IONA INSTITUTE
for Religion and Society

HOW BRITAIN'S ABORTION LAW OPERATES

INTRODUCTION

Many pro-choice campaigners in Ireland want us to adopt an abortion law similar to what operates in the UK. Some want us to go even further than this. This briefing note looks at the operation of Britain's abortion law. In theory, Britain's law is quite restrictive, but in practice the law is very permissive as we will see.

GROUNDS FOR AN ABORTION

Under the Abortion Act 1967, the main ground under which abortions take place is where there is a risk to the 'physical or mental health' of the mother. Two doctors must approve an abortion. After 24 weeks, abortion is illegal except where there is a 'substantial risk' to the life of the mother, or the baby suffers from a disability. Again, two doctors must approve the abortion.

It was envisaged in 1967 that these conditions would mean abortion would be rare but that is not what has happened in practice. On the contrary.

Number of abortions in Britain

200,000 ABORTIONS
take place annually in Britain.

ONE IN FIVE
pregnancies end in abortion

Official figures show that there were **190,406 abortions** carried out in **England and Wales** in 2016 and **12,063 in Scotland**. This number has shown little variation in recent years.

Vast majority of abortions conducted on 'health' grounds

In 2016, 97% of abortions (180,794) were undertaken under Ground C (physical and mental health of the mother).

A further 2% were carried out under Ground E (physical or mental abnormalities of the foetus), and a similar proportion (1%) under Ground D (physical and mental health of other children in the family).

Grounds A and B together (risk to the life or permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman) accounted for very few abortions (246).

Ground C abortions have consistently accounted for over 95pc of abortions over the last 10 years. The vast majority (99.8%) of abortions carried under Ground C were performed because of a risk to the woman's mental health. There is no requirement for a doctor to perform any mental health assessment. The rest of the abortions on ground C (0.2%) were performed because of a risk to the woman's physical health. **We can see from this how the health ground is used to open the door to whet amount of abortion-on-demand.**

Down Syndrome abortions

90%

of babies who are diagnosed before birth with Down Syndrome are aborted in England and Wales according to official figures. More than 700 babies were aborted for this reason in 2016.

IRELAND'S ABORTION RATE

How many abortions?
Far lower than the British rate

Of women who had an abortion in England or Wales, 3,265 gave an Irish address. This means one pregnancy in every 20 ends in abortion, a rate far lower than the British rate of one in five.

Even if we estimate that 1,000 to 2,000 Irish women per annum use the abortion pill or give false addresses when in Britain, this still results in a far lower abortion rate than in Britain (one in twelve or one in fifteen versus one abortion in five pregnancies).
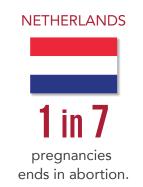
On what grounds?

Over 95% of abortions performed on Irish women (3,118) were undertaken under Ground C (physical and mental health of the mother). We can see from this how permissively this ground is interpreted.

ABORTION RATES IN SELECTED OTHER COUNTRIES

FRANCE	SWEDEN	DENMARK	NETHERLANDS
1 in 5	**1 in 4**	**1 in 5**	**1 in 7**
pregnancies ends in abortion.	pregnancies ends in abortion.	pregnancies ends in abortion.	pregnancies ends in abortion.

SOURCES   https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/652083/Abortion_stats_England_Wales_2016.pdf
https://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Sexual-Health/Publications/2017-05-30/2017-05-30-Terminations-2016-Report.pdf
http://www.binocar.org/content/annrep2013_FINAL.pdf

Figures mentioned in this document are from official reports. For more information: abottone@ionainstitute.ie

About the Iona Institute

The Iona Institute promotes the place of marriage and religion in society. We defend the continued existence of publicly-funded denominational schools. We also promote freedom of conscience and religion.