Abortion Coercion and Informed Consent

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Multiple speakers
Thank you for that clarification. Maria, I turn to you for the next question. What distinguishes freely chosen abortion from abortion influenced by pressure from partners, families, financial circumstances, social expectations, hospitals? How should healthcare professionals recognize and respond to coercion?

Michelle Buenrostro
Yeah. So there is data that suggests that 24% of women say that their abortions were coerced or unwanted, and 43% of women say that it was inconsistent with their values. With a million annual abortions, this is hundreds of thousands of women who say their abortions were coerced or unwanted or inconsistent with their values.

Michelle Buenrostro
You can be pressured by your circumstances. For example, you could risk losing a scholarship because of your pregnancy. If you're renting, you could face eviction if the limit of the number of people in the home has been passed, or with parents threatening to kicking out a minor, that is you having to choose between an abortion or homelessness.

Michelle Buenrostro
And those are not a freely made choice. That's a choice under duress. And so social expectations can also manifest when people treat abortion like it's morally neutral and no different than removing a tooth, for example. I've seen online where women share their struggles with parenting and when they're venting, and then people dismiss her by saying, "Well, you chose to continue your pregnancy."

Michelle Buenrostro
Even years after I had my daughter, people would still ask me why I didn't obtain an abortion without understanding why somebody would oppose abortion even in a difficult situation. And regarding how healthcare professionals should respond, there are states like Michigan where they have specific rules on screening patients for abortion coercion, and this can be something as simple as taking the patient away from the person that they came in with, be it parent or a boyfriend or somebody, in a room alone and ask directly, "Do you want to proceed?"

Michelle Buenrostro
And that alone can help screen. Another tool for screening is domestic violence. And ruling out domestic violence can ensure that there isn't any fear-based decision-making.

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