of women. It is shown top professional bodies, such as the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Royal College of Midwives; and human rights groups such as Amnesty International are support abortion reform in Northern Ireland. These are the people who in the frontline caring for women and girls. The politicians from Northern Ireland however, can’t even communicate and have a power sharing parliament should not be the people control our bodies. A body is a body, a woman is a woman not a vessel. We deserve better.

Abortion shouldn’t be criminal offence it should be a decision made between a woman and her doctor. In the Netherlands they have the right to choose, assessable contraception and sex education, and have one of the lowest abortion rates. What we should be doing letting women in Northern Ireland have the right to choose but also start protecting us better, helping tackle the violence and control many women are facing, make sure doctors get the right advice and new updates about every type of contraception so women have a contraception that works for them, making sure everyone gets great quality sex education with contraception and consent.

I am 26 years old and just over two weeks ago I underwent an operation to completely remove my Fallopian tubes. With the chances of pregnancy being 75% to be non-viable, I never want to take a risk with my own body ever again. I will never put myself through losing control over my own body and my dignity and privacy to be ripped away from me by my own county. I will never allow for that to happen to me again. The abortion laws in Northern Ireland didn’t protect me they prevented me from getting a diagnoses sooner, they made the torture of a devastating miscarriage be even more agonising. I am fighting for privacy, dignity and humane treatment, this government does not respect my body and by extension my life!
How can the government call themselves a pro-life movement when my life is quite obviously so worthless to them.

- As a non-binary person who can become pregnant I worry that should I be placed in a position where I may need to seek an abortion I may be forced to travel or break the law to access it.

- Being pregnant of a wanted child, I still need to travel to my home country (Spain) to get my scans and everything. I found out that the scans here take place on week 14 of pregnancy. If the being that is growing inside of me is not ready to be born or won’t have a dignified life, I won't make it suffer. I’m travelling home to be scanned and assured that the being I'm growing inside will be healthy and ok when is born. I wish I could have done this in Belfast, here I have been living for 6 years. I wish all NI women had the chance to choose as I have and I wish I didn’t have to travel abroad.

- I work as a consultant psychiatrist and have been referred women who have had devastating news at their 20 week scan. These referrals have been for psychiatric opinions asking for me to decide if a woman meets the criteria for a termination under NI law. As you can imagine a full mental health assessment is the last thing women want to go through at this vulnerable time. Although it is harrowing it has been a privilege to meet these women and try and help them through a terrible time. It is hard, however, to sit and discuss the reasons they are forced to carry a baby that will not survive. The impact on individuals is varied, but the law as it stands puts a cruel and unnecessary burden on a mother to be.

- In 2005, I had to travel to England to access abortion due to current abortion laws in NI. This was extremely expensive, stressful, and required a lot of secrecy and lies to family and friends in order to conceal what I was going there for. I am a non-binary, trans-masculine person, and I became pregnant as a result of coercion (I was beaten if I tried to take or use contraception) and rape while in a physically abusive relationship with a cisgender man. In addition to the trauma of being raped and beaten, I had to deal with the trauma of becoming pregnant by this man who nearly killed me. I had to travel while still covered in physically visible bruises, which were impossible to cover no matter how much make-up I tried to use - they were greenish-yellow by this point, which any makeup artist will tell you is extremely difficult to cover. I wasn't out as trans to anyone at this point, so I had to deal with the dysphoria, both physical and social, that I felt in accessing a gendered service for which I had to travel on my incorrectly-gendered passport (I am an Irish citizen, so gender recognition was not a possibility for me at that point). I had to go to a city (Liverpool) which I had never visited before and deal with having an abortion in an unfamiliar location with unfamiliar accents and unknown doctors with no possibility of accessing post-operative care as I would be arrested if anyone at home found out what I had done.

Now, in 2018, I am on hormone replacement therapy, I have transitioned socially and medically, and I have changed the gender on my passport. However, I am still capable of becoming pregnant, and although I am not in a relationship at the moment, and I am careful if I have sex with anyone who can get me pregnant, the reality is that if I were raped again, or a condom split, I could still become pregnant again. Having had an abortion once, I would not want to go through the process again as I know that the room where you wait to be taken up to surgery is for patients only, and to sit in a room full of cisgender women would out me immediately as trans, as well as making all those who don't understand that trans people can become pregnant, extremely uncomfortable, as they would want to know why someone who "looks male" is sitting in a waiting room for an abortion. I also know that trying to get this through referral would be difficult as my gender marker is I on my NHS records (for what reason, I don't actually know, but it isn't M or F) so I’d imagine it would be difficult to actually get referred for a service like this anyway, let alone trying to navigate medical systems in a different area of the UK.

- I have never been in a position where abortion was something I needed to consider, personally. I know many women who have and for whom it was a difficult decision made harder by the difficulty in gaining access to help.
I feel at risk by Northern Ireland's abortion laws. I am a young woman who is careful with contraceptive use etc. but there's no way I can be sure I will never face an unplanned pregnancy. The same goes for my friends, I worry about this scenario facing them. Northern Ireland’s abortion laws leaves women and girls unsafe and unable to control what happens to their own bodies. Northern Ireland’s abortion laws are against basic human rights, and encourage the pursuit of dangerous backstreet abortions, as well as necessitate the need to travel - something that enforces economic discrimination as it means those with the financial means can have bodily autonomy, and those who don't are forced to be pregnant when they don't want to be, even if it endangers their health. If I want an abortion, I will go to England and get one. The Northern Irish restrictive laws don't stop abortions, they put women at risk. They force women to travel to another country before and after an exhausting and emotionally straining event, and on top of that, they stigmatise them as a result of their own failure to provide their female citizens with basic reproductive healthcare.

As a trans person who is often gendered as male I also worry that that my ability to access services on the mainland may be more difficult than for other people. I worry that I will be turned away for not being a female and that the experience will be made all the more traumatic by the misgendering that happens in many, but especially typically gendered health care services.

I have had two close experiences with loved ones and pregnancies that were either crisis or involved a fatal foetal abnormality.

My friends have had to travel, the expense this entails plus the emotional trauma of being away from friends and family to have the procedure done in England. Friends should not have to run the risk of being jailed for life for taking pills to end an unplanned pregnancy.

I am a 27 year old woman from Northern Ireland, currently studying for a Masters degree in London - the state of my home government, the violation to human rights and women's rights, the fact Westminster continue to suggest abortion is a matter of devolution when in fact Stormont hasn't been sitting for many months and the fact that NI women should be afforded the same rights and healthcare as any other women with British passports, all contribute to absolute despair, anger and frustration when I am asked by any English friends about the situation. Ask any NI woman 18-30 how they feel about being imprisoned for abortion and I guarantee the majority will say we need equals rights and access and for Westminster to finally help us gain access and to make it legal on the basis of equality and human rights.

The first instance was my teenage sister who has been in a coercive controlling relationship. She discovered she was pregnant and had no access to money and was petrified of bringing a child into this dangerous and unsafe relationship. She made the decision to have an abortion which was extremely difficult for her. Myself and close family had to travel at significant expense, and my sister felt like a criminal and was upset being away from home and her own mummy. While she knows this was the right decision for her, she feels saddened that she had to travel and be criminalised for this action. Furthermore, due to the nature of her relationship at the time, it is likely that many other young women are in similar positions and are isolated from family and cannot access the money for this opportunity.

A second experience is a close friend who at 12 weeks scam was told her pregnancy was high risk and there appeared to be abnormalities with the foetus. At 20 week scan this was confirmed as fatal, and that the baby would have no chance of survival outside of the womb for more than a few hours. She was devastated, more so when told in an apologetic way by her consultant that her options in NI were limited and if she wanted to terminate the pregnancy she would have to travel. This was an insulting option given what she was facing, and did not want to leave her family and experience this loss through abortion alone away from home and in a different country and didn’t know what would happen remains in terms of travelling. She decided to continue with the pregnancy and her daughter was stillborn and buried at home. This trauma was exacerbated by the continued pregnancy, comments from passers by or people she was working with, knowing that the baby had no chance of
When I was 17, my best friend who was 18 got pregnant the first time she had sex. Between us we had to find a way for her to get the money and get to England to access abortion services. The trip was organised via a network I think connected to the New University of Ulster in Coleraine. My friend had to pretend to her family she was going with me to look at a college in England - I covered for her as she went alone (and for the first time) to England for this procedure. We lost contact many years ago, but I will never forget her torment and fear, and my own helplessness while trying to help her. That this is still going on 40 years later is a disgrace, and shames NI.

Growing up in Derry, the only time abortion was ever discussed was in my RE class, when my teacher gave a long sermon talking about how barbaric it was that people in England could legally murder babies. There was never any question of having an informed, balanced discussion of the issue, and for many years I knew very few people who were pro-choice. I come from a liberal, feminist family but we never really spoke about the issue - perhaps even my parents didn't feel educated enough on the topic to broach it with me and my brother. I remember how that changed with the Savita Halappanavar case, and suddenly my friends and I started voicing our pro-choice views more publicly, no longer afraid of being branded 'baby-murderers' by our RE teacher or our classmates. I have never needed to have an abortion, and as a university student now living in Glasgow I know that I have a strong support network and healthcare resources at my disposal should I ever need to, but I am angry on behalf of all those who are not so fortunate. I have marched to support the repealing of the Eighth Amendment across the border, and now it's time to deliver full access to reproductive healthcare for women and pregnant people in NI.

I have had both of my children in NI and always the worry about what might happen if something went wrong was present in my mind. I have had friends and a sister who lost much wanted babies to FFAs and the worry never ends.

Before my two children I had an abortion using pills. I was not in a fit state to have a baby, I had no family support, my relationship was not steady, I had no money and only temporary work. It was an easy decision to make and the right thing to do. My struggle then, and one of the reasons I still dislike talking about it, was with the secrecy and shame. I feel angry that I was forced to do this. I should have been able to tell people but I couldn't. It should not have been that way, I became involved in pro-choice activism after that because I cannot and will not allow my daughters to experience that kind of unnecessary shame and risk a life sentence in the process.

When I experienced a crisis pregnancy and needed an abortion I had an 8 month old baby and a 4 year old child. I was at the end of my maternity leave so had no spare cash to travel to England and pay for a procedure. In addition to the expense I had never been away from my baby for longer than a few hours and I was still breastfeeding. The option of travelling seemed impossible to me and I felt trapped. Since I was only 5 weeks pregnant when I found out, at such an early stage I knew a medical abortion with pills was the best treatment for me. The only way I could access that in my own country was to obtain pills illegally. The only pills that I was able to access were Misoprostol and so in order to induce a miscarriage using these alone I had to take a very high dose - 4 pills at a time every 3 hours. Unfortunately despite taking 3 rounds of this medication I did not miscarry and the pills made me very unwell, symptoms similar to food poisoning or a bad stomach bug.

During the 12 hours that I spent lying in bed (and running to the toilet) with severe stomach cramps, feeling dizzy, dehydrated and almost delirious, I became extremely aware of how isolated I was. No one except my husband knew what was happening to me. If my symptoms had worsened I don’t know who I could have turned to or what I would have told a doctor in an emergency. I felt very alone and vulnerable. This wasn't what I had expected because I had heard the pills talked about as an empowering thing - women taking control over their choices despite the law. For me it felt like a horrible substitute for the care and support that I should have had. When I realised it wasn't working and my body couldn't take any more of the effects of the pills I stopped and thankfully my symptoms eased. Although I had digestive problems for around 6 months after this experience and I
think it caused inflammation of my bowel. Later that night I took out a credit card and made arrangements to travel to Liverpool to a BPAS clinic. I had the procedure a week later and the difference in these 2 experiences was so stark. Arriving at the clinic and talking openly to nurses, anaesthetists and doctors who were there to help me felt so unreal. It made me realise what abortion care should be like - normal, supportive, no stigma. While I was there I felt such a sense of relief and gratitude to every person who helped me. When I got home I started to feel so much anger that we can't have that here in Northern Ireland because of the law. I can't stand the thought of other women lying in bed alone miscarrying having to process it all in complete secrecy.

- In the North of Ireland we have a culture of stigma and ignorance reflected in a lack of adequate sex and relationship education for young people which contributes to an environment in which men often carry little responsibility and women find themselves silenced by fear and shame. Lack of access to abortion services has contributed to this culture, and further, deprives women of adequate health care post abortion (legally procured in England). In addition, we have a lack of adequate and easily accessible contraceptive services, for example, for emergency contraception for women of all ages.

