

Lowest number of under 18's on record are having abortions, despite overall numbers in England and Wales reaching an all-time high, according to data

by Grace Dembowicz

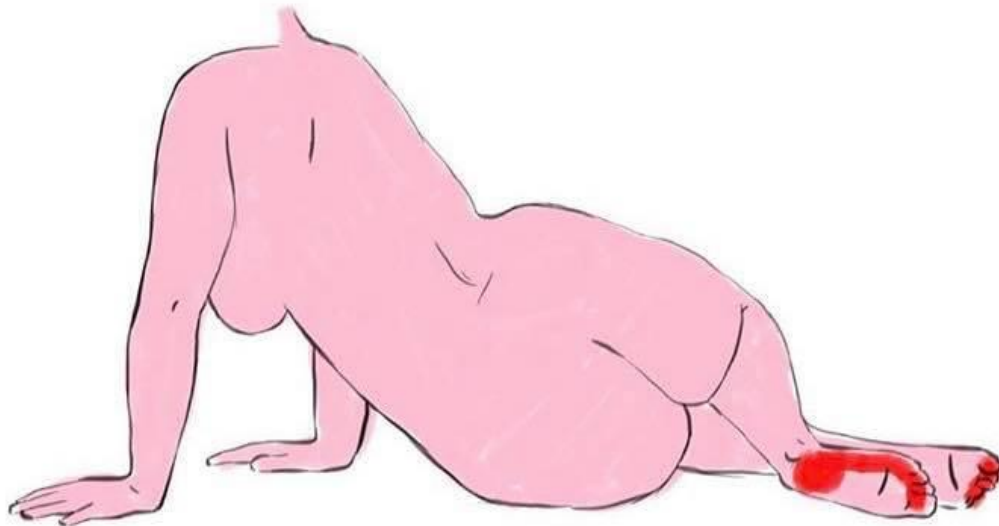


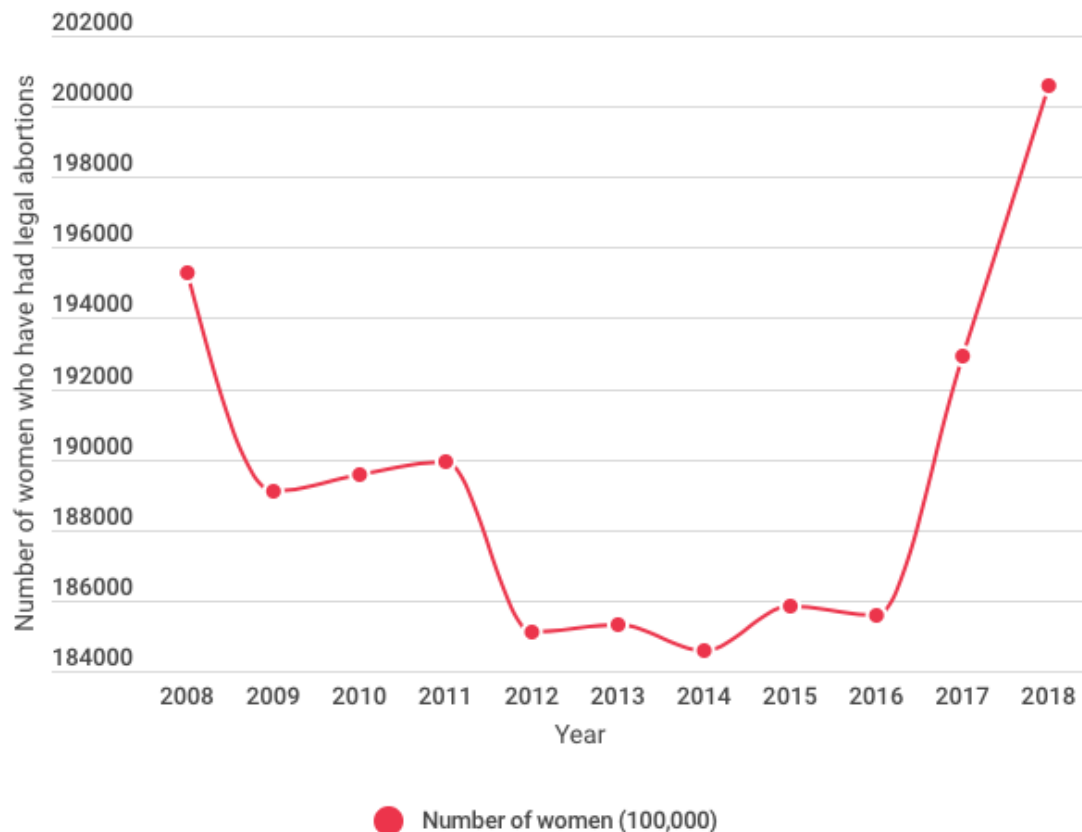
Image by Poppy Crew via <https://www.instagram.com/poppycrew/>

