Pre-abortion Counselling in Flanders (Belgium)

How do women feel about it?

Joke Vandamme (drs.) - JokeL.Vandamme@Ugent.be
Elia Wyverkens (drs.) - Elia.Wyverkens@Ugent.be
University of Ghent
Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences
Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent
Presentation Outline

• International debate

• Legal context and practice in Flanders

• Research methods and questions

• Results

• Conclusion
Pre-abortion counselling...

“is superfluous because most women are already sure about their decision when they enter the abortion center”

“is intrusive, paternalistic and ignores women’s needs”

“should only be targeted to the women who are at risk of post-abortion psychological problems”

“should only be offered to the women who ask for it”
International Debate: Problems

1. Ethical versus scientific debate?

2. Meaning of “counselling”?

3. Political and legal context (priorities)?

4. Where are the women themselves?
How do **women** feel about pre-abortion counselling as it is organised in Flemish abortion centers?
Legal Context (Belgium)

1. Health care institute which encompasses
   - an abortion counselling service
   - a multidisciplinary team
   - which can inform and support

2. Six days waiting period
“Counselling” in Practice (LUNA Abortion Centers)

1. **Opportunity** to speak

2. **All** women

3. Psychosocial workers

4. Trained

5. Non-directive attitude
Research Methods

• **Explorative** study

• 971 women in 5 LUNA abortion centers

• Pre-counselling and post-counselling survey

• Dutch, French and English

Research Questions

1. Does the session *fulfill their needs*?

2. How do they *perceive* the session?
   - Before
   - Afterwards

3. How do they *experience* the session?
   - Before
   - Afterwards

4. What are *helping* factors for them?
1) Does the session fulfill their needs?

**Need to Discuss versus Actual Content**

- Religious aspects
- Role of significant others
- Experiences of others
- Feelings of guilt
- Emotions
- Alternatives to the abortion
- Reasons for the abortion
- Information about consequences
- Decision and doubts
- Information about procedure
- Contraceptive use

Graph showing the comparison between 'Need' and 'Actual Content' for each topic.
2) How do they perceive the session?
3) How do they experience the session?

- Decisiveness
  - Baseline: 8
  - Posterior: 9

- Total Mood Disturbance
  - Baseline: 5
  - Posterior: 3
3) How do they experience the session?

“pleasant”

“relaxed/calm”

“reassuring/relieving/encouraging”

“empathic/open/warm/supportive”
4) What are **helping** factors for them?

“**You can tell everything** that is on your mind”

“**There was someone really listening** to me”

“**To know** I can be pregnant again”

“**To know** that there are so many women who are in the same situation”

“**That she didn’t doubt** my decision”

“**She said I have the right** to take this decision”

“**To be convinced that this is the right decision** for me now”
To conclude...

Pre-abortion counselling in Flanders...

1. Is about “tailoring”

2. Is experienced by women with an initial restraint

3. Is well-appreciated afterwards
To conclude...
Thank you for your attention!

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