



Press release – 11.05.18

Psychological Society of Ireland releases fact-based position on abortion and mental health, and supports repeal of the Eighth Amendment

The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) has today released two papers commenting on the psychology of referendums and the Eighth Amendment and mental health. The Society wishes to draw attention to evidence-based facts on the issue and to counter “false facts” that are not based on scientific research. The PSI supports the repeal of the Eighth Amendment.

In the ‘Referendums: On the Relevance of Psychology’ paper, the PSI examines the role that psychology plays in referendums and how the quality of psychological research is dependent on a number of factors. The Society highlights that psychological health is as important as physical health and how, according to the research overall, terminating a pregnancy does not appear to damage a woman’s mental health.

The second PSI paper, ‘5 Facts on the Eighth Amendment and Mental Health’, has been researched by a number of PSI members specialising in Perinatal and Infant Mental Health. The five facts outlined in this paper are:

1. Women who choose abortion do so because of the negative effects of continuing the pregnancy on their mental health and that of their existing children and significant others;
2. The overwhelming majority of women report feelings of relief after an abortion. Those who maintain feelings of regret over time are affected mostly by societal stigma and the lack of social support;
3. Those who have a history of mental health difficulties are the most likely to experience these same difficulties following an abortion;
4. Robust, high quality scientific research by organisations such as the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (AMRC) has concluded that abortion does not harm women’s mental health;
5. Women are at their most vulnerable during the perinatal period compared to any other point of time in their lives and rates of mortality during this time are highest with regard to mental health difficulties.

The PSI President, Mr Brendan O'Connell, stated: "There have been many arguments made over several decades on the legal, physical and moral aspects of abortion and the Eighth Amendment in Ireland, but analyses and empirical research of the mental health aspects of abortion have been rare. The PSI is committed to ensuring that scientific research on relevant social issues is clearly understood by the public, so that they can make truly informed decisions when deciding how to vote."

Professor Brian Hughes, of the PSI Science and Public Policy Committee, stated: "We are convinced that the scientific research literature shows clearly that women would be best served if the Eighth Amendment was repealed and its prohibition on abortion removed from the Constitution. The highest-quality research has demonstrated little to no negative mental health outcomes in women who have had abortions. In fact, the research shows that prohibition of abortion is itself a risk-factor for adverse mental health. In short, the stigmatization and criminalization of abortion, and the disenfranchisement of women's reproductive choices, are extremely damaging in mental health terms and cannot be justified."

Barbara Western, Chair of the PSI Special Interest Group in Perinatal and Infant Mental Health, added: "The vast body of higher quality research that exists on the topic of abortion and mental health supports person-centred, safe and legal access to medical treatment. Overall, what is of paramount importance is that there is access to information and professional mental health supports for all women who find themselves in the position of an unintended or crisis pregnancy."

President O' Connell concluded: "As psychologists, the PSI is committed to supporting the mental health and well-being of all families throughout the perinatal period, including those who are affected by the Eighth Amendment."

ENDS.

Points to note:

- The 'Referendums: On the Relevance of Psychology' paper and '5 Facts on The Eighth Amendment and Mental Health' paper can be viewed at <https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/footer/PSI-Guidelines-Policies--Papers>;
- The list of '5 Facts on the Eighth Amendment and Mental Health' is taken from the PSI Special Interest Group in Perinatal and Infant Mental Health (SIGPIMH) discussion paper titled *The 8th Amendment and Mental Health* from April 2018, which can be viewed at <https://www.psychologicalsociety.ie/footer/PSI-Guidelines-Policies--Papers>;
- The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), with over 2,700 members, is the learned and professional body for psychology in the Republic of Ireland.

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