Recent instances I know of include:

A homeless woman in her twenties who had to lie about her age to access the services of a clinic to obtain emergency contraception;

A woman in her twenties who had given birth only 3 weeks previously, had sex with the father of her child - no doubt thinking that he had finally returned with some commitment - and did not know how to access emergency contraception; 

A woman in her twenties who, following an abortion procured in England, required medical care and feared doing so because she thought she would be arrested.

I am distressed and frustrated by the inhumane treatment of women in the community in which I live and hope that this will soon be addressed.

I am also greatly disturbed by the lack of commitment to any debate that could alleviate the level of unnecessary suffering that women are enduring including better relationship and sex education, improved access to services that would prevent the need for terminations, adequate health care that would reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancies and provide good health care for women who find it necessary to have an abortion.

- I am a market craft trader in St George's Market and worked in a women's organisation relating specifically to women's health. On 8th March 2016 my workshop was raided by the Police Service of NI. The search warrant was searching for abortion pills and any tools that could cause an abortion. It also sought, mobile phones, PC's and any device that was connected to the internet.

I work in a workshop that is shared with 12 other artists and crafts people, however on the day they raided my workshop I was at an event that I organised in the City Hall with Professor Angela Davis as our main speaker.

After the lecture, I received a phone call from my workshop to say the Police had raided with a search warrant but after a very short search of my workspace they left with nothing. I immediately returned to the workshop and noticed that the search warrant was not signed, and I contacted the police who said they would be in touch with me “at a later date”.

I had not done anything illegal and was totally mortified that the Police had several officers at my workplace with a warrant that intimidated that I was running a back-street abortion clinic. They did not take anything; no PC, no mobiles, no internet devices, no abortion pills and no tools that could cause an abortion.

As there was an attempt to sully my good name in the workshop and the police offered no explanation when I contacted them, only to wait for them to contact me, I felt it necessary to go public with this as it was in the public interest to know how police resources where being used. I was very aggrieved as there had been a serious sexual assault on a student on the 5th March in the same street that I have my workshop and there was little to no police presence investigating this.
I felt very intimidated, as I have grown up during the conflict in NI, I was afraid that I would be a target and my workshop would be a target of hate crime, as I have seen only too often during the conflict. I was in shock, but I was also very angry as this raid was an attempt to bully me as an organiser of women’s campaigns, I felt it was an attempt to keep me quiet.

I am openly pro choice and would frequently comment on social media, attend workshops, rallies and wear the T-shirt to support bringing women here and in the South of Ireland, abortion rights and was truly frightened that I was being targeted as someone who would “have tools to carry out an abortion” or that I would carry out any illegal activities in my campaign work.

I went to the local media to explain what happened to me and highlight the use of abortion pills in NI as women have no other means to access abortion in NI, particularly for those women who do not have the finance to travel or who are in precarious work situations or they are who are in violent, coercive and toxic relationships whose only option in managing an unwanted pregnancy would be to access abortion pills.

The story was covered in the media from all the local stations and print media, I was able to speak out because I had support of my family, friends and women’s rights campaigners and did so to challenge the raid, clear my name and speak for women who would not be as supported or strong as myself.

It was an extremely stressful period of my life. My employer at the time was concerned that their organisation would be brought into disrepute and reduced my duties and contact with women’s groups. In the year that followed I had several complaints made against me in my workplace, of which none were upheld but the pressure that I was under forced me to leave that job and seek other employment.

I was extremely stressed for several weeks and received numerous nasty comments on my social media, stating I was a “baby murderer” which were very disturbing. I was verbally abused in the public by people who did not agree with my beliefs and felt lucky that I was not physically abused. I did not have any confidence in the Police acting on my behalf regarding this intimation and did not want to prolong the stress of the whole event as I knew it would eventually fade away. It was an extremely negative experience and while I received support from my Trade Union, friends, family and the women’s movement it is a scar on my life that has left me more paranoid than is healthy at times.

The impact of this experience has had a lasting negative effect on me and my family and my work. I have had to change the name of my stall at the market, I have had to change jobs and I am very wary of leading campaigns for women’s rights. Nearly three months after the police raid, I received a phone call from them, stating they would not be taking any charges and the case was closed. This ended any stress of legal action but did not take away from the impact that it had on my life.

I felt that the action against me was not moved by public benefit more that it was used as a tool to silence me and other women who speak out for abortion rights and it has reduced my confidence in the legal system. It was a traumatic event in my life and caused me to relive trauma that I carry as a child who grew up in a very conflicted and dangerous society.

Helen Crickard, December 2018
(This person chose to be Named)
Below is a drama I have written which tells my story of having to have an abortion and having no access to it in Northern Ireland. The impact of that day still lives with me today and it is barbaric that those laws are still in existence.

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The Loneliest Journey

As the plane approached Belfast International Airport, Cara looked out on that all too familiar landscape...verdantly green, beautiful, rolling hills and simply stunning...well it always was in summer in Co Antrim. She felt the familiar bump as the plane landed and several minutes later she was walking across the tarmac towards the terminal. “How many times had she flown in and out of Aldergrove?” she wondered, but she hadn’t been back for years, happy to leave the grief behind. As Cara walked past the luggage carousels and straight up to the driver holding up her name, she felt weirdly at home...that was not necessarily a good thing.

The driver greeted her professionally and asked how her journey was, courteous, professional and in that Non-iron accent that she knew and loved so well - after all, her kids had that same accent - faded now with time but it re-established itself whenever a few drinks were involved! She got into the car and answered the driver’s attempts at conversation with perfunctory but polite replies. “He must think I’m a right miserable cow” she thought to herself, but she wasn’t in the mood for small talk however pleasant the driver, which was very very unlike Cara.

As he drove up the drive to the Dunadry Hotel...again so familiar...a chill came over her...a shiver down her spine...revisiting the past was never easy. And as she thanked the driver and wandered in through the huge stone porticos she was brought back 25 years...nothing had changed...but she had...how would the staff look on her now, this 52 year old woman in jeans and a white shirt with a “just in case”jacket on (just in case you need to make something look smart, in case it rains, in case you end up on TV) ...would they remember her very small wedding reception was held in their conservatory so many years ago...would they remember her in the bar sat waiting on her now ex husband as he tried to remember the time of her flight and yet again had left her alone, waiting at the airport...but today, the reason she was here meant so much more...” course they bloody wouldn’t remember her...staff moved on, and why would they care about her life?

After checking in she walked into that lovely warm wooden bar she knew so well...it was made of oak with a balcony running round and all the spiral wood formed in columns from the mills...Cara knew she should have known the history of the bar but today it didn’t matter...it never mattered...it was a stunning room. As she approached the bar wanting to order a double Bush (she may be scottish but she still loved bushmills) she was approached by a 30 year old fresh faced young woman...in stark contrast to herself. The woman asked “are you Cara” and as she nodded she ordered a green tea instead...she knew today would be a long day.

The young woman led Cara to a table...again so familiar...the high leather armchairs with the highly polished tables...a place Cara enjoyed, she felt comfortable here...then the journo asked her question “so tell me, why you are here? And why did you say yes?”

Cara took her time to respond, her long brown hair fell over her face and as she pushed it away she said gently “I said yes because I have been fighting this battle for many years; and maybe this time there is a chance of winning, of changing things. Why I am here in Northern Ireland again?...I don’t know...maybe to finally lay the ghost to rest. Maybe to get me back...the woman that used to laugh and dance on tables, but definitely to get women the right to choose, the same right that every other woman in the uk has without having to travel hundreds of miles, no matter what the circumstances”

“Ok” said the journalist “let’s start at the beginning.” and with that she clicked on her voice recorder ready to listen to what Cara had to say.

* It was the 2nd January 2001 when I suspected I was pregnant again. The sickness I so recognised from my first two pregnancies...well there is nothing like it and I could not blame it on New Years Eve as I had been sat at home with my two children, aged 4 and 1, my husband on night shift. He was a police officer. There was not the joy I had felt with my other two pregnancies because I had already been warned not to have anymore children. My second emergency section had been rushed and there had been complications resulting in severe muscle damage. My body
could no longer carry a baby to term and trying to have one could cripple me with the baby unable to survive...well that’s what the Gynaecologist told me. I’d already had to have a lot of laser treatment to heal the muscles and had come to terms with the fact I could have no more children. Also, I knew there was something terribly wrong in my marriage; to bring a new life into this was wrong...I think as well it would have made me feel trapped...I mean how could I support three children on my own, especially if I was crippled? And he wasn’t exactly a doting dad...who would look after them if anything happened to me?

A pregnancy test confirmed that I was indeed pregnant...and my heart broke. I made an appointment with the doctor for the next day (it’s surprisingly easy to get an appointment on 3rd January)

My husband awoke about 4 p.m and I remember being so nervous about telling him. I was right to be. There was no hug for me, no “we’ll deal with this together”, there was however blame. How could I have let it happen? Had I taken the pill every day as I should, how had I been so stupid? Truth was I had taken the pill everyday as I should...he even went and checked the packet which I kept in the cupboard in the kitchen...up out of the reach of the kids...everything was as it should be. He then asked had I spoken to the doctor and when I explained there was an appointment the next day, he seemed to be quite calm but said he couldn’t make it so I would have to take the kids, and that I just needed to sort things out as quickly as possible and that I want to tell anyone, especially not my family...and then he buggered off to work early. Alone again.

As always with those interludes, I felt battered, that the floor had opened up beneath me and swallowed me whole and all I wanted to do was curl up and cry...but I had the kids to look after. The rest of that day I went through the normal things me and the kids did...reading , singing, playing and all the bedtime routines of storytime and bath time but somehow I was detached. My eldest must have noticed this as she asked “are you ok mum?”. As all us mums do I smiled, said yes and hugged her tightly, breathing in the smell of her baby shampoo hair, feeling desperately lost. I barely slept that night and was already up when he came in from night shift at 6 a.m. We had a perfunctory conversation as he then headed to bed and I got the children ready for the day..I had leave that week...at least that was a blessing. My daughter was in fine form that morning, singing and dancing as she always did, tickling her baby brother who could now crawl at about 100mph across the wooden floors. As I got their breakfast I realised I couldn’t take the kids to that appointment...I never wanted them to have a memory of the conversation I was going to have however young they were...somehow it seemed it would taint them...take their innocence. Luckily my friend Sally was home that day and she said she could take them for an hour.

As I checked in at the doctor’s surgery I was hoping that as normal they were running behind...but it seemed as if 3 January is a good day to get ill as the doctor called me in straightaway. I remember her so well, middle aged with red hair, a kind face, brown suit and a smile on her as she bade me good morning. I remember freezing when she asked “what can I do for you today?” She asked me again in a gentle voice. “I’m pregnant but I can’t keep it” I blurted out. When she asked why and I explained the medical issues, she looked through my file saw the letters from specialists and she shook her head. She told me “there is no abortion in Northern Ireland”. I remember looking up shell shocked...I had been brought up in England and knew there were different laws but thought that in the event of the mother’s health being compromised it was permissible. I said this to her to which she replied “There is no certainty that you would die or be crippled, only a good possibility and recommendations from specialists for you not to have anymore children. Unfortunately in these circumstances you would not be allowed a termination...in fact to be considered you would have to be suicidal and risk having your children taken away”.

Tears of shock rolled down my face as I stuttered “but that isn’t right, this is the UK, this can’t be right, what do I do?” She had clearly had this conversation before as she held her hands and said she was sorry - that she wasn’t even allowed to give me any information on how to get an abortion but what many did in my situation was to phone private clinics in England or Scotland. It would not be available on the NHS “And if I were to have the child?” I spluttered. The doctor shook her head and said it wasn’t a good prognosis for either of one of us. She did say the one thing she could do was not record the pregnancy in my notes so no-one needed to know as she hadn’t done a test. Even that was risky for her as a doctor”.

Cara stopped for a moment, catching her breath. Her eyes had glazed over as she spoke, the emotions clearly, even now, so very raw. The journalist, who knew she should have been used to these stories by now, but somehow wasn’t, asked gently “Are you ok? Can I get you anything”.

Cara shook her head as if shaking off someone’s hand on her shoulder...the last thing she needed now was someone being nice, not if she were to do what she had to do. She recited to herself “get a bit of iron in your backbone girl”, something her father had always said whenever she had to face something. Cara straightened up, took a deep
I left the surgery in a daze and got into my car, a little red VW polo. You know I didn’t even like that car or want it, but he always had to have VW’s, and even my car had to be...just a pity it was me fucking paying for it!! “ Cara sighed deeply and carried on “I sat there for what must have been 20 minutes just trying to take in what had been said. It was a simple choice really; risk my life and health for that of a baby I could not carry to term. And then there was the cost, how could we afford it? Money was tight as it was with a new house, 2 young children and we’d just had to replace one of the cars. As ever with all this going on I picked up the kids and went home. I ensconced them in front of the video... (Thomas the tank was always a winner), and started up the internet (still dial in then and sporadic where we lived) and found the number for Marie Stapes in London. I had heard of them before. I rang them from the phone in the hall where I could keep an eye on the kids and they told me what it would cost and asked which location was convenient for me, central London or outside - they had one located near Stansted. I noted down the costs and checked out the flights...I knew my husband would want all the information when he woke up. All in all it would cost about £800 which would clear out our savings, or lack of them, but it was doable and could be done on 11 January...just 8 days from now. 

