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**Justine McCarthy Repeal the half-truths before going to vote**

*It is vital to get clear-headed facts on the eighth amendment before May 25*



A little learning is a dangerous thing; / drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring: / there shallow draughts intoxicate the brain, / and drinking largely sobers us again.”

So said Alexander Pope in An Essay on Criticism. Had he not written it more than 300 years ago, he might have been talking about the abortion referendum campaign. With catchy slogans masquerading as incontrovertible facts, and ideologues blithely dismissing the experience of professional experts, voters are being drip-fed a lot of “little learning”.

It is not for the first time either. In 2013, anti-abortion advocates warned that the Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act would motivate women to claim dishonestly to be suicidal in order to qualify for abortions, thus opening the proverbial floodgates. That deluge has turned out to be barely a dribble. In 2014, only three terminations due to suicide were performed. The number remained unchanged for 2015. In 2016, it dropped to one.

In our age of instant communications, 24-hour news and argumentative social media where ignorance screams loudest, it is virtually impossible for citizens to safeguard themselves against the trespass of a little learning. That makes it imperative that we, individually, seek out the sobering facts before casting our votes on May 25. Here are eight half-truths, fallacies and myths that have to be debunked.

Ms McCarthy's Assertions	Tony's Responses
<p><b>1) The eighth amendment has saved between 100,000 and 250,000 lives.</b></p> <p>Not women's lives (see below), because when anti-abortion campaigners make this assertion, they are implicitly talking about babies. Apart from the unreliability of Irish abortion statistics collated in other jurisdictions, upon which this assertion is calculated, it is nonsensical to presume that, had the abortion ban not been inserted in the constitution in 1983, Ireland would have legislated for liberal access. Politicians did not summon the courage to legislate for even highly conservative provision until 2013.</p> <p>Yet the hard reality is that more than 170,000 pregnancies have ended in abortions since 1983.</p>	<p>The figure of 100,000 abortions avoided – and hence babies not killed – is derived from an actuarial report, <i>“The 8th Amendment: Ireland's Life-Saving Provision – Publication of Actuarial Report”</i>, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2016, commissioned by the Iona Institute.</p> <p><a href="http://prolifecampaign.ie/main/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ProLifeCampaign_Actuarial_Report_and_Commentary_7September2016.pdf">http://prolifecampaign.ie/main/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ProLifeCampaign_Actuarial_Report_and_Commentary_7September2016.pdf</a></p> <p>The figure is based upon abortion-to-pregnancy percentages in other Western countries where they are 2½ times higher than Ireland's (5.1%).</p> <p>It assumes that without the 8<sup>th</sup> the abortion regime in Ireland would become as liberal as other countries. This is justifiable on the basis that wherever there is abortion it has originally been</p>

	<p>introduced with highly restrictive conditions (including in Britain).</p> <p>But these have steadily been eroded over the years until abortion has become highly unrestricted, as in Britain.</p> <p>These are reasonable assumptions, whether one agrees with them or not.</p>
<p><b>2) Any pre-natal life is an “unborn child” or, in the words of the businessman and anti-repeal campaigner Declan Ganley, “pre-born girls and boys”.</b></p> <p>In medical terms, it is called an embryo from conception until the eighth week of pregnancy. Then it is a foetus. Many of the most prominent anti-repeal campaigners are informed by their Catholic religion, but nowhere in the code of canon law is the term “the unborn” used. Canon law calls prenatal life the “foetus”.</p> <p>Using expressions such as “pre-born girls and boys” is part of the so-called “pro-life” movement’s lexicon designed to influence the debate subliminally.</p>	<p>Expressions such as “<i>pre-born girls and boys</i>” or “<i>unborn babies</i>” are technically correct, even if the doctors often use different terms. They are intended to emphasise the scientifically indisputable human nature of the infant in the womb, a matter which many people would gainsay.</p> <p>Indeed, it is the pro-choice movement’s lexicon of “<i>clump of cells</i>”, “<i>embryo</i>”, “<i>foetus</i>” that is designed to subliminally disguise the humanity of the child.</p> <p>Through history, people have tried to dehumanise their victims because it makes it less troubling to abuse and kill them. Thus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jews were/are “<i>apes</i>” and “<i>pigs</i>”</li> <li>• Underage white girls in Rotherham are “<i>meat</i>”</li> <li>• Black slaves were “<i>sub-human</i>”</li> </ul>
<p><b>3) A baby’s heart starts beating at 22 days.</b></p> <p>Rhona Mahony, the master of the National Maternity Hospital, explained to the special Oireachtas committee on the eighth amendment: “The heart begins to develop as a tube very early on in pregnancy, but then it must develop ... chambers. Although much of the development is complete by 12 weeks [84 days], it still has to grow and develop normally.”</p> <p>Medical experts agreed when asked if it would be more accurate to describe the heart, at 22 days’ gestation, as “a pulsating tube”.</p>	<p>Is Ms McCarthy actually claiming that by describing a “<i>beating heart</i>” as a “<i>pulsating tube</i>”, she can somehow detract from the central point – that the unborn baby at 12 weeks is a human being with, yes, a beating heart, whatever one might want to call it?</p>

