I wish to submit my experience of the changing opinions on abortion rights in Northern Ireland as a woman able to get pregnant and as part of a family of people with various issues around pregnancy and mental health.

My granny wondered why I cared so much about abortion rights because when she was in and out of hospital in the 70s, abortions happened. The Borne judgement that said if it was a great risk to a woman’s life was often interpreted liberally when dealing with addicts and people with mental health issues. This isn’t the case anymore. Since 2013 the number of abortions happen in Northern Ireland legally continues to drop while the number of women travelling to England continues to grow.

My mother teaches kids with severe disabilities and came home to say that one of the students’ mother was told that if she were to get pregnant it was a choice and she wouldn’t get the support for another disabled child. She also wouldn’t be allowed an abortion. I don’t understand how this can be and neither did my mother and that’s why she came home agog. We didn’t always talk about abortion rights but when I told her of a woman shouting at me “what if your mum thought the way you do?” she said “I hope you told her she does. And her mother does too.”

My sister wants nothing more than a baby. I didn’t talk to her about being prochoice for years because she hadn’t been able to carry a child to term. On the day of the Irish referendum to repeal the 8th amendment she said about all the women who she worked with who had been telling her about their fatal foetal abnormalities and having to travel to England for an abortion for a wanted child. At this point she said that her personal want doesn’t make other people’s decisions any easier.

I have been involved in feminist activism in Northern Ireland for about six years and this leads to prochoice activism. People I barely know tell me their stories of miscarriage and abortion constantly, people from here who have moved to England, people who had lived in England at one point and then came back to Northern Ireland.

I can’t speak for all families but I know in mine that when you start going into the challenges of contraception, the complexities of motherhood and the complete lack of childcare strategy in Northern Ireland, we all come out agreeing that what is best for a woman, her life and her family isn’t for us to decide.

New medical guidelines that allow for abortion is the least that should be done. The cases that both CEDAW and the UK Supreme Court should be governed on. Ideally I would like abortion decriminalised and early medical abortion being available by GP or pharmacy as per the UK’s Department for International Development’s Who Decides? We Trust Women research. It should be made clear that doctors shouldn’t fear prosecution when they are acting in the best interest of the patient.

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