When my husband woke up the interrogation began. “What had the doctor said? What would it cost? Where would I fly to? How quickly could I book it? Why hadn’t I booked it yet?” I remember just closing my eyes and telling him to slow down, that I needed time to process all that was happening...to which he responded angrily “Well it’s your body so I can’t tell you what you should do” as he stomped off into the study. Clearly it wasn’t my choice, just my fault, as always. He spent his time in there double checking everything and came through with a print out of what flights I should book...the earliest out and the latest back to get the best prices, same day to save on hotels. I knew I had to do this but needed to breathe too, time to process what was going to happen to me.

There was no helpline I could call, no counsellor to see no-one to help me do this. I remember going back into the study to book everything - it was so much easier just to do as he said and I didn’t have the strength right then to argue. The woman on the other end of the phone at the clinic was very kind and told me I could change my mind at any time right up until the procedure. When she heard I was flying into Stansted she also gave me the number of a cab company to book transport from the airport to the clinic - she said they were discrete. As soon as I put the phone down my husband barked “Well is it all booked?” . When I nodded he smiled slightly as he responded “Good, but you’ll have to get the childminder to get here early that day as I’m on earlies.” That was the end of the conversation about it - nothing more to say, the hardest thing I had ever had to do and there was nothing more to say, and I just had to get on with it and sort it all out, even the kids.

They are good at that in Northern Ireland...black is black, white is white and no discussion in between. Your role is the kids, mine is being a cop, so I don’t have time to deal with the kids...say nothing, keep things quiet. Feelings, consequences, collateral damage, they don’t come into it because right is right and wrong is wrong, and now this was sorted, what I felt, what I needed didn’t count. What was happening to me right then did not count as long as I did the right thing, which was the wrong thing in Northern Ireland so shut up, stay quiet and do what you need to do”. Cara’s voice became very hard as she spat the last sentence out, anger that she had stored up for years spilling out. Now, she needed a drink!

As Cara sipped her Bushmills whisky, she smiled that it was served in the old style whisky glasses they use in Northern Ireland, like a wide champagne flute with the stem cut off. She smiled as she remembered the holidays she had had with the kids on the North coast, and the tours around the distillery which always ended in a tasting. Cara loved the north coast. As she looked up, Cara noted that the journo was staring at her. “What is it?” she asked. The journo smiled “It seemed you were a million miles away then, happy, content.” “Not too far away, just holidays with the kids on the north coast” replied Cara, “they used to love it”. The journo smiled “Well who doesn’t like Portrush?”.

As the warmth of the whisky enveloped her body, Cara felt herself relax and able to carry on.

"Right, lets get on with this” she said forcefully.

"I don’t know how long I got through the next few days. They all seem a blur. I remember organising for Sally to have the kids really early in the morning until the childminder could pick them up, and in the evening when he had to pick me up at the airport (fortunately her children were the same age as mine so early mornings were the norm). I also swapped my shift at work so I would do the weekend. I remember feeling numb and the ever growing silence from my husband was almost tangible, like a huge glass box between us, aside from when I vomited. Then the reality of what was happening kicked in; the physical reminder that this wasn’t a dream, his silence broken only by telling me
to be quieter when I was sick "in case the kids heard."

The night of the 10th he announced that he had taken the following day off work so he would be driving me to the airport and Sally didn't have to have the kids in the morning, that he would drop them with the childminder as normal and pick me up at the airport later. I suppose I should have been happy at this but again felt like the floor had given way. All that had been arranged was being unarranged. Certainties were now uncertainties. Was he making sure that I did actually get on that plane? Was this really affecting him but he didn't know what to say? But to be honest I couldn't be bothered finding out, I had enough to contend with. I made the calls to change the arrangements and went to bed early as we had to leave the house at 6.30 a.m. I barely slept, waking every hour, as most of us do when we are facing something big, life changing.

The following morning was the normal chaos of getting the kids ready, fed, changed dressed as well as myself. By 6.30 we were in the car ready but my husband was doing his usual thing of keeping us all waiting whilst he shaved, ironed something and generally paffed. We didn't leave til after 7 and the flight left at 8.30 with 40 miles to travel to the airport. There was no point saying anything- it would only lead to a row. We arrived at the airport at 8.10...I couldn't even hug or kiss the kids, no hug from my husband, I just had to run in and check in. I made it just before they closed the check in and ran through the airport getting to the gate just before it closed. Not really the way I wanted to start the day. I suppose.... "

The journo interrupted “So do you think he did that on purpose, that he was really trying to stop you going?” Cara, thought about her response for a moment, pursing her lips in contemplation. “No,” she replied, “cos he had done this so many times before. Even when I was going into hospital to give birth, and had to be there at certain times he would be late, every flight we ever got we just made it, it’s just him, its like everyone has to work around him yet he cannot stand waiting for others. I dont think its deliberate, but I also think he doesn’t care about how his actions impact on others”...Cara paused, catching her breath, not wanting this to all be about him, again. “Anyhow, I was finally on the plane. I had made the decision that day to wear work clothes, so that I didn’t stand out, so people didn’t guess what I was going to do, so the kids thought I was just going to work for the day (not that the 1 year old would have noticed ). I wore a black trouser suit with a red blouse and my cream winter coat. Funny the things you remember isn’t it? The flight went by in what seemed like 15 minutes, and there i was in Stansted airport, walking through a sea of people heading towards the exit, heading to important meetings, some being greeted by relatives, and me searching for my name amongst all those written on pieces of cardboard. I don’t remember much about the drive to the clinic, but I do remember thinking “I could call my brother and he could be here with me.” He worked in the city and could have been at Stansted in an hour. He would have held my hand, hugged me, made me smile, made me feel not so alone, but I wasn’t allowed to, and if my husband found out that I had,there would have been consequences, there always were. So instead, I walked into the clinic alone feeling the loneliest I had ever felt in my life.

The waiting room, I remember, was very comfortable, neutral, nothing that would stand out too much. I guess this was done so that you couldn’t link a particular image or colour back to that day, that time, that place. The receptionist was very pleasant, I suppose as she would have to be.

All too quickly the doctor called me through. She asked me why I needed an abortion and i recanted what had gone through my mind thousands of times in the last few days. She did a scan and confirmed I was 11 weeks pregnant. I remember her turning the screen away from me...a kindness I suppose, and I also remember her telling me that if I wasn’t sure I did not have to go ahead and nor would I be charged. They never show that in dramas or in the pro life propaganda. She told me if I needed more time to think, that was fine. Hmm, time was the last thing I needed” Cara shook her head as she recalled this

“There really was no choice, if anything my husband’s actions had confirmed more than anything that this just shouldn’t be, that I couldn’t rely on him. I told the doctor I was sure. With that confirmed, she explained the process, we signed the paperwork, payment was taken and I was taken through to a small ward to get changed. There were other people in the ward, and as the nurse drew the screen around me she explained what would happen and that after the termination I would stay in bed for 30 minutes and then could get a cuppa in a side room after I was dressed. Again, it’s weird the things you remember the small details.

The colour of the robes, the packets of Crawford biscuits on the side, anything to stop you from thinking about what was about to happen. As I looked around the small ward I noticed a couple (must have been in their early thirties) at one of the beds and what must have been a 20 something young woman with who I guessed was her mother, all of us there for the same reason, but I suspect I was the only one that had had to travel hundreds of miles that day."
Cara looked up at the journo and appeared to be quite angry “You know, I hear some of these zealots, the idiots in parliament, the Sammy Wilsons of this world talking about women doing this easily, using it as contraception, almost like its a trip to a spa! There was no one in that room laughing or making small talk, no-one! They were just people from different walks of life making a difficult decision, one that they thought was best for them or their families! One only they should have a right to make” she said vehemently.

“You Ok” asked the journo gently. She could see other people in the bar had looked round, maybe hoping to see a row going on.

Cara took a deep breath and sighed “Yep, it just irks me. I bet that no-one in that room has ever forgotten that day, you just don’t”

Cara took another sip of her whiskey and continued. “One by one they gave us meds, took us into the small theatre beside the ward and as I saw the other’s emerge one, by one, I knew my turn was coming. I wished someone was there with me, someone was there holding my hand, telling me it would be ok, but there wasn’t.

When it came to my turn to go through the nurse held my hand, bless her. The theatre was like any other, all white, bright and shiny. She started chatting to me about where I was from, what I did, anything to distract. I noticed she had a Chinese accent and she confirmed she was indeed from Whampoa in Hong Kong which made me smile as I had lived and worked there for years...she was astounded I knew it. And then the doctor came in and explained the process once more for me... and then it began. It lasted a couple of minutes and I felt the cramping that I had been advised of - and at the moment I wished it wasn’t happening, wished I didn’t have to be doing this, and all the while the nurse held my hand. As the tears rolled down my face, she held my hand, and as she took me back to the ward, she held my hand and then got me a cup of tea...i must have been special cos they dont do that for all...or maybe she was just a superkind nurse. I don’t know... but that woman I will never forget”

“So you regretted the abortion immediately?” the journo asked, almost astounded..then said “you cried throughout?” “No” replied Cara gently “I regretted that it had to happen, that my body couldn’t carry another child, that my marriage was not in a good place, that I had to go to these lengths to access the abortion with all the stress it entailed, and that I felt so bloody alone on what was one of the worst days of my life: but the abortion, no, I have never regretted that”.

Cara took a deep breath “and breathe” she laughed.

“So, the journey home?” asked the Journo.
Well, i got dressed, had my biscuits, Crawford’s Shorties as I recall and the car arrived to take me to the airport at about 3pm. ” Cara responded perfunctorily, “All so normal... I remember chatting to the driver this time, wanting to think about anything else than what had just happened. He asked where I was travelling to. When I told him Belfast he said in a very kindly voice “we get a lot of passengers from there, it’s not right is it?” I shook my head, tears forming in my eyes, you know the way they do when you are trying to hold something back and just one kind word has you crying. He must have noticed this as he quickly changed the subject to annual holidays. He was a kind man and as we pulled up at the airport he wished me good luck. Its funny how small kindnesses make such a difference to you. Once in the airport I had to wait to check in as my flight wasn’t till 7pm. I was sore, bleeding, exhausted and all i wanted to do was lie down, instead I had to wait 3 a half hours till my flight!” Cara’s voice had risen again, the anger even now, so many years later, so raw, so palpable., pain etched on her face, as if she was watching a movie of herself experiencing this.

So I did what you do at airports when you arrive early, I had a cuppa...I really wanted wine but the meds ruled even that out! And then I went shopping, buying the kids the comics they would love, examining scarves and ties, not wanting to read anything but wanting the time to go as fast as it could, as every minute felt achingly slow. I phoned home to remind him of the time of my flight...he wasn’t there, wasn’t answering his pager (yes pagers in those days for police)...and I felt even lonelier. And then it was check in time, and Did just that ...but somehow that day my brain wasn’t working between the pain and emotions so I ended up at the area for international flights. I had thought the check in clerk had say gate 63...and headed there not even bothering to read the boarding card. It was when it got within 30 minutes of my flight and I was reading the flight info that I realised I was in the international part of the airport. I managed to stop one of the service crew that ran the airport and asked her why my flight wasn’t shown, and yet I already knew but didn’t want to believe it... she looked at my boarding card and said it was gate 23, I was in the wrong part of the airport. Right then I began to panic, said I had to get home, it was so important, that I would miss my flight and I couldn’t, I just couldn’t. Something in that woman in her yellow and blue uniform, smart, immaculately made up, hair in a chignon with her hat on...perfection...must have seen, must have known my frailty,
my imperfection, my hurt, because she put her arm around me and said she would sort it. She radio-ed through to the gate and said I would be there and took me through a very different route to what passengers take...a route that took us two minutes to walk through staff only doors and corridors, instead of 20, avoiding security, and she made sure I was sat at the front on my own for the flight.