<p><b>4) No woman has died because of the eighth amendment.</b></p> <p>If you are willing to set women's deaths as the baseline for deciding how to vote, you cannot ignore Savita Halappanavar, who died at the age of 31 in University Hospital Galway. The refusal to terminate her pregnancy when she suffered a miscarriage at 17 weeks' gestation was "a contributory factor" in her death, according to the state's official report.</p> <p>Its author Sabaratnam Arulkumaran, a former president of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, gave evidence to the committee. Told there were people who still denied the eighth amendment was a factor, he restated that the law had affected medical considerations in her case.</p>	<p>There were three official reports.</p> <p>They all attribute poor Savita's tragic death to the failure of Galway University Hospital first to diagnose and then to treat her sepsis.</p> <p>It was not caused by lack of abortion.</p> <p>If Sabaratnam Arulkumaran thinks the 8<sup>th</sup> prevented treatment to save Savita he is simply mistaken. Countless eminent doctors have repeatedly asserted that nothing in the 8<sup>th</sup> prevents treatment to save the mother's life – even if a known side-effect is the sad loss of her baby.</p>
<p><b>5) The eighth amendment does not stop pregnant women who are sick getting all necessary treatment.</b></p> <p>Various case histories show this to be untrue. One of the most graphic was that of the late Michelle Harte, who had to travel to Britain for an abortion while she was terminally ill with cancer. As her cancer treatment had stopped, her condition had deteriorated rapidly by the time she had the termination. Her consultant obstetrician Louise Kenny said Michelle had "no other option". She later received compensation from the Irish state.</p>	<p>Ms Harte sought an abortion, not so that she could be treated for cancer by the hospital, but so that she could have access to a trial of a new cancer drug, which the drug company would allow only to women who weren't pregnant. This was a drug company rule not a hospital rule.</p> <p>Her pregnancy did not preclude her from receiving any of the existing medical treatments for cancer at the hospital.</p> <p><a href="https://donate.save8.ie/the_case_of_michelle_harte">https://donate.save8.ie/the_case_of_michelle_harte</a></p>
<p><b>6) The case of NP, a pregnant 26-year-old mother kept on life support after death, is not linked to the eighth amendment.</b></p> <p>This is a vile distortion. A woman who was between 13 and 15 weeks pregnant when she suffered a fatal brain injury in 2014 was kept breathing by machines, until the High Court ordered they be turned off. The unborn had separate legal representation in court. The HSE argued that the eighth amendment obliged it to keep the foetus alive. "The question then becomes one of how far the court should go in terms of trying to vindicate [its] right," said Nicholas Kearns, then the president of the High Court, in his written judgment.</p>	<p>The point here is that the law allowed the machine to be turned off despite the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment.</p> <p><a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/26/ireland-court-rules-brain-dead-pregnant-womans-life-support-switched-off">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/26/ireland-court-rules-brain-dead-pregnant-womans-life-support-switched-off</a></p> <p>So the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment did NOT require that that the unborn baby be kept alive through machines.</p> <p>Sadly it took the period of the court case to arrive at this conclusion. Nevertheless, the medical guidelines will have been updated to prevent a recurrence.</p>

### 7) Abortion makes women suicidal.

At the Oireachtas committee, the independent TD Mattie McGrath asked Fergal Malone, the master of the Rotunda Hospital, whether he was familiar with a 2015 study by Duke University that purported to show women who underwent an abortion after a diagnosis of anencephaly were “significantly more likely to suffer from depression and even despair” than those who continued with the pregnancy.

