



CARE
FOR WHAT
YOU BELIEVE

Mr Richard Sharp
BBC Broadcasting House
Portland Place
London W1A

Dear Mr Sharp,

I am writing to you on behalf of CARE Northern Ireland, to state our concern about the BBC Drama Three Families, which is due to be aired this evening and tomorrow evening, Monday 10 May and Tuesday 11 May, and deals with abortion. In raising our concern, we want to make two points very clear from the outset.

First, we are not objecting to the BBC having a drama that deals with abortion. Second, we have not yet seen the drama and hope very much that the concerns we have from published descriptions of the drama are not born out by the actual drama.

Having made those two introductory points, however, we write to urgently draw your attention to our very serious concerns regarding the proposed drama on the basis of the descriptions of the drama that have appeared on the BBC website. The synopsis¹ suggests that this series is likely to fail to provide a balanced view of abortion because it only seems to consider the experiences of women that are likely to problematise recognising the rights of women and the unborn. It does not suggest there will be any consideration, let alone equal and balanced consideration, of the stories of the pregnancy experiences of women in Northern Ireland that are likely to affirm the importance of the rights of women and the unborn.

The BBC is a public service broadcaster, whose mission 'is to act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain'² and section 4 of the BBC editorial guidelines state BBC is committed to achieving due impartiality in all its output.³

Given the BBC's obligations as a public service broadcaster, it would plainly be very inappropriate to develop a drama that only looked at abortion through the eyes of the pregnancy experiences of women in Northern Ireland who view restrictions on the provision of abortion negatively. In a context, moreover, where any survey of Northern Ireland news platforms reveals a real diversity of experience, and multiple eyes through which to view the 1967 Abortion Act, both positive and negative (ranging from that of Sarah Ewart, who has

1 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000wosl>

2 http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/assets/files/pdf/about/how_we_govern/2016/charter.pdf

3 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidelines/impartiality>

been very vocal about what she perceived to be the negative practical implications of the 1967 Abortion Act on her,⁴ through to women in Northern Ireland who have been vocal in their support of the 1967 Act because of what they perceived to be the positive practical implications of the 1967 Act on their lives, for example: Tracey Harkin, whose daughter Kathleen Rose was born with Trisomy 13;⁵ Rebecca, who found herself facing an unplanned pregnancy at 18 and chose to carry the pregnancy to term and now as a son Reuban;⁶ or Lynn's story of having an abortion and struggling to live with the consequences.⁷), the failure of any drama to interrogate the subject from the perspective of the different pregnancy experiences of women that cause them to reach completely different conclusions about abortion would render the breach of the BBC's obligations as a public service broadcaster that much more blatant. BBC Northern Ireland's position would, in such a context, be transparently indefensible and unsustainable. The provision of a drama providing equal and balancing accounts of the pregnancy stories of different women in Northern Ireland, reaching different conclusions about abortion, would provide a compelling drama. The consideration of the issue from just one side of the debate promoting abortion would constitute emotional propaganda.

As we stated in our introduction, we trust that the drama looks at the subject through the eyes of the different stories of different women in Northern Ireland that caused them to reach different conclusions about abortion. If it does not do so, we would call on you to pull the drama from tonight and tomorrow night's schedule and not to show the drama unless and until it has been restructured so that subject it viewed through the eyes of the very different experiences of different women in Northern Ireland.

If the drama is unbalanced and you broadcast then you would be in breach of your public service obligations and we, and many other bodies in Northern Ireland, would be forced to take further action.

We very much hope that this will not be necessary.

Yours



Rebecca Stevenson
CARE NI Policy Officer

- 4 <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/belfast-woman-vows-to-battle-to-the-end-for-abortion-law-reform-in-northern-ireland-37371484.html>
- 5 <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/life/features/our-daughter-would-have-been-diagnosed-as-having-fatal-foetal-abnormality-yet-this-special-soul-has-made-us-far-better-parents-and-better-people-35157625.html>
- 6 <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/life/features/blogger-rebecca-finlay-on-starting-university-and-being-a-young-mum-34119779.html>
- 7 <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/republic-of-ireland/women-traumatised-by-abortions-29270286.html>



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