I cried most of that flight home, you know the way tears fall silently down your face, when you are just empty of words and just full of pain, silent tears that hold so much hurt that you just can’t express, those kind of tears, the most painful in the world...an ache inside like nothing I had ever had...loneliness I would call it...loneliness...and it was awful, the most awful thing in my life, worse than my dad dying, a man I loved so much, but worse than that...in one day I had lost my baby and my husband...cos he wasn’t there, he didn’t have the excuse of being dead...just of not bothering, not caring how I was, just of not being what he should be, what I needed...which right then was a hug, someone to tell me it would all be ok, and there was no-one.

When the flight pulled in to a very dark and wet Aldergrove airport, I felt a sense of relief, nearly home, nearly home to my babies. The crew were great, made room for me to get off the plane first, much to the disgruntlement of those vying with their briefcases to be first off the plane, to be the fastest, proof that they knew just how to do airports...you see them on every flight. And as I was led down the steps and motioned into the airport across the tarmac a sense of trepidation came over me. I walked through the baggage areas and stood in arrivals. My eyes searched around for my husband, He wasn’t there, yet again late, on a day he really should not have been.

The journo looked at Cara and asked “and how did that feel?” Cara looked at her in amazement, a look that said “how do you think it bloody felt?” but she resisted the urge to come out with some sassy sarcastic comment, this was too important. Instead she sighed “It felt sadly inevitable, it felt lonely, like he was sending me a message that he didn’t love me at all, that on this day of all days, that I didn’t ‘t matter. And as I stood there in pain, heartbroken, 30 minutes passed and one by one all the passengers on the plane and the crew had collected their luggage and walked passed, either into the arms of people that loved them or straight down the exit corridor to the carpark, eager to get to where they were going. There was no answer to the repeated calls to his pager so eventually I decided to wander down the corridor to the exit doors and get the bus into Belfast. And there he was in our red polo, with the two kids in the car, the wee man asleep and the 4 year old lively as ever. He had the audacity to be annoyed at me, that I should have known he would be waiting in the car, that he couldn’t take the children up to arrivals, that he had been working all day too. When I reminded him that I had arranged for Sally to have them and that he had a day’s leave, he simply said he had been working in the house on stuff I should have done and that leaving them with Sally was too much hassle. It was bollocks of course...he just didn’t want her asking any questions. Thank goodness my wee girl was there, as she sang the tweenies all the way home, and chatted and giggled and was just who she was...and she loved me...her joy of simply being enveloping me, allowing me to feel safe, feel happiness, allowing me to escape all that had happened that day.

As we pulled into the driveway of the house, I felt some kind of relief, relief to be home with my babies. I took them both in and put them to bed (he could not be arsed and was eager to get inside after his long day). My wee man did not even wake. I shouldn’t really have been carrying him but I just wanted to breathe him in, hold him close, and anyway my husband wasn’t going to. Little lady was bribed into bed with yet another reading of sleeping beauty...it felt normal, comforting to hug them close and do normal things.

Then I walked down the corridor of our bungalow to the open plan kitchen and there he was pouring himself what looked like another glass of wine, cigar lit and motioning me to sit down. I wanted to lie down, lose myself in one of the big comfortable sofas we had and watch some crap on TV, something that could take me out of myself. I didn’t want to sit in the kitchen on wooden chairs and chat, but as ever he got his way. I was too drained to argue.

And when he sat down and asked how it was, I tried to tell him, to explain how it felt but he interrupted me to tell me he had felt funny that day, how it had affected him, how it was all over now and that we didn’t need to talk about it again. And that was it as far as he was concerned, something never to be discussed or spoken about again, all over, just like that. Yet the cramps that kept on coming were the physical reminder that it wasn’t over, and it has never been over for me.

The journo looked at Cara. “What do you mean by that?” Cara, looked at her and said, “For me, that was the beginning of the end of my marriage, things of course were to get worse in the next three years, he was a very controlling and bullying man, but to leave me so alone, that hurt deeper than all the other stuff I endured...” “What other stuff?” the journo asked hoping to get another story out of this “Erm, that’s another story, this one is the important one today”. Cara smiled. “You know I don’t blame the law here for his behaviour but I do blame it for the ordeal I had to endure, the rushed-ness of the decision, the lack of support, the cost, the sheer cruelty of making a woman travel hundreds of miles to endure a procedure that is available everywhere else in the UK. It’s just so wrong, and so many years on it is still so vivid”.
“And what about those who do not agree morally with abortion?”

“Dont have one…but dont stop those who may need them having them and the support they need. Do you know that 50% of unplanned pregnancies occur when contraception is used? But here’s a thing, why should we force a woman to go through with a pregnancy she doesn’t want? Think about what it does to her body…we dont force vasectomies on men but in Northern Ireland we force women to not only go through nine months of pregnancy and often long painful labours, we force them to bring up teh child with little support for the next 18 years…you get less for murder, and for rape, yet those women who have been raped cannot even access an abortion. It is cruel beyond belief. That for the one mistake of getting pregnant we make a woman pay forever in this country! It is simply wrong and causes untold misery to thousands of women every year.” “The problem with these nay sayers is they dont think beyond the birth...black is black and white is white, they dont think about the life of teh baby and the people around it they think about the foetus…Once its is born it become’s the mother’s problem, if it can even proceed to term. It is just wrong!” By then Cara’s voice had risen again and people in the bar were staring at her. “Oops” she said as she smiled at the journo…“Soapbox time again”. The journo laughed out load, touched by the passion and fervency of Cara’s response but also by her sudden self awareness. Just then Cara heard “Mum!” and “Caral” shouted in unison and as she looked up her lovely daughter and her daughter’s lifelong friend were charging across the bar to her table. And as Cara got up to hug these two beautiful young women, the journo noted the look of love on all of their faces. Stood chatting excitedly like wee birds in spring, laughing out loud and just delighted to see each other. Cara was a decidedly beautiful when she smiled, when she was surrounded by love she mused. As the young women pulled up a couple of chairs and ordered a round of drinks Cara introduced them. “This is my daughter, and her lovely friend Skye, lifelong friends and both here to campaign with me this weekend. I never want them to have to go through what so many women like me have been through. “ And as the journo turned to ask the girls questions, Cara whispered to her, “they are off limits so no more questions. Have you got what you need?”. The journo laughed and nodded, knowing that she had been dismissed and as she said goodbye, she looked at the girls and said “Cara is some woman”. They looked up and laughed “yeah, we know!”. And with that she left, leaving the three women laughing and chatting. Cara was clearly not alone on this journey. She was a very loved woman.
My friends are pro-choice actively, my partner as well. My colleagues would be split on this issue and my family would also be pro choice for the majority.

Some pro-choice, some pro-choice 'with limits' I believe the media in NI's output doesn't give pro-choice campaign fair hearing so a lot of inaccurate information given a platform

My mother now knows of my decision to terminate my pregnancy and fully supported my decision. I come from a family that is very much pro choice, and the majority of my friend albeit some may not make the choice for themselves believe that this should be an individuals decision and not dictated by law and politics.

Most people's opinion is now pro choice. A lot of changed minds with the publicity and the southern referendum

I am from a Catholic family and whilst we were educated on abortion through GCSE RE that it was wrong, my siblings and I kept open minds and whilst we respect the religious views of others, we strongly support the abolition of the abortion law in Northern Ireland. Women should have the right to choose what they can do with their own bodies.

Abortion, contraception, and pregnancy should be the absolute choice of an individual woman. No single person should have their opinion nor wishes imposed upon anyone, ever.

The same as above.
We do not see abortion as a positive moral good but it needs to be a choice which is free, safe and legal to make.

They believe that all women are worthy & capable of making their own reproductive choices.

My husband and two young adult daughters are all in favour of free and legal access to abortion in Northern Ireland, same access as in the rest of the UK.

Pro choice

As above. I come from a long line of people who believe in gender equality and have chosen to surround myself with people who share this point of view, in both my professional and personal life. I am fortunate that this was a CHOICE I COULD MAKE. I am fully aware that other women living and working in NI are regularly forced to defend their opinion on adequate healthcare for women and feel threatened for expressing this view.

All of my friends and family agree that abortion should be legal and safe

Pro-choice
Only one person in my family would be anti-abortion on religious grounds. I think some friends might not agree with abortion but would want it to be a woman's choice.

Even those who are religious, such as my mother, agree with the need for abortions to be made available in NI.

None of my peers oppose a woman’s right to choice.

I know of very few people who are anti-abortion and even they believe it should be available for the very 'hard' cases. People here respect a woman's right to choose, hard line anti-choice people are few and far between, they (for some reason) just keep being given a platform. Northern Irish people want change.

Vast majority of my friends and family are pro-choice. There were a number of quite heated debates in my workplace around the time of the southern vote.

I would say most of my friends have the same view as me. My mother did not believe in abortion but as the referendum in the South became more prominent and she listened to some stories, she changed her mind.

All my friends and families agree on woman's right to have an abortion.

Almost identical to my own.

People used to comment that availability would have meant less people having protected sex but now people know this is not the case.

Some are for, some are against.

Pro-choice.

More and more people want to see access to safe medical intervention to support our young people.

Everyone I know believes that the current situation is cruel and archaic, and needs to change.

Pro-choice. Legalise abortion now. It is a UN universal right.

Agree with it.

Each situation is different and personal and should be treated as such.

All my friends, family and colleagues are pro-abortion. The only people I know that are not are religious and frankly that is their belief that should not be enforced on others. This group against is a small minority.

It is a medical procedure that should be available to all women.

All agree that women should have the right to choose and shouldn't have to go to England in order to get it.

Abortion should be freely available.

Mostly pro-choice now, even people from quite religious backgrounds.

I have confided in close friends and family, who I knew would be supportive. But it's not something I wanted to share publicly. It's a private matter and I didn't seek the views and opinions elsewhere.
Without exception my women friends and family agree there should be abortion on demand.

Most of my friends have children themselves and they fully trust women to make their own reproductive healthcare decisions, and they unequivocally support a woman's right to abortion.

It's true that a lot of my friends are similar to myself in their political and social views, income bracket, education level. It is not just those that I agree with on everything though that see the need for abortion legislation in Northern Ireland. Even my most religious and conservative friends understand the real dearth of access for NI people and the compassion required for those in such a decision. The older generations of my family too have become much more receptive and understanding of the issue and its obligation to change in NI.

It is a difficult choice for people to make, but that it should be theirs to make.

I believe that vast majority of people I know are pro-choice. By this I do not mean pro-abortion. I don’t think many people have a pregnancy terminated lightly or as anything other than a last resort. But that woman should have the freedom to chose what is best for her. That choice should be respected. If you don’t agree with abortion then don’t have one but don’t impose your opinions on me and my freedoms.

My colleagues in obstetrics and gynaecology, and more broadly in medicine as a whole think that the way we treat women with unplanned pregnancy is barbaric. It is not what we came into medicine for. My friends and family are of the same mind that things must change. Women must not be discriminated against and stripped of certain civil rights by virtue of being pregnant.

Mixed views dependant on religion but immediate family mostly pro choice

When speaking to my Catholic father about abortion rights, he said that he "didn't believe it was any of his business" what women did with their bodies. He is right. Most of my other family members are pro choice and believe the law should be changed. Others are more pro life, believing that life begins at conception.

Agree that it should be legalised in Northern Ireland

Pro choice

My mum and friends are fully for choice.

They all believe in a woman's right to choose.
Majority of my friends and colleagues are pro choice. My catholic parents feel that there are occasions it is required but simply fear people will view it as contraception. I am pro choice. I needed the service and it wasn’t provided to me in my home county. I hope this will change for girls coming after me.

Supportive and very willing to make sure choice is provided to women.

I don't know anyone who thinks the current law should remain, even among those who don't think they would personally terminate a pregnancy. Friends and family feel especially strongly about abortion access in case of rape or fatal abnormalities.

That this is no one else's business except the woman concerned. Her rights are paramount in this discussion.

They all agree that it should be legal and that women should have the couce

My 3 adult children support extension of UK legislation as do majority of my friends

All agree that NI abortion laws are in urgent need of reform.

Pro choice/ trust women to make ethical and sensible decisions about their own health and pregnancies.

My dad, father in law and husband are pro choice and beleive that there should be free safe and legal access to abortiin in Northern Ireland. My friends, colleagues and family and I have marched side by side in many of the protests for changes to the law on abortion in NI. We have travelled together to protest for the rights of our irish sisters and marched in solidarity for our right to choose. From across the generations there has been a significant change in our ability to speak out and say its time to change.

Most of the people around me were anti-abortion and this affected my decision.

It's a personal choice that EVERY woman should have available to her.

Mixed views. Some friends are staunchly pro life because they've never experienced a crisis pregnancy. Others are more empathetic.