On 22nd October 2019 Northern Ireland took control of their narrative by decriminalizing abortion. However, across the pond 3,500 miles away history was being made for different reasons. Five months previously, in the United States of America, in the state of Alabama, a bill was signed, on 15th May 2019 to set a near total abortion ban.

With media discussing, debating and dissecting abortion, how do the women of England and Wales fit into the conversation?

Data from Gov.uk shows abortion levels in England and Wales are at an all-time high with numbers reaching over 200,000 in 2018. However, between 2008 and 2018 there has been a 60% decrease in the number of under 18's having an abortion, the lowest numbers currently on record.

Total number of legal abortions in England and Wales between 2008 and 2018



Source: Gov.uk

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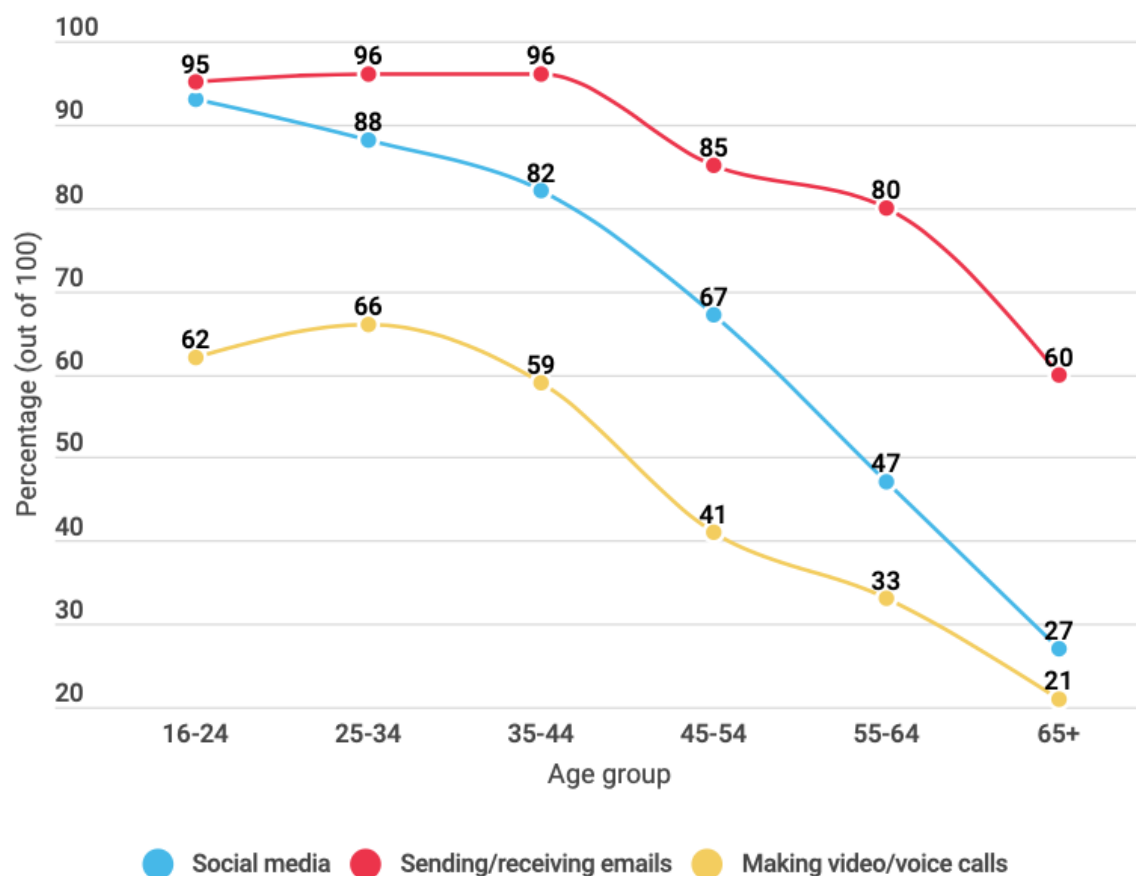
Katherine O'Brien, associate director of Communications and Campaigns at the *British Pregnancy Advisory Service* (BPAS), discussed this declining number: "we believe that this is in no doubt reflective of improved access to contraception and better information to sex and relationships in schools".

