

News story: Review into harassment and intimidation near abortion clinics

Some women have been subjected to harassment and intimidating behaviour from protesters when visiting family planning clinics to seek information, advice and services from medical professionals.

The review will gather evidence from police forces, healthcare providers and local authorities to understand the scale and nature of these protests, before considering what further action the government can take to protect those using or working in abortion clinics. This could include bolstering existing or creating new police and civil powers.

Home Secretary Amber Rudd said:

While everyone has a right to peaceful protest, it is completely unacceptable that anyone should feel harassed or intimidated simply for exercising their legal right to healthcare advice and treatment. The decision to have an abortion is already an incredibly personal one, without women being further pressured by aggressive protesters.

Let me be clear, this review is about ensuring the police, healthcare providers and local authorities have the right powers to protect women making these tough decisions. But this isn't to kick the issue into the long grass. The review will collect the detailed evidence and firm recommendations that allow us to take the right action to tackle this problem.

The law already provides protection against harassment and intimidation, and the police have a range of powers to manage protests. Like all members of the public, protesters are subject to the law and all suspected criminal offences will be robustly investigated and dealt with by the police.

But the review will see what more needs to be done and the Policing Minister Nick Hurd has written to the National Policing Lead for Protest, Deputy Chief Constable Rachel Swann to begin this work.

The review, to be conducted by Home Office officials, will also consider international comparisons, as similar protests have taken place in Australia, France and the United States.