My friends and families views are consistent with mine as detailed above. Women and girls should have a choice what happens to their own bodies.

My friends and family all support the need for legislation introduced into N.Ireland so women have access to free, safe and legal reproductive healthcare

Fairly pro choice. View it as a personal decision that no one else should impose on
My pregnancy naturally brought up lots of discussion about abortion. People told me to my face that they "didn't agree with abortion but thought I should have been allowed to have one". Since that pregnancy, many of the people that know me have changed their stance on abortion. They are now more aware of the reasons why people may need an abortion and understand that even if they may not agree with their reasons, pregnant people should be allowed to have a choice.

My friends are, without exception, pro choice.

Family and friends are pro choice.

My family would be split, my colleagues all support the pro choice movement and our place of work actively supports the cause when we can. My friends are all pro choice.

The views now are very clear that traditional church law and religious teachings has no place in 2018 healthcare provision.

My family are now completely prochoice.

My family are all Pro choice as are the majority of my friends. I find it difficult to relate to people who are anti abortion as I can't understand why they wouldn't want females to have the right to do what they want with their bodies.

My parents say girls lie about being raped to get money. They say young girls get pregnant to get money and a house. Single mothers are manipulate sluts, they should be punished for their slutiness by being forced into Parenthood, the kids are fatherless and therefore tainted. Not as good as people with married parents. My boyfriend believes people should be left alone to make whatever choices they want to make.

My friends are very anti abortion but then they have never been in that situation.

My friends, family and colleagues are supportive of abortion reform in Northern Ireland. After the referendum on the Eighth Amendment in the Republic of Ireland, they firmly support the decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland. My older relatives are not as comfortable talking about abortion as I am, I think that is because stigma about women's reproductive autonomy was even stronger when they were my age. The word 'abortion' wasn't even whispered in Northern Ireland 30 years ago: the Troubles overshadowed everything. The silence is ending now. Both my 89 year old grandmother and my teenage cousins have talked with me about how unjust the abortion law in Northern Ireland is.

They all believe women should be able to chose. Our bodies, our choice.

Pro choice
They are devastated by what I was forced to go through and are broadly pro-choice, although my husband’s view would probably be more in line with the proposals under discussion in the Irish Republic (12 week limit unless there is an FFA or diagnosis of severe disability). They all believe abortion should be decriminalised.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Nuanced. Supportive of difficult individual decisions. Changed since the adult and mature conversations in ROI around the 8th amendment referendum</th>
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<td>Generally liberal, want is to be legal up to the 12 week point</td>
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<td>Pro choice</td>
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My mother is pro-choice like me - but I want to be clear in stating she never forced her views upon me. She allowed me to develop these beliefs myself and I thank her for that. My friends are more difficult. One of my friends is extraordinarily pro-life. She works for a pro-life organisation and has appeared on radio and TV promoting her views. She is against abortion in ALL circumstances. I am convinced that if I ever had to have an abortion she would try to get me arrested or would cut me out of her life; it’s an obsession for her. It’s so bad that nobody in our circle of friends can ever bring up the topic in her presence and it has without a doubt affected our friendship especially since the Republic’s Referendum to, rightfully, Repeal the 8th Amendment. Most of my friends are pro-choice like me but cannot express their views due to this pro-life friend’s incredibly strong opinions. One other friend is pro-life in that she will never have an abortion but understands why others do; she did not take it well when I informed her that she is in fact pro-choice then. Abortion has been a strong point of contention in Northern Ireland particularly this year and it is wonderful to see so many people supporting a change in our laws here.

I would say 98% of the people I know agree that abortion should be legalised in NI

My friends and family are broadly pro-choice.

Some agree with it, some don’t, but ALL share the same view - the choice should be there.

My friends and family are decidedly pro-choice

mostly pro-choice when you get them to talk about it

Should be available to anyone for free on the NHS

I don't know any woman, now, who doesn't think abortion should be safe free and legal.
My friends, family and colleagues all believe the law should be changed, that Northern Irish women should have the same human rights as the rest of the UK, that we are being abandoned by Westminster and it is shameful. We need abortion reform. Abortion can be a sad event, but is something many women go through, and still experience even though they can't in Northern Ireland, by travelling to the rest of the UK for abortions.

My parents have a traditional religious mindset and would be unforgiving and unsympathetic to abortion. My siblings and friends however all consider abortion services to be part of normal health care for women. I was able to draw on both practical and emotional support of siblings and friends.

There are a mix of views among my family and friends. Some are, likely me, in favour of abortion being available to whoever needs it, whenever they need it, with the minimum of barriers, some are broadly in favour of it being available but would prefer some restrictions, and some would prefer it not to be available, but for there to be much greater support for parents, children and adoption services. The common theme across all of my social circle is that none of us believe that the current situation in Northern Ireland is sensible or fair.

Generally pro-choice with a few anti-choice for religious reasons.

My friends and family definitely agree with me: Northern Ireland’s abortion laws are barbaric and medieval.

That woman should have access to abortion in Northern Ireland and should not have to travel.

It's the woman's choice, no-one else's.

Most of my friends and family are supportive of a change to abortion law. In the past most of us just silently accepted it, and never talked about it. But now we're aware of just how unjust and unfair the situation is it's a regular topic of conversation.

They believe it should be available to all women in the UK; it is available in all other parts of the UK which means women in Northern Ireland are paying their taxes to fund a service not available to them.

I have one friend who traveled to England to have an abortion the baby was later term than she thought but the clinic agreed to carry out the procedure if she didn't talk about it. She can not have any children of her own and not a day goes by without her having to take tablets to cope.

If I meet someone who isn't pro choice - firstly that is rare, secondly when I press them on it they only think about "silly young girls who will use it for contraception" which is really more about them slut shaming than being worried about the word of god or babies.

2. My friends/family/colleagues view on abortion

Same - all should have a choice
I have spoken to many people about the abortion laws here and nearly all have agreed there needs to be change. Some are not fully comfortable with the idea of abortion, some feel the need to say they wouldn't have one, but only one person has said they think it shouldn't be available at all and refused to discuss it further.

My children put up posters in the house saying CONGRATULATIONS WARRIOR.,

Pro choice

My friends are all pro choice. I’d say most of my family are as well. I work with some people who would be anti, however most would be pro choice. Most people are wise enough not to want to tell others how to make their choices and decisions.

mostly pro-choice when you get them to talk about it

Almost all are pro-choice.

Everyone agrees that free, safe and legal abortion services are long over due.

Support the right to choose

Even my friends who disagree with abortion and would never see it as an option for themselves are opposed to the criminalisation of women and pregnant people who access one. They agree that everyone has the right to choose what happens with their body, and the current laws are a disgrace.

3. An example of how views on abortion have moved on

Would be the southern referendum

I believe the success of the Repeal campaign has helped pushed the campaign to the fore

Society is more secular. Although there is a long way to go women are no longer being viewed as human incubators. Political parties need to align their views to the people of a Northern Ireland’s.

All of my family who had pro life views now have pro choice views. People actually talking about it outside on NI
It is a modern and multi cultural society where women are no longer shackled by the kitchen or the permissions of a husband or male members of her family. With the success of the Repeal the 8th Campaign in the Republic, people have been educated on the prospect of abortion being legal and understanding the right of a woman to have ownership over her body. The stories that individuals have shared from their difficult experiences have helped drive the opinion that someone can still be religious but accept that women should have the right to choose to have an abortion.

Public open support for the call for equality in this issue, from all walks of life, religious folk, famous folk, political folk, just about from every corner of society in Northern Ireland. To have to take to the streets to peacefully protest a out being treated criminally, or just denied the same rights as the rest of society, is just demeaning. Having a personal opinion against abortion is absolutely a person's right, but to prevent those with a different opinion is brutally unfair.

In NI, most of the population would feel the laws are barbaric, yet devolution has allowed them to continue.

The vast majority of people in NI no longer feel that women should be punished for being the victim of rape or for their contraception failing. They no longer think that their daughters should be forced to continue with a pregnancy against their will.

I believe people in N.I. now have a better understanding that there are a multitude of reasons why a woman may need safe, legal access to abortion and to force a woman to continue with a pregnancy or face criminal conviction, is cruel and barbaric.

Women are more confident expressing their views and sharing stories

ROI referendum highlighted the changing views OF THE PEOPLE, which is reflected in NI. The governmental chokehold in NI should not be mistaken for public opinion.

I know of many people who are members of the church that a few years ago had staunch anti abortion views but with all the awareness, education and stories that have been shared over the past while now agree that it should be legal and safe.

The cheers that created the alliance for choice banner got at the processions march this year

The vast majority of people are in support of equality in all its forms.

Views on abortion are no longer universally tied to religious mandates
Before the referendum in the Republic of Ireland a majority of people were quietly pro choice, quietly because of the stigma and shame our religious history has left us with. Now after the referendum the pro choice voices are becoming louder because they know it's right to allow women bodily autonomy. People aren't afraid to talk about it anymore. Maybe 20 years ago we were a country that didn't want to talk about it or accept it, but if you looked there were always women who knew about these things and could help in times of need. The fact that workplace discussions were taking place in the north when the southern referendum was happening. It is now a mainstream topic. People understand that it happens regardless of their personal opinion. Also the fact that Scotland and Wales are now allowing women from here to access NHS abortions there shows that Northern Irish women are being treated badly

Literally the landslide of a YES vote to Repeal the Eighth.

My 76 yr old mother now agrees.

Almost all of the women and men of my generation support the idea of unrestricted access to termination in Northern Ireland. Religious law has no place in a secular society

I can now talk about the fact that I accessed a termination, something I was ashamed of for decades.

It is still very taboo in the North, usually due to religious views. If it is illegal to discriminate for religious beliefs then why is it that religious beliefs of one type of church force their view on everyone else, atheists included? In the South it is much less oppressive to speak about and get support for one of the toughest choices a woman will ever have to make.

More activists involved from younger generation

Groups that protest against abortion pedal their out of date religious dribble and force their views in people's faces. People are aware that with the correct support and access to safe medical intervention in their own country without having to travel will not only support but also educate young people about the importance of seeking help as this can lead to mental health concerns. It is already well known that mental health in Northern Ireland is a concern due to the legacy the troubles have left behind.

People are willing to admit that they have had abortions, or would consider abortions in certain circumstances.

Change the current law, to legalise abortion

It’s the 21st century and the vast majority of people now agree with this

It is more accepted and understood, however this makes the current situation more frustrating.

The fact we are having this discussion is how things have moved on. We are no longer dominated by religion.

Women are now talking about it in NI - 18 years ago it was a secret
I think years ago it was thought that women who had abortions were young girls who had made a "mistake", nowadays it is seen as a medical procedure to prevent undue suffering to mother and/or child if there are complications with the pregnancy, etc.

The church should have no say in this matter

My mother shocked me during the Irish referendum on repealing the 8th. She said it was the woman's choice, and people shouldn't judge. My mother is Catholic, and I always thought she would be very anti-abortion.

Abortion can now be openly discussed. I don't feel ashamed that I had an abortion. I'm ashamed that our useless politicians in NI are still obstructing women's access to safe, legal, affordable abortion.

Look at the rest of the world! Look at Ireland! This is fundamentally a human rights abuse.

I believe that women in Northern Ireland should have the same rights of access to abortion as women in any other part of the United Kingdom. At what is a very difficult time for women who are facing a pregnancy that they do not feel able to continue with, for whatever reason, I believe that they should have access to impartial advice and support, and termination, if that is what they chose, in their own locality and supported by health professionals that they trust.

Following the campaign and success of the REPEAL vote in the south, I had in depth conversations with my mum, who was probably indifferent and not particularly concerned with the legislation prior to this. She was fortunate in having children only when she wanted to and was in a position to provide for them, and is now no longer facing possible pregnancy due to her age. Taking this discourse as a chance to explain my position, as a woman seeking equality in terms of healthcare across the system, not only reproductive issues. She came to realise my position, and the need for this to change at home. I feel certain had we had a referendum in the north, she would have voted yes on my behalf/ at my request. (I am not advocating for a referendum in the north, I don't think there is a need as this can be resolved within the structures, currently functioning, for our legislation and healthcare services.)

The result of the referendum in the South has facilitated a wider, more urgent discussion about abortion and the result of that has been the people of NI showing that they are empathetic to the circumstances under which people seek abortion.

I think the referendum in Ireland earlier this year is a good indicator of how views on abortion have changed. I think these views are also held by the majority of people in Northern Ireland. The minority remain “pro-life” and unfortunately some of these people have very loud, very influential voices. But they do not speak for me.
Midwives who I worked alongside in a hospital in traditionally DUP heartland were in favour of women being afforded autonomy of their own bodies.

