# Nicola Packer’s ordeal exposes urgent need to modernise UK abortion laws



### The Ordeal of Nicola Packer: A Call for Reform in UK Abortion Laws

In November 2020, while the UK was grappling with the chaos of lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic, Nicola Packer faced a shocking revelation: a positive pregnancy test. At 41 years old and amid personal uncertainty, she'd thought she was perimenopausal. Despite her initial disbelief, Packer knew without hesitation that she wanted to terminate the pregnancy. Thanks to emergency legislation introduced during the pandemic, she was able to obtain abortion pills through a telemedicine consultation, a significant shift in access to reproductive healthcare.

However, what unfolded after taking the pills was harrowing. Packer delivered a fully formed baby hours later, an event that would soon be eclipsed by the ordeal that followed. Seeking medical care at Charing Cross Hospital for significant bleeding, she was redirected to Chelsea and Westminster Hospital by unhelpful staff who did not provide an ambulance. Feeling compelled to keep her medical history private, she refrained from disclosing that she had taken the abortion medication.

When she eventually revealed this information to a midwife, the consequences were devastating. The police were summoned, and Packer found herself arrested in hospital, her electronic devices confiscated as her legal journey began. This incident marked the start of a grueling four-and-a-half-year legal battle, culminating in a trial that would expose the most intimate details of her life in open court.

Throughout her trial, Packer maintained a mixture of composure and emotional turmoil. Her defence barrister, Fiona Horlick KC, highlighted that while the ordeal in itself was tragic, it should not have been criminal in nature. “The facts of this case are a tragedy but they are not a crime,” Horlick asserted during the proceedings. As Packer relived a deeply traumatic chapter of her life, the emotional impact was palpable; her friends rallied around her in court, providing critical support through moments of intense questioning.

The trial's conclusion did not signal an end to the public scrutiny over Packer's life. Her medical history, including past terminations and intimate relationships, was laid bare, prompting a wave of outrage regarding the approach taken by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Criticism echoed among medical leaders and advocacy groups, who pointed out that prosecutions under the existing laws not only invade personal privacy but also exacerbate existing trauma, arguing that the legislative framework is antiquated and harmful.

Amidst the backdrop of Packer's experience, calls for reform of abortion laws have surged. The rise in prosecutions surrounding abortion—prompted largely by regulations rooted in 19th-century legislation—highlights the urgent need for modernisation. Medical leaders have decried the trauma inflicted by such prosecutions, characterising them as cruel and unnecessary, and advocating for a shift in perspective that sees abortion as a healthcare issue rather than a criminal act.

Tonia Antoniazzi, a Labour MP who observed Packer's trial, encapsulated the sentiments surrounding this case, stating, "Nicola’s experience... includes being taken from her hospital bed to a police cell, denied timely access to essential medical care, and spending every penny she had on lawyers defending her case." These events depict a broader national scandal regarding how vulnerable women and their rights are perceived under current legislation.

Further compounding the urgency of this reform is the backdrop of rising prosecutions against women seeking abortions. Recent statistics indicate an unprecedented increase in such cases, prompting organisations like the British Medical Association to call for immediate legislative revisions that safeguard reproductive rights. The complexity of these issues underscores the need for a societal reassessment of abortion laws, particularly as the implications of current practices continue to unfold.

As Packer emerges from this harrowing experience, the questions surrounding her case resonate beyond her personal ordeal. They span legislatives boundaries, touching on core issues of women’s rights and healthcare access. Abortion laws written at a time when women were not even afforded the right to vote are increasingly seen as inadequate, leading to discussions about broader ethical considerations and the healthcare system’s treatment of women.

