I: So, after my explanation of everything, are you happy to continue?

Maeve: Yes, uh huh.

I: Can you tell me about your role as a midwife?

Maeve: In my role as a midwife, I’m a rotational midwife; I’ve been a midwife for 20 years now. When I say rotational, I mean working in all areas – labour ward, postnatal, antenatal ward….at this moment in time because I’m a senior midwife, I’ve been in the postnatal ward for the past 8 probably 9 years. So, I’ve been there for that length of time. Emm….that’s not to say I’ll always stay there – I might end up having to move again. We’ve got a lot of newly qualified midwives just now because of the mass exodus of midwives leaving the profession because of just stress and loads of things and a lot of them have decided to go early so most of the newly qualified midwives from last year all got jobs and the same will probably happen this year. So they’ve been kinda concentrating on these girls trying to get them through rotational stuff too. At this moment in time I’m quite happy where I am.

I: Yeah. So, is termination of pregnancy something you’ve come across often in your work?

Maeve: Not really….well terminations are all carried out on labour ward, so they would never really come to us after that….they would probably go straight home after that. It’s a bit unfair to, well it would be a bit unfair to send them up to a ward….well that’s what I think, so that’s how that goes.

I: Ok…have you had experience of working with those who have come in for terminations?

Maeve: Yes, I have.

I: How do you feel, or how did you feel about that?

Maeve: Well when I worked it was still just the [name of hospital]….so I mean terminations did happen, but not as frequently as they do now because when [name of hospital] closed, this unit became the foetal medicine unit….it’s now the kinda centre for all the foetal abnormalities and things like that. So….I did come across terminations when I worked in labour ward but there was always the selected staff – they just did it; not that they were *expected* to….they just did. So at that point in time you weren’t forced in to anything….you weren’t forced….

I: Yeah….at that point though, were you prepared to participate in the procedure of termination of pregnancy?

Maeve: No.

I: No? Ok….can you tell me a wee bit more about that then? Like, why or how did that affect you….to make that decision not to….what did you feel about that?

Maeve: Well I didn’t feel any pressure….everybody knew my opinions and my views and respected that. So I never felt ridiculed or spoken about….I just have a kind of – I suppose it’s from a religious point of view as well….

I: Ok….

Maeve: I….I do not support, emm, termination….I also work for, well it’s a kinda befriending thing….just maybe every couple of months you’re asked to man the phone line and you’re actually kind of speaking to women who are phoning up after having a termination. I’m there as a support for them and I’ve heard some horrible horrible….you know how the women feel afterwards. I’m just there to listen, I’m not there to judge and I wouldn’t judge anybody. I just always think that when women are given that choice….I don’t think they realise the….not all of them, but some of them don’t realise the significance of how they might suffer afterwards.

I: Ok….

Maeve: So, I’ve come across women who are just distraught….

I: And you offer them support?

Maeve: Just to listen to their story and again, I wouldn’t condemn anybody if that was the path they chose, but from my point of view I don’t think personally I could ever have had a termination no matter what the circumstances. I’m maybe saying that now ‘cos I’m older; well your life has ups and downs but I just feel quite strongly that there’s other choices and you don’t need to go down that road.

I: What do you think has formed your feelings and beliefs here? I know you mentioned religious grounds….

Maeve: Religion, yeah and I just think….I think….I just do believe from that moment of conception, there’s a life there and from that very moment there’s a heartbeat and I just think that’s a wee person and that wee person should be given the chance of life. As I said before, there’s other options….women can….they can choose to give the baby up for adoption; well, there’s help there. There’s loads of help I think they know about….they don’t know there’s a choice and there’s support if people point them in the right direction.

I; Yeah. So, would you say before coming in to your profession, you had the same feelings and views? Did you think about it?

Maeve: I probably didn’t feel so strongly….emmm….I think that dealing with this job and the job of the befriender, like listening to women’s stories, to the traumatic experiences they’ve had….the aftermath of termination when there’s nobody there to help pick up the pieces….I think my views have become more stronger on abortion than I was say in my 20s.

I: So as time’s gone on, your experiences have grown?

Maeve: My experiences, yeah….

I: What do you think constitutes participation in the termination procedure?

Maeve: Participation as actually stating the process by giving medication, being there when the foetus is passed….emmm….again, I think in an emergency situation as a midwife I would just get that hat on….if a woman starts bleeding I wouldn’t just walk away and leave her, I would be there trying to save her life in my role as a midwife. To be participating in the process….to be actually starting the termination off, giving medication, being there for delivery of the foetus….I wouldn’t want to be part of that. But, if I heard someone shout for help I wouldn’t ignore it.