Most people now believe abortion is a women's reproductive right however some people are still mislead by incorrect religious dominated infotmation

My own personal views on abortion have significantly changed in the last 5 years, 180 degrees and I am 100% unapologetically pro-choice now. The Repeal the 8th amendment campaign and referendum is also the best example of how views have changed and the incredible journey Ireland has gone on in the last 5-10 years. and the majority of people in Northern Ireland feel the same and want change. It's time.

Northern Ireland does not give access to abortion and many, many other countries do

People are beginning to realise that women deserve control over when and if they have children

Every single person in my year at school was pro choice openly

Now that a change in law is being more openly discussed people talk about abortion more and it's not seen with as much stigma. But forcing women to travel to another country makes them feel that they should be ashamed

My catholic parents are more open to the idea now, as long as it is not used as contraception in their opinion

There are more and more people who view the current status in Northern Ireland out of step with the rest of the UK and Ireland.

Literally everyone I know or ever spoke to about it has agreed it should be legal but unfortunately it's not because of that backwards DUP party

Recent referendum in Ireland reflects growing awareness of the right of women to make their own reproductive choices & the subject is more openly discussed. Religion no longer has the same power to shame, threaten & target those who make their own decision based on their individual needs

The shame and stigma is slowly being removed as more women come forward with their story

Hold of the church over the moral high ground has diminished. Young woman more liberated to and less dependent on others and can make informed decisions for themselves. Our understanding and the potential to diagnose of fatal feotal abnormalities has improved
My grandparents and my grandparents in law from catholic and protestant backgrounds believe there needs to be change. All the men that I know are pro choice. There is a real wish to see human rights and basic medical care access here in Northern Ireland.

We openly stand up for bodily autonomy. We have increased our understanding of women’s rights. This is not 20th Century Northern Ireland. Women are our citizens too.

Nursing and other professionals have spoken out more openly in support of change. SDLP and Sinn Fein have revised their policies. May 2018 referendum in ROI has indicated clear need to change and parity with other EU nations.

With funding being available, it's a positive. But women shouldn't have to travel for healthcare.

The public views have moved after hearing the moving and personal testimonies of many women, girls and couples. It is time to make safe, legal abortion available in NI.

People in N.Ireland have always supported a woman's choice to have an abortion. It's just the pro life campaigners were making more noise. Young people are disgusted with the inequality and lack of legislation which is available in the rest of the UK.

As someone who has lived in both jurisdictions of Ireland I have found talking about my own abortion a lot easier with other Irish people post repeal of the 8th amendment from the republic of Ireland's constitution.

As above. As I went through my experience I witnessed people close to me change their stance on abortion, not just in relation to abortion for fatal foetal abnormalities but for abortion for any reason. An example that sticks in my mind is my colleague's husband. It was the weekend the 8th amendment was repealed and apparently the minister in his church gave a sermon that focused on how abortion was a sin etc. My colleague told me that her husband was disgusted by the sermon and that pregnant people should have a choice and not be judged.

I believe religion is the factor in relation to pro life views, however, we live in a world where we CANNOT have religion dictate laws.

With the campaign for Repeal down south, there was a huge increase in people openly talking about these issues, especially men talking amongst themselves. I work in a public house and the discussions were constant, open, and over time the stigma around talking about autonomy disappeared and made way for decent discussions.
Access to free, safe, legal abortion is a healthcare issue and fundamentally a rights issue. Women and their families should not have to travel, leaving the safety and security of their homes, family and social support systems and their usual healthcare provider at such a challenging time. No one I know thinks that this is acceptable in 2018. We must trust women to make the best choice for themselves.

My family would have towed the church line but now believe it’s a persona choice.

Thankfully there seems to be more people nowadays that are pro choice. My husband was on the fence about abortion until I sat and had a real conversation about it and he is now Pro choice.

I was raised anti choice, abortion was only in extreme circumstances. I didn’t realise there was no safety net until I was in that situation.

It is now a conversation that happens. It never used to.

In the last 5 years, I have seen a significant change in the language used by the Northern Ireland media and by politicians about abortion. For instance, MLAs who in 2016 compared abortion to killings during the Troubles or the Holocaust would not get away with saying that now. There is a greater understanding of the human rights of the pregnant person after the cases of Sarah Ewart and the 21 year old prosecuted in April 2016. Politicians have been put under greater pressure by the public to support abortion reform e.g. the SDLP has moved from complete opposition to abortion reform to support for the decriminalisation of abortion in 2018. The student movement and political commentators have become more consistently pro choice in recent years. Until around 2016, being pro choice was regarded by the media and student movement in NI as a radical or 'lefty feminist' stance. Now support for abortion reform is seen as a baseline progressive position.

Women are no longer seen as second class citizens, we have the right to decide what should happen with our body.

We realise that access to abortion is healthcare. That a woman's body is not a vessel for a pregnancy she does not want. Abortion being illegal does not stop abortion, it only stops safe abortions - women will still need abortions and keeping it illegal is risking their lives.

I have confided in so many other mums and colleagues about what has happened to me, and is is truly astounding how many of them have also had terminations, some for brittle bone disease, some because they knew they couldn't give a child the life they deserved. There are huge numbers of women who have quietly taken that trip and feel unable to speak out about what they think, in case anyone finds out.

Her mother previously did not support abortion but when faced with a grieving daughter supported this decision and others more widely.

Views here are very behind the times, but they are clearly progressing as most people I know, acknowledge that some change needs to occur in the law.
My parents who were pro life have now moved to being pro choice after a series of campaigns from southern Ireland on pro choice abortion

I feel it has a lot to do with the rise in liberal thought. People have had enough of being told what to do with their own bodies and being forced to do what the state says. It is our bodies and OUR choices. Northern Ireland is ready to catch up with the rest of Ireland and the UK in the 21st Century. This is a HUMAN RIGHTS issue and it is disgusting that such laws remain in place when clearly people want change. A minority is speaking for the majority. False facts continue to be spread by the pro-life radicals who shame and degrade women on a daily basis.

Views have moved on dramatically, people feel that the older generation are hugely against abortion but that is NOT true after speaking to my Granny who is 72 it’s clear that her main concern is with the safety of these young girls. In my Granny’s day she told me how abortion was unthought of but now look at us and how far we have come, she said she thought she wouldn’t have seen the day were abortion became legal in Ireland and it did so why can’t it happen here in NI?

Polls show that people believe that this is a decision between a woman and her doctor.

I can’t think of a single person I’ve spoken to who believe abortion should remain unavailable. My best friends granny is a staunch loyalist and DUP supporter (to the extent that her dogs have little Union Jack neck scarves on the 12th), and she strongly swears she would never ever have an abortion - but she also said she would like the choice to be there for her granddaughter. She said she would strongly encourage her granddaughter not to have an abortion, but that she’d prefer a safe option to be available instead of the alternative: buying dodgy pills online or flying to another country.

People now see it as a healthcare issue, that the choice belongs to the pregnant person alone

when it comes on the news now more people talk about than ever before

More people speaking more openly about abortion and other complications during pregnancy.

I can talk openly about my experiences. I'm 56 and now realise I have nothing to be ashamed of. The people who should be ashamed are those who take action - or fail to take action- to end the suffering of women with crisis pregnancies.

Views on abortion have changed as many people who 10 years ago may have been pro life are pro choice now.
The younger generation can deal with this and are clear about heat are healthcare rights. Young people point to the south now as an example of how society could support women.

I think the fact the majority in NI are in favour of reform is a good example of how attitudes amongst the population are not aligned with the political parties refusing to pass any changes.

I think most people are more liberal towards abortion these days, with exceptions of a lot of the elderly population. When I was doing my GCSEs (seven years ago) we learnt about reproduction and my biology teacher told our class that if we had an abortion we were an evil person and we’re going to hell. I’d like to think nowadays that this isn’t the case.

The repealling of the 8th amendment in the Republic of Ireland.

Growing up in a very religious area meant I was surrounded by very totalitarian views on abortion. My own views changed as I grew up. I used to think that abortion should only be allowed in very extreme circumstances. That view changed as I started having a sex life and waiting monthly on my period. Feeling so out of control of my body was horrible. I remember once when my period arrived late shortly after a relationship break up, living in shared accommodation, earning a low wage. As I held the pregnancy stick and waited for it to change I had no idea what I would do next if it came back with a positive results - the idea of travelling to England alone felt so unjust. He could move on, while I, purely because I'm the one in possession of a womb, would have to hide, leave my country alone and travel bleeding by airplane. But it's not just my views that have changed. I had a lot of very religious friends growing up who would have been completely against abortion and so many of them came out in support of a change to the law when the repeal referendum was taking place in ROI.

The decision to have an abortion is a very personal and intimate one, until we're faced with the question we don't really know how we will respond. This means that even if we would not avail ourselves of abortion as a personal decision it is one that should only be taken by the individual.

Oh it is shocking that many woman are thinking that this is a feminist issue and are following a trendy thing to oppose. It really is shocking the lies that's organisations such as amisty international can openly lie and give false lies.

You hear it brought into the conversation in politics all the time now - as often as equal marriage.

People talk more openly about it.
My work colleague used to have quite fixed ideas on abortion, some were firmly rooted in internalised misogyny and she didn't even realise it. Once we had a chat about all the issues surrounding abortion care and access she changed her views entirely and now fully supports decriminalisation.

The success of the referendum down south has made it easier for people here to have conversations about abortion. We thought for so long that we were more socially accepting but not with DUP control. We are seriously trapped in the Old Testament!

Most people realise that they have no right to decide for others. They realise that pro choice is a personal choice, and not ‘pro abortion’. Also, I think Sarah Ewart’s case has moved the discourse on.

when it comes on the news now more people talk about than ever before

84% of the NI population is now pro-choice and want free, safe, legal abortion here.

Please read my piece for open democracy
https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/stephanie-williamson/northern-ireland-anti-abortion-ghetto-uk

More people now believe in the right to choose

The referendum on the repeal of the 8th Amendment gave people in NI hope, and has opened up many conversations that were happening clandestinely before. Recent high publicity court cases in NI have highlighted the cruelty of these archaic laws, and in my personal experience public opinion is in favour of change.

### 4. What should the UK govt. do?

Decriminalise abortion in Northern Ireland and Male abortion accessible from home.

the UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland

The government needs to interveign. Women in Northern Ireland’s human rights are being violated and essentially this is an embarrassment! Repeal sections 58 & 59 and extend the 1969 Act to Northern Ireland

the UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland
NI is part of the UK, we have been ignored by mainland UK despite our obscenely backwards laws and our open and accepting majority population. The UK government should not rely on the DUP so much that their backwards and hateful opinions govern NI when they refuse to physically govern it themselves.

| Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland |
| Take whatever action that is required to legally address this inequality. To give women in Northern Ireland the equal rights as the Mainland. To repeal whatever needs repealed to stop women being unable to choose for themselves what they want to do with their body. To take firm action as soon as possible to ensure that no woman, or person nor even Doctor will be treated as a criminal in Northern Ireland for doing something perfectly legal in mainland UK. |
| Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland |
| The UK must repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allow safe and legal access in Northern Ireland. |
| The UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland |
| The British Government as signatories to Human Rights Laws, must decriminalise Abortion & Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act. Additionally, as there is no Stormont & there is no prospect of it returning anytime soon, they must acknowledge that women in NI are just as capable & worthy of the same reproductive rights & abortion services as every woman in the UK. It’s hypocrisy for the government to complain about the lack of women’s rights & human rights in other countries, whilst British Citizens in the UK are denied the same. |
| The UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Person's Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland |
| Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland |
| Repeal sections 58 and 59 of the offences against the persons act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions |
| Cease criminal sanctions for abortions and allow safe legal access for women in Northern Ireland |
| The UK must repeal sections 58&59 of the Offences against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortion, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland |
Ireland

**Repeal sections 58 and 59 of the offences against the person act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions allowing legal access in ni**

The UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland.

Decriminalise abortion in NI. Grant a woman's right to choice.

It is imperative that the UK Government repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act to begin with. After that it will be necessary to ensure that every person who needs an abortion in Northern Ireland is able to get one, in Northern Ireland.

Amend the legislation so that basic healthcare needs for women are met. The UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland.

REPEAL REPEAL REPEAL, allow the women that need abortions to get them and not throw them in jail for making a personal and medical choice about their own bodies. Abortion should be legal in Northern Ireland.

Let the women choose, give them their right of choice.

The UK must Repeal sections 58 and 59, in line with women here being afforded the same human rights as our mainland counterparts.