Malone said he was “very familiar” with the study. “I would not accept that paper as being a good example to learn from,” he said. “When one looks at the methodology, one can see that many of the patients who were recruited came from social-media campaigns or were tracked down or recruited through social media. If one recruits patients who might have a certain viewpoint already ... it is not at all surprising if the results are in a particular direction. “

Abortion is statistically bound to make some women suicidal.

The issue is moot whether this is a significant proportion, or a higher proportion than those who are denied an abortion.

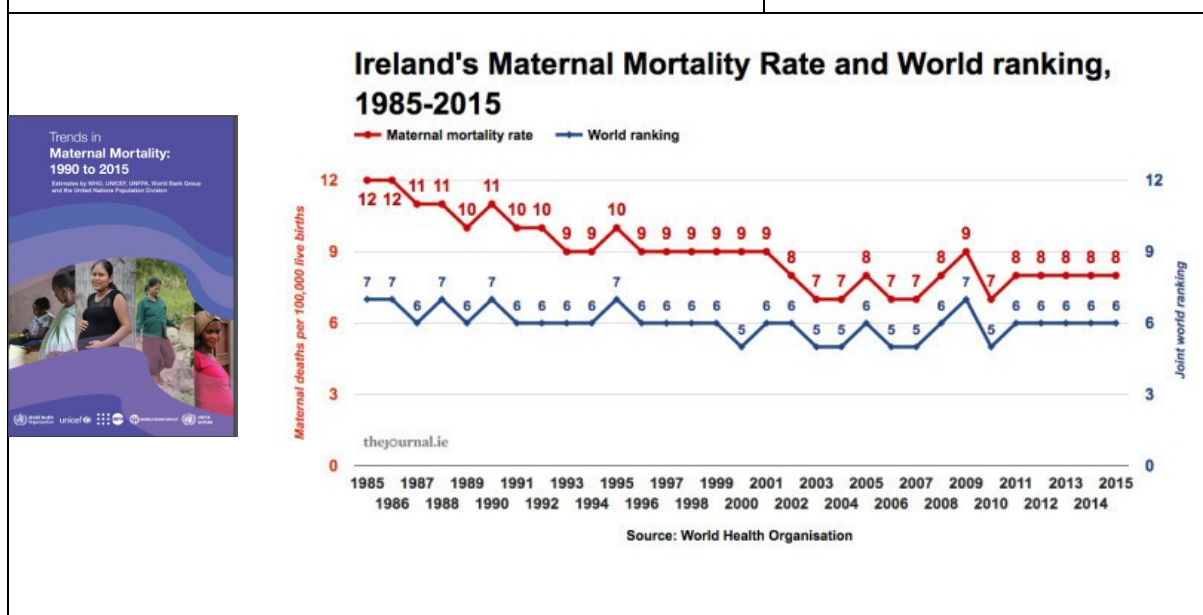
Of more relevance would be the comparative rates of actual suicide, but such data does not appear to be available.

### 8) Ireland is one of the safest places on earth to be pregnant.

See Savita Halappanavar, Michelle Harte, Ms X, Ms C, Ms D, A, B and C, Ms Y, et al. That is only to mention some of the cases we know about.

Out of tens of thousands of births, to cite some individual cases is not an argument.

What is an argument is to cite, for example, the WHO. When the WHO’s maternal mortality statistics are used, it is clear that Ireland has long ranked around 6<sup>th</sup> best in the world – see chart below.



A little knowledge really is a dangerous thing. It could cost somebody her life.

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