

## IFN Conference Notes

### Reproductive Rights: focus on abortion

#### 1. What lessons can be learnt from previous feminist activism?

The group noted that past campaigns had problems with funding in that the 'pro-life' campaign had amounts of money that the pro-choice movement doesn't have. Recently though, it was recognised that steps were being made to place abortion into the mainstream, that it was an issue which didn't just affect the margins of society but also average couples. This was something that was felt the pro-choice movement could make more of. Another past form of campaigning that was liked was methods which were used to reach out to individuals in a quiet way, such as writing on the back of toilet doors in universities and so on. This softly-softly approach, it was suggested, would stop the campaign appearing extreme. It was considered that a good way to do this would be to appeal to a wider base by employing a plethora of previously used campaign methods, and not to focus upon one aspect or campaign method because that will inevitably miss out an important group in society.

#### 2. How do these impact the current situation?

The abortion issues was considered to be particularly relevant to current times for a few reasons. Firstly, in regards to the economic climate, it was said that it was not reasonable for the government to essential force women to have children without their choosing, but simultaneously cut the benefits which they need to support the lives of those children. Secondly, that currently an expert group is writing a report due to be submitted to the government means that this is an issue which shall be re-emerging. It was felt that it is important for the pro-choice movement to get behind that paper, should it come out in favour of legalising abortion, even if it doesn't go as far as some would like. It was thought that some progress is better than none, and when abortion becomes more acceptable then it might be easier to push for further changes. Thirdly, that a significant number of Irish women have experienced abortion in some form was considered to be highly important. It was considered important to demonstrate to the public that although abortion doesn't exist within Ireland it exists for Irish people, and always has done in some form or other – just because abortion is illegal, doesn't mean it doesn't happen! Lastly, the ruling from the ECJ was considered relevant in terms of making legal headway into recognising the need for the provisioning of abortion facilities in Ireland when legally it is possible to have an abortion under life-threatening circumstances.

#### 3. What practical measures can we adopt/pursue for the future? (name at least 2)

It was felt that more could be done to involve the medical community, either directly or through them providing more consistent information upon abortions and post-abortion care. It might be possible to involve the Irish Medical Council in this. Further to the role of the medical community, it was suggested that the religious influences found in hospitals should be challenged, with a more secular provisioning of information potentially being more factual

and less leading. Depending upon the report given by the expert group, they may also be a helpful campaign support mechanism. More support could be given to prominent pro-choice politicians and public figures such as Ivana Batchik. Greater coordination between pro-life/feminist groups could be managed to help develop a wider and more holistic campaign. It was also considered vital that more information and education was needed around the practical elements of abortion, how it works, what it costs and so on. This was thought to be particularly important in order to challenge the misleading information publicised by the pro-life movement.

#### 4. Additional comments.

There were a couple of points about conceptions which need to be challenged, which although not practical things are still relevant and interesting nonetheless.

It was mentioned that is important for the label 'pro-life' to be challenged: WHOSE life is being supported? Additionally, pro-life immediately congers up the opposite idea being 'pro-death'. This is, obviously, not pertinent to reality and so needs to be undermined in some way.

Generally, and not surprisingly, it was felt that the pro-life campaign was often misleading with its information and visuals. Everyone agreed that pro-choice campaigns should offer up more accurate medical information about abortion methods, consequences and to challenge the accuracy of the visual aids. It was also pointed out by one member that it is possible to make guardai complaints about the content of anti-abortion visuals.

It was also highlighted that it is important that society and individuals respect the intelligence women more, instead of levying the expectation that abortion would be used as an extra form of contraceptive, and recognise if for the significant procedure that it is.