Please make abortion services in line with rest of UK & Ireland.

Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in NI.

Bring reproductive healthcare provision in line with the rest of the UK.

Act now to bring Northern Ireland in line with the rest of the UK. The fact that our politicians have no urgency to return to Stormont speks volumes about their attitude towards addressing issues like abortion. Hiding behind their Victorian ideas is holding Northern Ireland back in the way of progress and making the lives for women and the gay community barable.

The UK government must Repeat sections 58&59!of the OAPA and treat abortion as healthcare, not a criminal act.

Change the current law, to legalise abortion. The UK Government must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland.

The UK must Repeal sections 58&59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortion allowing legal access in Northern Ireland.

Abortions should be legally accessed in Northern Ireland and each situation treated individually and not generally.
**Repeal sections 58/59 of the offences against the person's act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in NI.**

They should take responsibility for women's human rights in Northern Ireland and extend the abortion act as well as decriminalising abortion. They should also halt the prosecution of the mother in northern ireland who obtained abortion pills for her 15 year old daughter

Intervene - it is against our human rights to deny us medical treatment/intervention, especially when the rest of the UK has access to it.

FThe uk govt should bring N I into line with GB

The UK must decriminalise abortion here. Stop using devolution as an excuse. Stormont is not running, and when the DUP can abuse the petition of concern nothing will change here.

The UK must Repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland.

Repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act.

Repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offenses Against Persons Act, stop criminal punishment for abortions, allow complete legal access, provide sufficient medical information about the procedure, and fund adequate sexual education for teenagers

Repeal sections 58 and 59 allowing legal access in NI

The UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland, as in any other part of the UK.

I believe there is an undeniable mandate now for the Westminster Government to repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act, so cease criminal sanctions for abortions and allow legal access in Northern Ireland, as well as providing a suitable framework for increased support in terms of mental health services surrounding reproductive issues in general. Abortion is a medical issue, not a political or criminal one. This should always have been the case in Northern Ireland and it is high time we were no longer denied human rights by virtue of living on a different land mass of the same country.

Repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions

The UK must repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland.

Repeal sections 58 & 59 the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland
The UK government MUST repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act. It is beyond scandalous that we here have had a democratic vacuum for almost 2 years. How this has been allowed to happen beggars belief and simply adds weight to the argument that people here are treated as second class citizens. There is no way this would be allowed to continue in Scotland England or Wales. It is beyond time to extend abortion rights to women here.

UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland

the UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland. Now!!!

Legalise abortion in Northern Ireland

Repeal sections 58&59 of the Offences against the person act and make abortion a medical issue between a woman and her doctor

The UK must repeal sections 58 and 59. No woman should be criminalised. We should have access to free, safe, legal and local abortion services

Repeal sections 58 and 59 of the offences against the persons act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland.

the UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland

The U.K. must repeal sections 58 and 59 of the offences against the Persons act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland.

UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland

Decriminalise and allow people in NI the same access as other citizens, safely and at home.

No criminal sanctions should ever be appropriate for seeking healthcare.

The uk government must repeal sections 58& 59 of the offences against the persons act and stop criminal actions for abortions and allow legal access to them in NI

I fully support the statement above

Repeal section 58 and 59 of the Offences against the person act. Cease criminal sanctions. Allow legal access to safe abortion in NI.

Repeal sections 58 &59. Cease criminalising a health matter.

the UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland
They must repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and stop all criminal proceedings against women behaving in the same manner as our counterparts in all other parts of the United Kingdom. They must allow legal access to abortion in Northern Ireland.

Repeal relevant sections of 1861 OAP act.

Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland. Penalize the NI office/executive for every day that NI laws continue to breach our human rights.

the UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland

The UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland. STOP making the women of Northern Ireland suffer.

the UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland

The UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland.

The government needs to repeal sections 58&59 of the Offences against the Persons Act and acknowledge that it is not acceptable to have different legislation in N.Ireland than the rest of the UK, when it is a healthcare issue which should be available free to any woman to choose to have one.

Decriminalization abortion

The UK government must decriminalise abortion across the UK by repealing sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and allow free, safe, legal access to abortion in Northern Ireland. Abortion should be treated as a healthcare issue.

the UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland

the UK must repeal sections 58 and 59 of the offences against person's act and cease sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in NI

The UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offenses against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions. Make access to abortion legal for women in NI.

the UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland
The government should get rid of any criminal sanctions on abortions, making them legal throughout the whole of the U.K. and allow access in NI.

The UK must repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person’s Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland.

Repeal sections 58 & 59 of Offences Against The Persons Act and end criminal sanctions for people who choose to end the pregnancy.

Make sure the human rights of those living in Northern Ireland are protected and that no woman is made to travel to England to suffer inhumane treatment for fear of criminal action.

The UK government should uphold its human rights duties to the people of Northern Ireland and implement all of the recommendations made by CEDAW in February 2018, including a moratorium.

Give NI, the same rights as GB & Ireland. Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act

The UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland

The UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland, and do it now. Do not make more women go on this lonely lonely journey. Let them make their own decisions #trustwomen

Abortion should be legalised

The UK NEEDS to repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland. The UK government needs to do this for the future of all women in Northern Ireland - we need your help, please help us.

REPEAL SECTIONS 58 and 59 and cease criminal sanctions for abortions. The UK govt. should allow girls and women to have rights over their own bodies and to make safe choices for them! They should not criminalise woman for not wanting a baby.

Please introduce legislation to reproduce section 58 & 59 of OAPA

The UK must repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland. In short: Trust women, dammit.
The government should repeal sections 58 & 59 of the offence against persons act and hold its end of the bargain on clause 4 of the Northern Ireland bill

stop prosecuting women and instead let women who need an abortion go and get one straight away. no sanction

Repeal section 58 & 59 and bring reproductive right's and healthcare provision in line with the rest of the UK

Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland

Repeal sections 58 and 59Offences against the Persons Act

The UK government must repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Crimes Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland.

The legal framework which criminalises women accessing abortion services must change! The shame in NI ought not be for the womnебneeding to find supoort and access services in secret as the real shame is a societal one which continues to not value women’s bodily autumony and right to choose

Abortion should be fully decriminalised, right across the UK, including Northern Ireland, and steps should be taken to reduce the financial barriers to seeking an abortion. Women's groups and those who advocate support for those experiencing crisis pregnancy should receive wholehearted support for government and efforts should be made to destigmatise the procedure so that those who go through it are not forced to endure more stress or trauma than is strictly necessary. Surgeries which are providing the procedure should have a protection /exclusion zone around them, within which it is forbidden to protest abortion, or to seek to interfere with those providing or obtaining the procedure.

At the very least they should extend the current legislation to cover NI

The U.K. must repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and allow legal access to abortion in Northern Ireland. We’ve waited too long, and I refuse to be a second class citizen.

The UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland

UK must repeal s.58&59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland. The UK government holds other regimes and governments to account for their abuses of human rights and not treating people with dignity and respect so it MUST give NI women the same human rights our sisters enjoy in the rest of the UK. It’s hypocrisy not to do so.
The UK must Repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland. They must ensure that Health trusts are prepared to offer abortion and other reproductive services throughout NI. And they should also review the state of sexual health and reproductive education in schools. The domination of the church in NI is particularly notable in rural areas, which are also the areas where people are less likely to have access to other services.

UK government should glean the views of citizens in Northern Ireland and if the outcome is in favour of abortion act to repeal the laws there preventing abortion.

Please keep our law. We need a place of refuse. I speck as one of the 75% of woman who face abuse being bullied into carrying out self harm. It is self harm, I know I would have never been able to live with myself

They need to repeal the relevant sections of the 1861 Act. They need to realise this is their responsibility - they created the laws we still suffer under it is degrading and it is tortuous. This should have been done in 2008

Allow abortion

The UK government must repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. The 1967 Act was right for the time, dangerous back street abortions needed to be stopped and the only way to do this was through the 1967 Act; but it is no longer fit for purpose. People who get abortions need sympathy, not questioning, judgement and criminalisation.

Criminalisation of women/girls who have accessed abortions in Northern Ireland must cease. Repeal of sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act by UK is the only way.

Decriminalise abortion now

Repeal 58 & 59 and allow legal access in NI

Make abortion legal and available on the NHS, free at the point of need. Easy and fuss free access when needed.

Please, repeal sections 58 & 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in Northern Ireland. We also urgently need decent sex and relationship education. I worked in a school last year while the so-called "rugby rape" trial was taking place, the school wanted to offer sessions on consent to year 12 & 13 pupils but would not allow the facilitator to mention condoms!!! The situation here in northern Ireland is painful and regressive.

stop prosecuting women and instead let women who need an abortion go and get one straight away and without having to jump through hoops to get one.
Allow safe, free, legal abortion in NI. Repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act. Decriminalise abortion in NI now!!

U.K. MUST repeal sections 58 & 59 of the offences to the person act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in NI

Cease criminal sanctions for abortion in Northern Ireland

The UK government MUST repeal sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Persons Act and cease criminal sanctions for abortions, allowing legal access in NI.

5. Why is devolution not a barrier?

Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years. Even if that weren't true, the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK govt. is required to intervene. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom's obligations to uphold our human rights.

the UK follows the United Nations human rights declaration. Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom. Human rights should not be a devolved issue.

The barrier is the old fashioned politicians. As a citizen of Northern Ireland I am ashamed of this country and ashamed that even with a collapsed government that the UK will not intervene.

Because at present in Northern Ireland, the general public are held hostage by our politicians ... Who consistently and publicly choose to follow an out dated agenda, who refuse to listen to the overwhelming evidence and pleas from their own people, who constantly fall back to past time of not speaking together on our behalf. Even if Stormont was called back tomorrow nothing would change, the political parties have had years to prevent this, and other inequalities, yet have taken affirmative action to ensure that our inequalities remain. These facts are all on public record. The people of NI deserve better, I believe you can achieve equality for us. Than You.

Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years. Even if that weren't true, the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK govt. is required to intervene. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom's obligations to uphold our human rights.
Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years. Even if that weren't true, the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK govt. is required to intervene. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the UKs obligation to uphold human rights.

Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years. Even if that weren't true, the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK govt. is required to intervene. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom's obligations to uphold our human rights. The petition of

Stormont collapsed almost 2 years ago. There is no prospect of it returning. The UK government must ensure that every part of the UK upholds the Human Rights of every woman within the UK.

Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years. Even if that weren't true, the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK govt. is required to intervene. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom's obligations to uphold our human rights

Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years. Even if that weren't true, the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK govt. is required to intervene. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom's obligations to uphold our human rights

As above

Obstructing access is a breach of the UK obligations to uphold human rights

This a breach of human rights. The UK government is required to intervene in the absence of devolved government.

There's been no Stormont for 2 yrs. UN declared universal rights to life include right to safe abortion- obstructing access is a UK breach of obligations to uphold NI women's human rights

General Recommendation 28 of the CEDAW states that devolution is not justification for a state to not ensure the human rights of its citizens. The UK have ratified this treaty, why do they continue to neglect their obligations to the women of Northern Ireland? This is a violation of our human rights, they're being denied systematically and gravely. It is high time this was changed.
Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years. Even if that weren't true, the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK govt. is required to intervene. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom's obligations to uphold our human rights.

Because this is a human right matter and should be addressed immediately no matter what state the government is in.

Please help... as online pills are being used and people are not able to access services until much later in pregnancy.

The UK govt must intervene as this is a human rights issue, which is legislated for by Westminster.

No Active Governance

Northern Ireland needs to be brought in line with the rest of the UK with regards to abortion. As a mother to a young girl I feel that her human rights and that of my own are most definitely being breached.

We have no devolved government, people are suffering daily due to these laws, our Human rights are being abused and our government holds the power to end this. It is their responsibility to act on the interest of their citizens, and by choosing not to do so they are breaching both international and moral obligations.

The UK government is required to protect all citizens, including women of NI.

It is a basic human right. Women should be in charge of their own body and mind and it’s cruel, torturous and detrimental to those who are denied the choice.

We have had no government for 2 years and at that they are breaching hua

BEcasue this was an issue way before devolution and issues affecting human rights are not devolved.

Devolution shouldn't be used as an excuse - there is no excuse for making us live in the dark ages!

The main parties are using this as an excuse for disagreement.

This is a human rights issue which is not a devolved matter.

Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years. Even if that weren't true, the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK govt. is required to intervene. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom's obligations to uphold our human rights.
Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years. Even if that weren't true, the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK govt. is required to intervene. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom's obligations to uphold our human rights.

