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What happens when counselling is no longer obligatory? An example from France

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History of counselling in France

The 1975 act

- Abortion is still considered as a criminal offence
- Abortion is tolerated and can be carried out under certain conditions
- **The establishment of this counselling prerequisite was a concession to politicians:**
It is a space open to dissuasion. It leads to the delivery of an attestation = permission to abort



The 2001 Act

- Counselling is no more compulsory, except for under aged girls
- This law finally decriminalized abortion

How did the counselling change throughout the years ?

- Individual or collective
- Carried out by professionals coming from various backgrounds
- Carried out in public structures or private associations, religious or not
- Free of charges
- Takes place before or after medical consultation




Accouts given by women

THE COUNSELLING COULD BE FELT AS

- Dissuasive, guilt inducing, even mistreating
- OR
- A good occasion to be listened to, with respect and without judgment

But it was mostly seen as a strain



The 2001 act: a victory ...but some fears remain

The counselling is no longer compulsory but
must be systematically suggested

What has happened since it is only proposed?



For the women

A relief :

The counselling is now a free choice

BUT

Abortion is still a taboo:

Feelings of guilt for the woman, who failed to take her contraceptive, norms of our society

- They want to go fast
- The counselling is a time and energy constraint
- They fear that they might change their mind

For the doctors

We can notice 2 different attitudes:

- Some of them want to play down abortion
- Others fear trivialization and great loneliness for the women

- When the counselling is still a prerequisite for the administrative organisation, it relieves them
- Some of them sometimes « forget » to propose it, but will think about it, when serious distress

**THE SPEAKING ARENA HAS MOVED TOWARDS
OTHER HEALTH WORKERS**



For the counsellors

- There is a real risk of reduction of jobs for an activity that is no longer profitable, which has become useless, whereas this speaking arena is also useful for the women and also deals with sexuality and contraception



Interest of a speaking arena

- To name the difference between the desire of a pregnancy and the desire of a child
- To see the ambivalences
- To let the partner get involved
- To integrate the abortion into one's life without denying it

Interest of a speaking arena (2)

- To speak out one's loneliness without making one's entourage feel guilty, to normalise this feeling and to decrease the pressure in the couple.
- But abortion must not be considered as a tragedy anymore! It leaves a scar as any other trial of life.



Conclusion

This new law is a conquest of freedom

But one must remain vigilant so that it does not lead to a return of loneliness for women and to a reduction of means for birth control professionals