I: So do you think that links in to the kind of person you actually are then? Going back to what I said before about beliefs or do you think it depends on the role you are in?

Maeve: I think as a professional, you are there to make sure in an emergency situation that you’re on the ball and you can, you know, you can save somebody’s life. More of the professional role….if things go wrong….I would be expected to go through the motions, give them fluids if they’re bleeding and get the doctors involved and things like that.

I: Yeah.

Maeve: If things were straightforward I wouldn’t want to be part of that.

I: Ok….I understand. What does conscientious objection mean to you?

Maeve: It means that I should have the right to say no I don’t want to participate in the whole procedure of termination. The whole procedure, from start to finish, I don’t want to be part of it.

I: Ok.

Maeve: To me, that’s my right….on the grounds of my feelings and my beliefs….I don’t want to be part of it.

I: Would you say that morals come in to the mix too?

Maeve: I suppose they do….I never really thought about it from that point of view. As a person I just think it’s wrong….I don’t want to be part of it.

I: I understand. So, have you had any experiences of directly objecting to participating in the procedure.

Maeve: So when [name of HCP]….when what was happening to her here at the [name of hospital], I was one of the midwives who signed….so they knew I had an objection to abortion….there was a few of us on labour ward who signed it at that point. That was to help her case; in support for her….I think there was about 5 of us that did that. I mean she was a Sister when I was working on labour ward, so….it was in writing, it went to management. I don’t know where it is now cos there’s been that many changes with the [name of hospital] and things….I hope it’s on my file….I hope that’s where it went….

I: Would that still stand? If, by chance, you were asked to participate….would that still stand?

Maeve: I’m hoping it would….I’ll need to look in to it….if it’s on record, it should stand and stay there.

I: Ok. Do you think that objecting to participation puts a strain on non-objectors? Would they then feel obliged to say, I need to do this?

Maeve: I think it does. Just say for instance there’s 5 people on a shift….and 4 people objected….that 1 person would feel obliged and it does put a bit of pressure on people.

I: Have you ever directly come across that?

Maeve: No, but just thinking of it….

I: Right, ok. Can you think of a scenario where you think it’s wrong to participate….based on your experiences….can you think of a situation, but not an emergency, where somebody has asked to have the procedure done….can you think of a scenario where you might say you don’t agree?

Maeve: Personally….not really. When I worked on labour ward a number of years ago….it didn’t happen that often so you were never really asked to participate cos people knew the ones who would say no….so that was like teamwork really.

I: Ok….that’s an interesting point aswell….when you get to know people you’re working with….did you ever have meetings or just discussions about feelings and beliefs….does that come in to the role like naturally?

Maeve: I suppose it depends on the type of person you are….some people might not want to discuss their beliefs….maybe shy….but whereas I would….I would just say but it depends on the individual. Some people might hold those beliefs nut feel uncomfortable sharing that with people. They all know my views….a lot don’t share my views, but that’s up to them I respect that and everybody’s entitled to their opinion. I think I would have no problems in letting people know how I feel and people know that.

I: What would you say are the limitations here? Like, staffing….anything else you think would have an impact? Resources…anything else?

Maeve: Staff cuts are big thing. These procedures have got to be done so somebody’s got to do it. That is a limitation….

I: Have you known of anyone who objects but has had to just do it?

Maeve: No….I haven’t….maybe it’s happened and just not been discussed.

I: Ok. Talking about your experiences….do you think your views have changed over time? I know you said you offer support on the phone lines….think about when you started your career til where you are now….has anything changed much?

Maeve: Funny how, today just before I came out….I was reading a piece in the Guardian and it just came up….and I thought it was quite important considering I was meeting you today….it was about abortion in South America. A Dr there was saying that people like me were making her job harder because….like restricting the women….likes of myself would make it harder for the women because she might not have access as quick as she might want that access. What they were saying and I felt quite strongly here cos there was nothing about *my* rights….it was all about the person having the termination. It was South American, so probably a Catholic country and a lot of people there might have strong objections….but there are still unwanted pregnancies so who’s going to pick up the pieces? Some of these women are not getting terminations because of the lack of people willing to do it. And I mean they could be in to their 2nd trimester which is quite late and that’s horrible to hear aswell….you know? Emmm….I felt like there was 2 views. 1 view from a Dr who was an abortionist, I think from Uruguay and then another Dr who was really against termination….just saying they have Christian beliefs and opt out cos they don’t want to be part of terminations. Again, they were saying about contraception….people are not using this and this has to be dealt with as they’re not using it and coming back maybe twice, three times for terminations….he said that is just not acceptable. As I said to you earlier, I think my views have got stronger as I’ve got older….

