# Woman’s year-long police ordeal highlights urgent need to reform UK’s outdated abortion laws



Amidst a growing call for reform, the harrowing case of a woman named Sammy starkly illustrates the dire consequences of the UK’s archaic abortion laws. Following a traumatic premature birth at home, Sammy found herself caught in a year-long police investigation, accused of attempting an illegal abortion—a procedure she had not even gone through with. This shocking ordeal underscores the distress faced by women trapped under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act, a law that not only criminalises abortion but has also seen a concerning spike in prosecutions recently.

Sammy's nightmare began as she performed CPR on her newborn son, born more than three months early, only to be met by a swarm of police officers. “My front room was full of police officers—there must have been about eight,” she recounted. This overwhelming presence during a critical moment exacerbated her trauma and ignited a criminal investigation that spanned an agonising 51 weeks. Instead of receiving the care and support women in such tragic situations desperately need, they often face scrutiny and public humiliation—an unacceptable reality.

The sobering statistics back this crisis. In just two years, six women have faced court charges for ostensibly trying to end their pregnancies illegally, a sharp rise from the mere three convictions since the law’s inception in 1861. Voices demanding reform are uniting, with some Labour MPs advocating for amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill to decriminalise abortion in England and Wales, aligning with progressive practices in Scotland and Northern Ireland. As one MP noted, “The harm inflicted upon these women is lifelong and profound. This cannot continue.”

Healthcare experts are echoing this sentiment, clearly stating that these laws stifle women’s access to vital medical care. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists fears that the legal framework not only chills willingness but actively deters women from seeking necessary medical assistance. Dr. Ranee Thakar, the college’s president, warned that women could avoid seeking help out of fear, turning what should be a safe procedure into a hazardous gamble. In a telling move, the RCOG has urged professionals not to report women suspected of illegal abortions to the police.

While the pandemic briefly relaxed these pressures by permitting eligible women to access medical abortions at home in the first ten weeks of pregnancy, the underlying criminal framework remains firmly in place. Nurse Nicola Packer, acquitted after enduring her own harrowing investigation, labelled the process as deeply traumatic, stating, “Although it’s a relief that I was finally believed and it’s all over, it’s going to be very hard to ever trust the NHS and police again.”

Despite the momentum for law reform, opposition is rife. Polls reveal that over half of UK adults remain against decriminalising abortion, demonstrating the contentious and divisive nature of this issue. Critics argue that any changes could lead to unforeseen consequences, and the government insists that all women do have access to safe, legal abortions via the NHS—pointing to the rarity of prosecutions as justification for the status quo.

Yet, for women like Sammy, the trauma and fear remain painfully real as they navigate a system that celebrates the right to choose while simultaneously criminalising essential personal decisions in complex situations. “No other woman should have to go through that," Sammy asserts, shining a light on the urgent need for legislative change. The grim reality is that without decriminalisation, these women's experiences will continue to be marked by fear rather than compassion, making the necessity for reform in UK abortion laws increasingly undeniable.

As Parliament prepares for a critical debate on this issue, the clarion call for policy change becomes more urgent than ever—one that prioritises women’s health and autonomy over outdated criminalisation, ensuring that no woman is subjected to the indignity of being treated as a criminal for simply navigating the complexities of pregnancy.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/abortion-decriminalise-bpas-law-uk-b2750861.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/abortion-decriminalise-bpas-law-uk-b2750861.html> - This article discusses the case of a woman named Sammy, who, after giving birth prematurely at home, found herself under a year-long police investigation for allegedly attempting an illegal abortion. The piece highlights the outdated 1861 Offences Against the Person Act, which criminalizes abortion in England and Wales, and the recent surge in prosecutions under this law. It also covers the British Pregnancy Advisory Service's (BPAS) call for decriminalizing abortion and the broader debate on abortion laws in the UK.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/23/senior-labour-figures-seeking-water-down-plans-decriminalise-abortion> - This article reports on concerns among senior Labour figures regarding proposals to decriminalize abortion in England and Wales. Some MPs fear that the proposed changes could lead to unintended consequences, such as the rollback of telemedicine services and potential backlash from anti-abortion groups. The piece also discusses the broader debate on abortion laws in the UK and the challenges in balancing reproductive rights with public opinion.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/12/unprecedented-rise-in-abortion-prosecutions-prompts-call-for-law-change-from-medical-leaders> - This article highlights the unprecedented rise in prosecutions of women for ending their own pregnancies in the UK, prompting calls from medical leaders for urgent reform of abortion laws. Over the past two years, six women have appeared in court under the Offences Against the Person Act, compared to only three reported convictions since the law's introduction in 1861. The piece emphasizes the need to decriminalize abortion and treat it as a healthcare matter rather than a criminal one.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/abortion-clinic-protection-zones-begin-england-wales-2024-10-31/> - This article reports on the implementation of protection zones around abortion clinics and hospitals in England and Wales, criminalizing actions that seek to influence or obstruct individuals accessing these services. The 'safe access zones' extend to a 150-meter radius and aim to protect women from harassment and distress. Prohibited actions include distributing anti-abortion materials, protesting, shouting, and even silent prayer or vigils. Infractions can result in fines following individual police and prosecutor assessments.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/08/mps-propose-decriminalising-abortion-up-to-24-weeks-england-wales-stella-creasy> - This article discusses a proposal by MPs to decriminalize abortion up to 24 weeks in England and Wales. The amendment seeks to protect women and medical staff from prosecution and modernize the law by decriminalizing abortion up to 24 weeks. The proposal is backed by MPs from various parties and aims to enshrine abortion as a human right, preventing future attacks on access and those who assist women in ensuring abortion can be safe, legal, and local.
7. <https://www.christian.org.uk/news/poll-over-half-of-adults-oppose-decriminalisation-of-abortion/> - This article reports on a poll revealing that over half of UK adults oppose the decriminalization of abortion. The survey found that 55% of respondents believe terminating a pregnancy after the 24-week limit, when the baby is healthy, should remain illegal. Only 16% supported changing the law, while 29% were undecided or chose not to express their opinion. The piece also discusses the implications of these findings for ongoing debates in Parliament regarding abortion legislation.