O'Brien suggests the trend is linked to shifts in teenage lifestyles with young people "consuming less alcohol at high levels which can be linked to unprotected sex. Young people also increasingly socialise with friends and partners online rather than in person, limiting opportunities for sexual behaviours that can lead to pregnancy".

Recent [research](#) published in *BMC Public Health* highlights an increase in the number of 16-24 year olds who class themselves as 'non-drinkers' and more than [two thirds](#) of teenagers would rather communicate with their friends online than in person according to a study by *The Wall Street Journal* in 2018.

Data from the Office for National Statistics supports this. In 2018 16-24 year olds used the internet, the most compared to any age group for social activity, with 95% using social media.

Social internet activity divided by age groups in 2018



Source: Office for National Statistics

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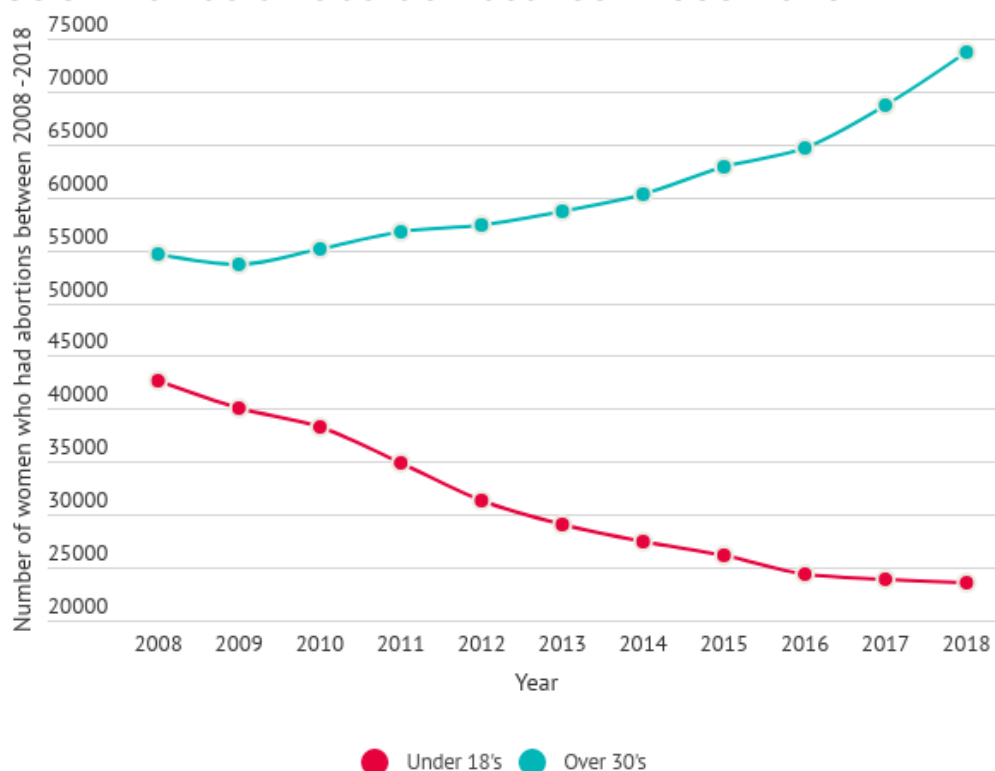
Responding to the trend of unwanted teenage pregnancies decreasing Kerry Abel, Chair of the *Abortion Rights* campaign, expressed her concern of under-funding and “fragmentation

of services that has been made to health, education and social care across the board” with concerns that this will “reverse the good work done in the future”.

There is no doubt that fertility misconceptions swamp mainstream media. Headlines consume the psyche of women, making them feel like they are running out of time. That their body clock is ticking away with each second jeopardising pressures to find a mate to create a family with them.

Figures from Gov.uk highlight how the number of over 30 year old’s having pregnancy terminations since 2008 has risen by 35%. This concept of women having a ticking time

Number of under 18's compared to number of over 30's who had an abortion between 2008-2018



Source: Gov.uk

bomb on their body clock stems from the 1970's and is the reason why O'Brien believes there is a rise in older women having abortions.

O'Brien suggests there is a correlation between the average age of motherhood being highest on record to this statistic, "more women are spending a greater proportion of their fertile years trying to avoid pregnancy", explains the associate director. "We also know that myths and misconceptions about fertility lead some women over 30 to underestimate their chances of conceiving, leading some to take risks with their contraception."

