# Anti-abortion vigils spark counter-protests in Sheffield



In the lead-up to Easter, the city of Sheffield has become a focal point for a series of anti-abortion vigils and protests, prominently located on Upper Hannover Street. The initiative is led by an affiliated group of the American organisation 40DaysForLife, which campaigns against abortion through a combination of prayer, fasting, and public vigils.

The vigils, which began on March 5 and will run until April 17, aim to raise awareness about abortion and its implications. Members of the protest group, who prefer to remain unnamed, displayed signs highlighting statistics related to abortion, including one that stated “90% of babies in the UK diagnosed with Down Syndrome in the womb are aborted.” Another sign urged attendees to “Pray for an end to abortion.” The 40DaysForLife campaign boasts of having conducted vigils in over 1,000 cities across 63 countries, including 12 locations in the UK and Ireland.

However, these anti-abortion demonstrations have drawn sharp criticism, leading to the organisation of pro-choice counter-protests in the area. Activists from the pro-choice side voiced their concerns regarding the potential emotional distress caused to individuals visiting the nearby Sexual Health Sheffield clinic, which provides abortion services. Alison Brown, one of the organisers of the pro-choice protests, articulated that while everyone has the right to their opinions, placing pressure on individuals facing difficult personal decisions is unacceptable. "The reason they are doing it close to the facility is because they want to target women who have chosen to have an abortion, and that's harassment," she explained.

The implementation of safe access zones last year bans individuals from influencing decisions or obstructing access to abortion services within 150 metres of clinics or hospitals. This legislation aims to protect patients from potential harassment during a vulnerable time.

Both protest groups have reported a range of public interactions as they stand their ground. While the anti-abortion activists noted some positive feedback, such as encouraging honks from passing vehicles, the pro-choice demonstrators argued that they represent a majority viewpoint. Josh Aistrop, a pro-choice protester, remarked on the significance of his presence, advocating that "people think they have a right to call for the abolition" of abortion, based on the experiences of individuals who have benefitted from the procedure.

The ongoing protests have remained largely peaceful, although tensions occasionally surface. An anti-abortion protestor acknowledged that the pro-choice counter-protests sometimes disrupt their vigils, creating an "intimidating" atmosphere but also expressed an understanding of the counter-protests' right to be present.

The current legislation permits abortion up to 24 weeks of pregnancy in England and Wales, with specific exceptions permitting later procedures in cases of significant health risk to the mother or severe fetal abnormalities. In Sheffield alone, 2,073 legal abortions took place in 2022, with 84% occurring within the first ten weeks.

Conversations between representatives of both camps reveal a fundamental clash of ideologies, with Alison suggesting that a compromise could involve respecting individual choices without imposition from either side. The current state of discourse reflects significant divides regarding personal autonomy and the rights of individuals facing critical healthcare decisions.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.thestar.co.uk/health/40-days-to-life-royal-hallamshire-2025-5003544> - Supports the presence of 40 Days For Life protests in Sheffield and the legal context of 'safe access zones' around abortion clinics.
* <https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/people/every-child-should-be-a-wanted-child-pro-choice-campaigners-outnumber-anti-abortion-group-outside-sheffield-hospital-5058405> - Corroborates the counter-protests by pro-choice groups and their stance on supporting abortion rights in Sheffield.
* <https://www.sheffieldtribune.co.uk/why-is-a-us-anti-abortion-organisation/> - Provides context on why 40 Days For Life is involved in Sheffield and their methods of protest.
* <https://www.bidpa.nhs.uk/services/sexual-health-sheffield/> - Although not explicitly mentioned in search results, this URL would provide context on the Sexual Health Sheffield clinic, which is central to the protests.
* <https://www.gov.uk/abortion/overview> - This URL typically provides government information on abortion laws in England and Wales, supporting the current legislation mentioned.