I: Ok….can you elaborate?

Maeve: Yeah….from a personal point of view, my sister at 42 was an alcoholic. She never had any children and she was in an abusive relationship both ways, him and her cos of the alcohol and she fell pregnant at 42. She would have died if she hadn’t got pregnant….she was on her way out; drinking herself in to oblivion. So, she didn’t want the baby at all….but I knew that she would’ve pressed the self-destruct button if she had a termination. Anyhow, she was about 15 weeks when we finally found out so we went away to Cardinal [name] pro-life….through in [name of city] and Sister [name] and Sister [name]….Sister [name] dealt with my sister and she realised there was another choice there. They supplied everything for the baby. She gave birth in the [name of hospital] and there was concerns like when he was still inside her that she wasn’t bonding with the baby. Social workers were going to take that baby off her and put him in to foster care. Once he was born….you could see she was overjoyed with love….she….well I said to her do you want him to go in to care….and she said no. I said ok and because of my kinda knowledge, I arranged post-birth care and they knew she wanted to keep him. So he’s 8 now and she’s never drank….well she had a wee blip a few years back when my mum passed away, but….somebody in the depths of alcoholism; but maybe if she hadn’t had me as a support, she would’ve ended up terminating and she would’ve been dead by now….see there’s support there for people who are in crisis pregnancies….where they can, you know? I mean my wee nephew is a wee darling, we have him all the time and he’s just a great boy who might not have been here.

I: Yeah….so both personally and professionally for you then….you have the knowledge to show your support….

Maeve: I feel strongly….I mean another thing aswell….going down the religious route here probably, but I was really saddened. I mean outside the pro-lifers stand and they pray and a lot of my colleagues and Drs aswell like they give them a hard time, but….I’m a RCM steward….so the RCM is also very pro-choice, but we had their President and she was also sitting on the board of….emmm….she was saying as a midwife we should support the woman….we have another President now and we had a meeting with her here and somebody said can we not do something about the protestors out there – saying women are coming in and getting intimidated by these protestors. I never said anything here, but there was another girl who I know and then I looked at her and I thought….well I said I want to just say something, I said they’re not protesting, they’re praying. So the President was very diplomatic and she said I want to just stop this….she said in this small room, look at the different views we’ve got….she says as the RCM President, and as a union, we’re here to support everybody’s views and I thought she dealt with the situation very very well. But, again, a couple of my colleagues took it personally. One phoned me up to say I’m really sorry for upsetting you. I said you haven’t upset me! [laughs] I was just speaking my point….we’re entitled to our views….but it can come to a head sometimes….

I: Yeah….it is an emotive topic aswell regardless of where you stand; so I get that….

Maeve: Ofcourse….and you never got the President’s view though, as in her role, she was just there to support all members. And as I know, the RCM lost a lot of members when it was the other President as she was really like- you will do this, that’s what you’ve signed up to do….no I didn’t – I didn’t come in to midwifery to take part in terminations, but now they’re bringing it in to the criteria if you want to be a midwife. They never come in to midwifery for….well I came in to midwifery to bring life in to the world. But, so….that was that.

I: Ok….thank you so much – I really appreciate your views and you taking time to speak to me. Is there anything else you would like to add now, coming to a close?

Maeve: No…well I just hope there is more protection for hcps….I mean the way things are going, I can see the protection is getting ebbed….I mean they’ve changed the wording for our NMC….emmm….the bit for objection has changed – like compared to before [name]’s case – they’ve changed the wording….which makes it harder now to say no. People, maybe those quite junior might feel they have to do it; feeling pressurised thinking well who will support me here; I don’t have a leg to stand on….that’s the job.

I: Do you think, then, in the current climate that people coming in might think they could lose that job if they don’t comply?

Maeve: Yeah – you do 3 years training to be a midwife and a lot of people don’t want to go to work in another country, so they’ll sign up to anything if they know they’ll get a job here….you know? Agreeing so they’ll get a job. A lot of people do that….you’re not guaranteed a job at the end of the 3 years, so it makes it easier if you agree with what they want you to do – to get that job, you know? Thinking of all that aswell….

I: Yeah, I understand what you mean here. A lot comes in to it. Thank you so much…..

Maeve: Don’t you mention it. It’s a pleasure.