

# 10 myths about abortion



# 10

## Our abortion rate is higher than anywhere in the world - and it's rising all the time.

Our abortion rate is almost exactly the same as rates in comparable developed countries such as France and Denmark, and is lower than Sweden's. These are all countries which expect women to be able to pursue individual goals and ambitions, and plan the timing and size of their families. There is no 'right' number of abortions and a variety of factors can determine whether abortion rates rise or fall. With 15.9 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15-44, the abortion rate for England and Wales is currently at its lowest point since 1998.

# 9

## Lots of people want restrictions on abortion. It's just very controversial.

The majority of the British public are pro-choice and are in fact more liberal on this issue than the law currently allows. The most recent British Social Attitudes Survey found nearly two-thirds (62%) of us agree with the statement that 'a woman should decide on her own if she does not wish to have the child'. At present, the law stipulates that a woman can have an abortion only with the agreement of two doctors. Polls also suggest that people are as supportive of a woman's ability to have an abortion if she needs one regardless of their political affiliation, and that support for abortion access among people of faith is very similar to that of people without religious affiliation.

8

## Contraception is free on the NHS - if women just used it, there would be no need for abortion.

The majority of women who have abortions were using a method of contraception at the time they conceived. No method of contraception is 100% effective. Sometimes it fails and sometimes women - or their partners - fail to use it properly. 'Fit and forget' methods such as the implant and the coil are very effective but for some women the side effects (eg pain and bleeding) are intolerable, while convenient appointments for fittings can also be a struggle to obtain. We can certainly do more to improve women's access to contraception and in the longer-term develop new and better methods, but abortion will always need to be there as a back-up for women.

# 7

## All women in the UK can easily access an abortion.

The 1967 Abortion Act does not extend to Northern Ireland. Women living in this part of the UK can only access an abortion at home under extremely limited circumstances. In 2013, more than 800 women travelled from Northern Ireland to England to obtain an abortion, which they had to pay for themselves, while others illegally used medication bought online. But even where the act does apply, women can experience obstructions at the hands of doctors who conscientiously object to abortion, and the fact that - unlike any other procedure - women need the approval of two doctors before they are allowed to end their pregnancy, can inevitably cause delays.

# 6

## It's really only young, childless women who have abortions.

It really isn't. 1 in 3 women will have an abortion, and an unplanned pregnancy can happen to a woman at any stage of her reproductive lifetime. Roughly the same number of women over 35 as women under 20 will undergo an abortion each year, and more than 2/3 (67%) of women who have abortions in England and Wales are married or with a partner. More than half of women having abortions are already mothers. The teenage pregnancy rate is at its lowest since 1969 and the under-18 abortion rate has fallen by more than 1/3 since 2003.

# 5

Women can now find out they are pregnant before they miss a period. There's no need for later abortions.

The vast majority - 93% - of abortions are carried out in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, and just 1% are performed after 20 weeks. Women who have abortions at later gestations are often women in exceptional and extremely challenging circumstances. These may be younger women who have felt unable to divulge that they were pregnant, or women entering the menopause with irregular periods who did not suspect they were pregnant. There are also cases where a wanted pregnancy is ended after a dramatic change in a woman's circumstances such as family breakdown, or when a child is taken seriously ill. Medical conditions and diagnoses of problems with the pregnancy also mean women need access to later abortions.

# 4

## Sex-selective abortion is happening all over the UK.

There have been concerns that female foetuses are being aborted by couples who prefer boys to girls for cultural reasons. In 2014, the Department of Health carried out an in-depth analysis of births across the UK and found no evidence of gender imbalance in any ethnic community.



# 3

**'Repeat' abortion is a real problem in this country. It shows women are using abortion as contraception.**

Around a third of women having abortions have had a previous procedure. This is very similar to the proportion in other countries where women have had access to safe, legal abortions across their lifetimes. Women may be fertile for up to 40 years, and so it is not surprising that during that time they will be exposed to an unplanned pregnancy or a pregnancy they cannot carry to term on more than one occasion. The term 'repeat' suggests these abortions are carbon copies of each other. In fact, the circumstances around each pregnancy are often very different indeed and they may be many years apart. No woman aspires to spend her time in an abortion clinic, and suggestions women are using abortion as contraception have no basis in reality.

# 2

## Abortion for fetal anomaly is discrimination against disabled people.

Abortion for fetal anomaly is no reflection on the value of disabled people in society. Women ending a wanted pregnancy because of a diagnosis of a fetal anomaly are not making a statement about their views on disability, but a very personal decision about their own lives, families and what they believe is right. There is no conflict between finding ways to reduce the incidence of disability (eg through taking folic acid in early pregnancy to prevent Spina Bifida), respecting a woman's choice not to bear a child with a disability, and as a society, ending discrimination against disabled people.

# 1

## Abortion is no longer a criminal offence.

Yes it is. Abortion remains a criminal offence in the UK at any gestation unless a woman's request is approved and authorised by two doctors under the grounds laid out in the 1967 Abortion Act. This means that a woman who uses abortion medication bought online could be put in prison, and a doctor who performs a procedure without the signature of a colleague can also be prosecuted.

Women in the UK have no right, at any stage,  
to end a pregnancy...



...isn't it time they did?



To find out the facts about abortion in the UK today, please get in touch with us.

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