

Bristol Feminist Network (BFN) Position Paper

Reproductive rights

Bristol Feminist Network (BFN) is a pro-choice organisation. It strongly supports a woman's right to control of over own body and reproductive rights. BFN campaigns for better access to abortion services, better access to contraception and more comprehensive sex education around choice, consent and respect for women and men across the globe.

BFN activity around abortion and reproductive rights has included:

- Picketing the anti-choice "Passion4Life" rally in Cardiff that was organised by Ann Widdecombe.
- Letter writing campaign to MPs asking them not to reduce the upper time limit on accessing an abortion (currently 24 weeks).
- A discussion group on Feminism and Abortion.

Since abortion was legalised in Great Britain in 1967 (excluding Northern Ireland where abortion is still illegal), it has been continually under threat. In 2009, Parliament voted against reducing the time limit from 24 weeks to 20 weeks, but only one of the current Tory Front Bench supported this decision¹. With the election of the coalition government in 2010, we have seen repeated threats to our rights to bodily and reproductive autonomy, including:

- A bill passing its first reading for abstinence-only education for girls.
- MPs proposing the time limit is reduced (again).
- MPs proposing that women should agree to counselling sessions from a non-abortion-providing organisation before having an abortion (this also delays the abortion)².
- Anti-choice groups Life and the Silver Ring Thing now sitting on the government's sexual health forum (at the expense of the British Pregnancy Advice Service), even though Life teaches that condoms do not protect people from STDs³.

All of these steps have been taken since May 2010. In Europe, abortion remains illegal in Poland and Ireland, and internationally abortion is illegal in many countries, on every continent, even in cases of rape, incest or where the woman's life is at risk⁴.

By refusing women access to contraception and abortion services, we put women's lives at risk and we deny them control over their reproductive life and their bodies. Every year, millions of women die as a result of 'backstreet abortions'. In the USA, laws are being put forward requesting for abortion to be illegal except in cases of rape and incest, and a recent bill proposed that abortion would only be permitted in cases of "serious rape and incest". Meanwhile, UK anti-choice groups are learning from the tactics used in the USA, picketing sexual health clinics and intimidating the women trying to access advice.

¹ http://skeptical-voter.org/wiki/index.php?title=MPs_who_voted_to_keep_abortion_limit_at_24_weeks

² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/07/dorries-abortion-amendment-defeated>

³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/07/dorries-abortion-amendment-defeateds>

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion_law

This attack on our reproductive rights must end. At BFN, we will continue to campaign for every woman across the globe to make her own decisions about her reproduction – i.e. have bodily autonomy.