As the nation awaits potential changes to its legal framework regarding abortion, Packer’s case stands as a poignant reminder of the significant human cost associated with outdated laws. The hope is that her experience may catalyse a shift toward a legal landscape that respects women’s choices and prioritises their health.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/08/anger-ordeal-woman-accused-abortion-nicola-packer), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/08/anger-ordeal-woman-accused-abortion-nicola-packer)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/08/anger-ordeal-woman-accused-abortion-nicola-packer), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/08/anger-ordeal-woman-accused-abortion-nicola-packer)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/08/anger-ordeal-woman-accused-abortion-nicola-packer), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/08/anger-ordeal-woman-accused-abortion-nicola-packer)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/08/anger-ordeal-woman-accused-abortion-nicola-packer), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/10/the-women-being-prosecuted-in-great-britain-for-abortions-her-confidentiality-was-completely-destroyed)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/12/unprecedented-rise-in-abortion-prosecutions-prompts-call-for-law-change-from-medical-leaders), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/10/the-women-being-prosecuted-in-great-britain-for-abortions-her-confidentiality-was-completely-destroyed)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/12/unprecedented-rise-in-abortion-prosecutions-prompts-call-for-law-change-from-medical-leaders), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/15/england-and-wales-abortion-law-has-been-settled-tory-mp-tells-commons)
* Paragraph 7 – [[6]](https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/262845/uk-pro-life-campaigners-press-ahead-with-vigils-as-court-verdict-looms), [[7]](https://www.safeabortionwomensright.org/news/england-a-young-couple-who-bought-abortion-pills-online-given-community-orders/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/08/anger-ordeal-woman-accused-abortion-nicola-packer), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/12/unprecedented-rise-in-abortion-prosecutions-prompts-call-for-law-change-from-medical-leaders)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/08/anger-ordeal-woman-accused-abortion-nicola-packer> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/may/08/anger-ordeal-woman-accused-abortion-nicola-packer> - This article details the case of Nicola Packer, a 41-year-old woman who, during the COVID-19 lockdown in November 2020, took a pregnancy test that confirmed her pregnancy. Despite initial shock, she sought an abortion and used the telemedicine service introduced during the pandemic, which allowed abortion pills to be sent by post after a remote consultation. After taking the pills, she unexpectedly delivered a fully formed baby. Following this, she sought medical attention at Charing Cross Hospital, where staff directed her to Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. Upon revealing she had taken abortion medication, police were called, leading to her arrest and a prolonged legal ordeal lasting over four years. The case has sparked discussions on the decriminalization of abortion in the UK, with calls for legislative reform to prevent such prosecutions in the future.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/12/unprecedented-rise-in-abortion-prosecutions-prompts-call-for-law-change-from-medical-leaders> - Medical leaders in the UK have called for reform of abortion laws following an unprecedented rise in prosecutions of women and girls for ending their own pregnancies. Over 30 groups, including the British Medical Association and various royal colleges, issued a joint statement warning that current legislation is causing 'trauma and cruelty' and demanding immediate action to safeguard reproductive rights. The intervention comes after several cases where women were prosecuted under the Offences against the Person Act, a Victorian-era law that remains in place today. The groups are calling for a halt to prosecutions and for abortion to be treated as a healthcare issue rather than a criminal one.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/10/the-women-being-prosecuted-in-great-britain-for-abortions-her-confidentiality-was-completely-destroyed> - This article examines the increasing number of women in Great Britain being prosecuted for abortions, highlighting the impact on their confidentiality and mental health. It discusses cases where women have been investigated and prosecuted for ending their pregnancies, often leading to the seizure of personal electronic devices and the exposure of private medical information. The article emphasizes the profound effects these legal actions have on women's lives and calls for a reevaluation of abortion laws to prevent such invasions of privacy and to protect women's rights.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/15/england-and-wales-abortion-law-has-been-settled-tory-mp-tells-commons> - A UK justice minister has stated that abortion law in England and Wales has been settled by parliament and that the government does not intend to change it. This statement came after a woman was jailed for taking abortion pills after the legal limit. The minister's comments were made in response to calls from opposition MPs for an overhaul of the 162-year-old legislation underpinning abortion regulations in the UK, following the sentencing of a woman who was 32 to 34 weeks pregnant when she took an abortion pill.
6. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/262845/uk-pro-life-campaigners-press-ahead-with-vigils-as-court-verdict-looms> - Pro-life campaigners in the UK are continuing to hold vigils outside abortion clinics despite government attempts to stop their activities. The 40 Days for Life campaign is conducting vigils in multiple cities across the UK, adhering to the minimum 150-meter 'buffer zone' that now surrounds all UK abortion centers. The article discusses the ongoing efforts of these campaigners to offer support to women facing crisis pregnancies and to advocate for the unborn, amidst legal challenges and public debates over abortion laws in the UK.
7. <https://www.safeabortionwomensright.org/news/england-a-young-couple-who-bought-abortion-pills-online-given-community-orders/> - A young couple in England who purchased abortion pills online were given community orders after being charged with procuring a miscarriage by poison and perverting the course of justice. The case highlights the legal risks associated with obtaining abortion pills without medical supervision and the potential consequences for women seeking to terminate their pregnancies outside the formal healthcare system. The article discusses the legal proceedings, the charges brought against the couple, and the broader implications for abortion access and women's rights in the UK.