As long as Northern Ireland is a part of the UK, then devolution is not a problem. It is up to the United Kingdom to safeguard the human rights of the women of Northern Ireland.

Stormont has not functioned for over two years. We are being punished and neglected at every turn as a result of this. It simply is the responsibility of the UK government to step in to provide support in lots of areas, but especially in this case. With the repeal of the 8th amendment in the Republic, the UN's recent declarations on abortion as a universal right to life and a louder demand in NI than ever, of which this inquiry is part, it is quite clear that the people of Northern Ireland who are being faced with impossible and unnecessarily stressful situations at a staggering rate should not have an excuse such as devolution thrown in their face. If Theresa May is happy to use the DUP to further her clout in parliament, and the border is such an important issue in terms of Brexit, where Arlene Foster demands for us to be treated as part of the UK in every respect then this is undeniably a case that does not meet her criteria. And even discounting the DUP, who have an ever decreasing majority in Northern Ireland and absolutely do NOT represent their constituents, never mind those who did not vote for them, should not be allowed to hold us hostage for their own, not our, political gain. Every time I email Nigel Dodds, my MP at home, to ask him to support a bill etc backing abortion rights for Northern Ireland, I am met with the party line of the DUP. This is not acceptable and deeply undemocratic. I believe there are more people in NI who are indifferent to, or even gently in favour of abortion rights than are staunchly against it. The UK government have a responsibility to the women of NI. Do not fail us.

Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years. Even if that were not true, the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK Government is required to intervene. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion.
The High Court has ruled that Stormont is breaching human rights by not extending abortion rights to Northern Irish women, and that the UK government is failing to ensure this in its capacity as guarantor in the event of a collapsed storming. And yet we have sat and waited for TWO YEARS. Enough is enough!

Stornont has been collapsed for 2 years. Even if that weren't true, the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK govt. is required to intervene. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom's obligations to uphold our human rights.

The Northern Ireland Executive at Stormont has been collapsed for the best part of 2 years. In this instance the UK Government as co-guarantors of the Good Friday agreement are required to intervene to uphold and progress our human rights. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom's obligations to uphold our human rights.

It gives women access to safe medical care.

The UK government has an obligation to the people of northern Ireland to ensure that basic human rights are not being breached.

Because abortion should be a protected right and a safe decriminalised procedure so others affected, like myself, don’t have to rely on our government to come back to make a decision on our lives.

Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years. Even if that weren't true, the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK govt. is required to intervene. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom's obligations to uphold our human rights.

Even if we had a functioning assembly, this is a Human Rights issue as agreed by the UN. The NI Sec of State is now obliged to review these regularly. While we have a petition of concern mechanism in its current form, the clear wishes of the majority of people in NI can be vetoed by a minority anyway, as with marriage equality. We need Westminster to protect our rights as there is no one else to do so.

Obstructing access to abortion is an abuse to human rights. Devolved or otherwise, legislation should be implemented to care for women in their own country.
Because of the seriousness, UK govt should override NI local government & introduces legislation in NI

Stormont has been stagnant for 2 years. The woman of NI deserve to have their human rights upheld and the uk govt has an obligation to intervene as a matter of urgency.

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This is not a case of health care but of Human Rights in accordance with UN ruling. It is the responsibility of the Westminster Government to ensure that Northern Irish women are extended the same universal rights as those from England, Scotland, and Wales.

Every woman has the right to a safe and legal abortion as per UN rights to life. Theresa May has said this also. We are UK NHS patients and NI and tax payers and we are not receiving fair or equal treatment.

The UK government has a duty to protect our human rights. You cannot continue to allow people in Northern Ireland to have their rights violated by a devolved administration that refuses to function. Devolution is being used as an excuse for inaction because the DUP hold too much power in Westminster. This is unacceptable. We cannot wait any longer.

UK Government, stop dancing to the DUP's tune and do something for the people of Northern Ireland. You have to power to change things. You have the power to prevent the next tragic couple having to endure what we did. This transcends party politics, this is about human rights, and the right to the people of Northern Ireland to be treated as equals in the UK.

It's time the UK government intervened. The politicians in Stormont are not capable. They are not fit for purpose. Their utter incompetence is violating the human rights of the women of Northern Ireland.

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This is a Human Rights issue which some of our locally elected politicians do not support. I am a member of the unionist community and I support free, safe legal abortion in N.Ireland

Holding women of northern Ireland prosecutable for making decisions that women in England/Wales/Scotland can make with no concern of being given suspended sentences or facing prosecution is a clear breach of the UK not holding women of northern Ireland as equal citizens.

Upholding Northern Irish citizens' Human Rights is not a devolved matter. The UK government are responsible for that. The ruling in the recent Supreme Court case, of which I was an intervener, clearly stated that the current situation in Northern Ireland breaches our Human Rights. Furthermore, Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years and it is not looking likely that it will be up and running any time soon. Upholding our Human Rights can be put on the backburner no longer.

Devolution in NI does not exist. We have not had a government for two years and Westminster had failed is

The UK govt. must intervene to uphold human rights in NI. This has gone on for TOO LONG.

The UK government need to address the failures of Stormont to deliver a bill of rights, and its failure to address human rights abuses show how its necessary for the UK government to step in and deliver rights to its own citizens in NI.

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The devolved assembly is a joke, they refused to allow women and pregnant persons human rights. They continue to deny access to abortion.

The right to safe abortion is a UN universal right to life.

As the anti choicers say my right to life is the most important right. The UN has found that the right to life includes the right to safe and legal abortion.

People move so often across parts of the UK that it makes no difference that is there is a devolved govt in Northern Ireland. Everyone should have access to fair and equal rights and as the United stated, the right to safety, humane treatment is fundamental.
It is completely nonsensical to use devolution as a justification for allowing human rights violations to continue under Northern Ireland's abortion law. If the human rights of ALL UK citizens truly matter to the UK government, it will recognise that leaving abortion reform in NI to an assembly which collapsed almost 2 years ago is tantamount to endorsing the status quo. Human rights duties are not devolved, the United Kingdom government is required to intervene. The inaction of the UK government on abortion in Northern Ireland over the last 50 years has to end - the time is now.

They are not sitting, haven’t for nearly two years. They should not be allowed to prevent necessary healthcare & force women, and their partners to travel. Their stand doesn’t stop abortions, just transporting it.

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Human rights specifically regarding autonomy are being violated and this is not acceptable

Stormont is USELESS and an EMBARRASSMENT. They do not care about our welfare. The DUP has been our dictator for too long - their draconian views are outdated and need to be eradicated. The UN has even implored the UK to change the law here! It is a BREACH OF HUMAN RIGHTS to deny women the right to access a safe and legal abortion.

Devolved administration has not dealt adequately with this issue in the past. There is no reason to believe they would in the future
N.I. remains to be ruled by tribal politics. Nothing will ever get done unless the UK govt. intervenes. Women in NI are suffering from lack of human rights and it is the UK govt.’s responsibility to address this.

Seriously. Get your shit together Stormont and sort this out. TRUST WOMEN.

Devolution is not a barrier as human rights have not been devolved to the Assembly yet. We have had no government for 3 years. It is time for you to take action in behalf of the majority of people in Northern Ireland.

stormont is a lame duck. we need mps to sort this out now!

Northern Ireland Assembly government is infringing a person human rights and criminalizes anyone that has an abortion.

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Abortion is a human rights issue and so should not be decided by a devolved government. The devolved government in Northern Ireland has failed anyway, and Westminster is ignoring the people of Northern Ireland and their rights by not moving towards decriminalising abortion. Or by hiding behind the idea of ‘devolution’ which has failed and is not appropriate for this issue.

Devolution should not be a barrier to women accessing their human rights, however it is obstructing access and UK govn must not fail it’s own citizens and act now to ensure this is re-dressed.

There is no need for this to be dealt with at the devolved level and, indeed, it is one of the responsibilities of the UK government to ensure that none of its citizens are discriminated against, or have rights withheld because of where they live. The right to medical procedures is a something which should never depend on which part of the state you reside in.

The U.K. should care about Northern Ireland! Westminster has a duty to uphold U.K. citizens’ human rights.

Why is devolution not a barrier? Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years. Even if that weren't true, the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK govt. is required to intervene. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom's obligations to uphold our human rights.

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The responsibility to uphold human rights lies with Westminster. The UN recently declared that universal rights to life include the right to safe abortion. Obstructing access is a breach of the United Kingdom's obligations to uphold our human rights. We are UK citizens yet we are suffering so much on a daily basis from this law. We have been silent for so long, but finally the stories are being told. This affects us more than those not living under the law can ever imagine. To ignore our calls for change is an abdication of duty.

The fact that this is a human right under the UN Charter, and, no doubt, under the European Convention on Human Rights, means Northern Ireland and the UK government is in breach. The UK government can act and should act.

Is the baby not human?

Stormont has not sat for 2 years, even if it has we know they will block any progress on this with a petition of concern. We know the DUP are happy not to represent their voters as long as they represent the wishes of their religious and backward party funders. The DUP are the biggest hypocrites in this country - they want us to be the exact same as England, except on women's rights and LGBT rights - and this is when the whole country knows they have some skeletons in their own closets, yet be willing to vilify people for not towing a 'respectable' line. They are embarrassing, Sinn Fein came late to the change in mindset - waited until they knew it was popular. England has already admitted its culpability by paying for the abortions we send over, it's admitted culpability by providing the services. As one of the judges in the courts said, what is the point of the abortion law if it doesn't stop abortions, it just stops them from happening legally and safely in NI? There is no good answer to that question except to continue the odd veil of fake respectability that the DUP play (and fool no-one with). Westminster is where our rights lie and should be the place they are redressed, or else really what is the point of Central Government?

Devolution is no barrier to the decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland, Stormont has been collapsed for almost two years with no sign of reassembling soon. People in crisis pregnancies need care today. The UN recently declared universal rights to life to include the right to safe abortion so even if Stormont was not down the refusal of a devolved assembly to redress human rights abuses means the UK government is required to intervene.

There is an obligation on UK to prevent the continuation of abuse of the human rights of women and girls in N. Ireland in relation to UN declaration of universal right to safe abortion. We have been bullied and rubbished by our local religious fundamentalists for too long.undamentalist

The political parties here play power games.
Severe intransigence of our elected representatives has caused enough suffering! The issue of access to abortion needs to be resolved and brought into with the UN Declaration on Human Rights - it doesn't matter by what process this happens, but it needs to happen.

Human rights are the responsibility of MPs in London and they need to sort this out. The Assembly will never do it!

The devolved assembly (before it collapsed) refused to redress human rights abuses so the UK government must intervene. The UK has an obligation to uphold our human rights, including the right to safe abortion.

Please read my piece for open democracy
https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/stephanie-williamson/northern-ireland-anti-abortion-ghetto-uk our government has been collapsed for 2 years

Stormont has been collapsed for 2 years!!!! The un state we have the right to safe abortion

It's outrageous that NI is considered UK territory, but it's citizens are not granted equal healthcare or human rights. I am 21 years old, and my generation will not be deterred by the puritanism of the DUP or the moral cowardice of Westminster. Abortion is a healthcare and a human right, and we demand our rights - the UK government has an international obligation to deliver these, regardless of devolution.

December 2018
Appendix

The form has been online since 8th November here:

A guide to the process is here:

Every submission received this in response:
Information on the process for inquiry submissions

Firstly THANK-YOU.
Your submission means so much for the thousands of other people who have been through it as well and can’t yet share it, even privately. At Alliance for Choice, we think we are getting closer to change for the better, even though we have to make it happen legislatively (which is a slow process).

Here is how Alliance for Choice will use this information:

Firstly only I, Emma Campbell will read these submissions with names and any identifying information. After which all of these identifying features will be removed for your own privacy.

All of these individual responses will be gathered together into one document and submitted as evidence from the real people of Northern Ireland.

If we need to do anything else after the submission closes on 10th December, we will email you to inform you of the process and when we should expect any sort of response from the Women and Equalities Committee. We have been informed that they plan to visit Northern Ireland. We will want to make sure that they don’t just speak to politicians who have refused to represent us.

We might want to include you story in the NI version of “In her Shoes” we’re collaborating on with the originator, but we won’t publish anyone’s without express permission, so will email you.

If you would like to speak to a counsellor about your abortion or any reproductive health matter, please contact:


If you want to help others to share their views and experiences, please share:


If you think you’d like to take any legal action, including damages for the experience you’ve been made to endure due to our almost-total abortion ban, please email
campbell.emma@gmail.com and I can advise you on legal representation and evidence gathering.

If you know someone who needs an abortion please direct them here: http://www.alliance4choice.com/i-need-an-abortion-now/