



## **Mental Health Europe supports Spanish campaigners who say that the proposed Spanish law reform on abortion involves the misuse of psychiatry**

Mental Health Europe (MHE) is very concerned to learn that once again the psychiatric profession is being involved, totally inappropriately, in an ethical debate in which it has no competence.

The Spanish Government is currently discussing a bill to be submitted to Parliament for approval entitled the "Law on the protection of life of the unborn and the rights of pregnant women". One of the grounds on which a woman can ask for an abortion is that if the pregnancy continues there is a risk of serious and permanent damage to her mental health which has to be determined by two psychiatrists.

This constitutes a misuse of psychiatry in a number of ways. It is well known that there is no scientific evidence of the existence of clinical predictors of "significant" damage or its permanence in time in respect of a single cause. Vulnerability to mental distress depends on individual factors, the family and social support network, economic conditions and many others. Having or not having an abortion could be equally hazardous depending on the person's situation at the time. It is the role of psychiatry to respond to mental distress, not to give spurious "expert" predictions on behalf of the state which impact on an individual facing decisions.

This wrong is further compounded when one considers the possible social and psychological effects of such an intervention. In order to abort, women would have to be labelled as being "at risk of psychological damage persistent in time" or be diagnosed as "mentally ill"! It hardly needs to be said that to be so labelled is still highly stigmatizing and can have lasting negative consequences for the individual's life and career.

A woman may want to abort for many reasons. There is no reason that mental illness should be linked to the decision to terminate pregnancy and there is certainly no reason to give psychiatrists a central place in any decision-making regarding a woman's desire not to continue her pregnancy. Mental health professionals can intervene at a woman's request to ease, comfort and offer support with the decision taken, whatever it is; but they should not influence a woman's decision one way or the other or act as moral watchdogs.

What is more, psychiatrists should not be placed in the ethical dilemma of having to abandon women in a stressful life situation or do something unethical by recognizing a mental health problem that does not exist in order for a woman to be able to abort. This would constitute complete misuse of the medical tool that diagnosis is designed to be, and puts it to other ends than cure and care.

***MHE together with the Spanish Association of Mental Health Professionals AEN reaffirm that the role of the psychiatrist is to relieve mental distress and not to act as an arm of the state or in a quasi-judicial role to offer opinions which restrict the ability of citizens to make independent decisions. Psychiatry has been and is misused in Europe and worldwide. As a long standing, independent, international NGO, MHE will continue to stand out against such attempts wherever they occur.***

Mental Health Europe  
Brussels, April 2014

#### About Mental Health Europe

Mental Health Europe (MHE) is an organisation committed to the promotion of positive mental health, the prevention of mental distress, the improvement of care, advocacy for social inclusion and the protection of human rights for people with mental health problems, their families and carers. MHE vision is of a Europe where mental health and well-being is given high priority in the political spectrum and on the European health and social agenda, where people with mental health problems live as full citizens with access to appropriate services and support when needed, and where meaningful participation is guaranteed at all levels of decision-making and administration. MHE's values are based on dignity and respect, equal opportunities, freedom of choice, anti-discrimination, social inclusion, democracy and participation.

[www.mhe-sme.org](http://www.mhe-sme.org)