When 23 year old Lily* discovered she was pregnant in February 2019 there was no question what the outcome would be.

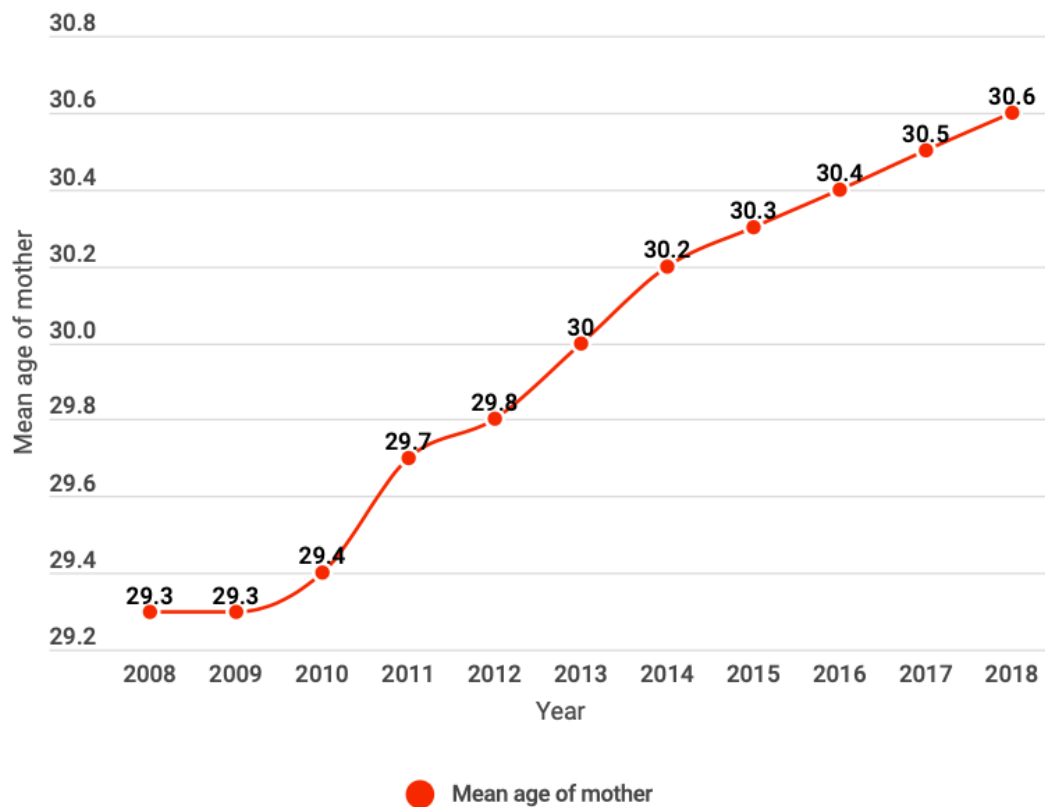
With her final year of university in full swing, Lily describes the moment she found out about her pregnancy as a sad moment, a moment where she knew what she would have to do, "it wasn't like I had a decision to make, the decision was already there, I just had to go ahead and do it."

With nothing but praise for the "welcoming and chatty" NHS nurses, Lily discusses the aftermath of the procedure which she struggled with the most. The recent university graduate spent twenty four hours after the medical procedure in her boyfriend's bathroom and describes the ordeal as "traumatic, I cried a lot, I was in agony and in pain".

When asked about the statistics highlighting high numbers of over 30's having abortions Lily believed it was based on women's drive for successful careers, "in our day and age more than ever women are more career focused than family focused". Lily commented on the decreasing numbers of under 18's having pregnancy terminations suggesting, "there is a lot more encouragement for women and young girls to be proactive with their sexual health and to be more willing to go and get birth control from a young age, we are clearly doing something right there".

There has also been a steady rise in the age of mothers at childbirth. In 2018 the average age stood at 30.6 years, a fifteen month increase from 2008.

Average age of mothers at childbirth in the United Kingdom from 2008 to 2018



Source: Statista

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At 37 years old Meghan Markle welcomed her first son, Amal Clooney gave birth to twins aged 39, and Meryl Streep welcomed her four children between the ages of 30 and 41. The desire for mothers to secure [financial and career stability](#) whilst desiring to live their own life before starting a family is becoming increasingly apparent. Women want more than being seen as the matriarch, they want to be seen as the boss as well.

