

IF SHARING  
A PAINKILLER  
WITH YOUR  
FRIEND IS LEGAL,  
WHY NOT  
SHARING A  
MORNING-AFTER  
PILL?

Dzień Po collective

**This interview was made on Sunday,  
the 6th of March 2022, at 11 am.**

**by Alexandra Ivanciu and Jolanta Nowaczyk**

**We would like to start from the context. Can you please tell us what is the situation in Poland now when it comes to access to the morning-after pills? Do you know anything about the history?**

Now access to the morning-after pills is restricted. You need to have a prescription and also it's not so easy to get it, because of the mental limitations of doctors, when it comes to reproductive rights. Any sex in any other form than reproductive is a bad thing. They use a lot of different excuses to not write a prescription. It's rather hard to get it, especially if you are underage, you cannot get a prescription without your parent's approval, and it's also expensive... Because every hour matters, and to have access to the doctor very quickly, you need to have a private appointment, so it's also an additional cost. Then the pill itself can be costly as well. Emergency contraception is more accessible to people who have money and resources.

**Can you tell us what excuses the doctors have? I know there is a conscious objection, mostly connected to religion...**

But this is also illegal, by the way. In Polish law... you can object to performing an abortion if your moral etiquette doesn't allow you, blablabla, but it's not legal when it comes to emergency contraception. We have heard stories that even pharmacists would sometimes tell you: no, I cannot sell you this pill because it doesn't align with my etiquette, but actually they are not allowed to do this. Even if they simply don't have pills available, they have to tell you where there is the nearest pharmacy where you can buy a pill. But it's not so easy to fight for your rights, sometimes people are intimidated.



Also, the power is on the side of the doctors, not the patients. So enough of me talking maybe.

**And you mentioned this is expensive - how much does a visit to the private gynecologist cost?**

I think it really depends but it can be from 150 zł (32 EUR), 200 zł (43 EUR) maybe sometimes. Something like that.

**So the visit to the doctor costs 150-200 zł, then the pill, another 150 zł.**

The costs are huge. Electronic prescriptions are usually cheaper, around 70-80 zł. But again, it's not so easy to get this electronic prescription, they are not as intuitive, and as cheap as we thought they are.

**Yeah, I can imagine not everyone can navigate a website and get an online prescription.**

...and still, if you are underage, you can't buy the prescription on your own...

This is another problem, lack of supportive parents.

**But how was it in the past? I know there was a period of time when it was available without a prescription. I think very shortly.**

It was only 2 years, between 2015 and 2017, that emergency contraception was available without a prescription. But only EllaOne, not even Escapelle. It was purely because of reproductive rights mixed with politics and business, frankly. EllaOne was allowed because it was a recommendation by the EU and because the pharmaceutical company was lobbying for the availability of EllaOne, which is much more expensive than

Escpalle. I think it's twice as expensive. It's working for a longer time, Escapelle is up to 72h after sex and EllaOne is working up to 5 days. But mostly you pay for the brand rather than the substance itself.

**But it's interesting, I thought all of the morning-after pills are for 72h... I think it would be nice to know a little more about your collective - how did you start, and how many people are involved?**

So we started this collective Dzień Po (Day After) in 2017 when the law changed and morning-after pills became available again only on prescription. We started just the day before the law changed. We organized a benefit party in Warsaw. First, we went to all of the pharmacies and we bought a lot of pills when they were still without prescription. And the next day we organized a benefit where we collected pills and money so we could continue our activity. It was a nice benefit I remember, we got a lot of support at that time. Still, we have a lot of support. We started nicely, I would say. Then we got all those pills, we slowly started to think how we will distribute them, and how we will self-organize. We created an email address that people can write to us when they are in need of contraceptive pills. We made stickers with our email so we could spread the message. We organized another benefit. In the beginning, we were just relying on the donations. When we went abroad during summer we also bought some pills and we asked our friends to get some pills every time they go abroad. Then we started to distribute them. In the beginning, we had only 10 pills and we were like wow, this is so much! It was rather difficult, as those pills are also expensive abroad, so... our possibilities were really limited. The first

time we got a lot of pills it was when our friends went to an abortion conference in Nepal and the pills are really cheap there. They cost like 2 EUR so they brought us a full bag of pills.

**And how is it with crossing the borders with pills? We read you can only take 4 of them from another country to Poland, but normally no one checks at the border, at least in the EU. What was your experience with bringing pills?**

I didn't have any problems, but it's true that legally you can take with you only 4 pills. Some small amount of drugs for your own personal needs is legal. But I never had any problems.

**Can you describe your work, from the very beginning, where do you get those pills?**

I think airports are the places where they are more controlled. But I think what could happen is that they would confiscate it. It's the same as when you travel from a country outside of the EU, where there is a restriction on how many cigarettes you can carry with you. If you have more, they confiscate it. Probably the same thing would happen with pills.

I don't know how far I can go into details, so... Zuzia and Dyzia, if you think that what I am saying is too revealing, then please stop me. In the beginning, we were operating with rather small amounts of pills and it was easy... if we were traveling or when our friends were traveling, we asked them to bring us 4 Ellas or 2. It depends on how much money we had. But now... we have been really depending on the self-help international community and many different collectives abroad know about us. They are

buying pills for us or collecting money. For instance, once we got a really big delivery of pills, at least a hundred pills. It was quite funny because it was around Christmas so the people who brought us those pills just declared them as Christmas gifts. Fully wrapped in decorative paper. Creativity is amazing.

**So you bring those pills, and what happens next? Could you describe how you distribute them?**

It depends. Where the people live. Sometimes we meet them and we give them the pill. Or we send it.

**By post?**

Before the pandemic, we used to send pills via train, but it was more expensive and problematic. We and the receiver needed to be on time, on the right platforms, it's really complicated. By post, it's just easier and cheaper. For all of us. But it's only half of the cases that we send by post. We have a lot of friends in different cities who help us. Although there are still areas in Poland where we don't have friends so in that cases we send pills by post. But very often we just contact people in need with our friends who have pills.

**Aha, so actually there is a bigger network - those people, your friends have some pills there, waiting for...**

Yes. This is also part of our mission. We don't want to be a center for the distribution of emergency contraception. We don't have the ambition to become that. If everybody



has a pill, either for themselves or for a friend, that's great. We are totally up to distributing for whoever feels would like to help. Do you understand what I mean?

**Yes, yes, and I think it's a very great strategy. I like it.**

**And how do you interpret the law about distribution? Is it dangerous for you?**

We are not selling the pills. There is no money involved. In our interpretation, we are not doing anything wrong, because we are not making a profit out of it. It's like you are giving a painkiller to a friend. Is it a crime? No.

**Yeah, that's cool.**

The history of our collective... We started with a small amount of pills, and we didn't have so many people contacting us. There were also many feminist actions and strikes about reproductive rights and we started to have big amounts of help, of pills. We actually operate with no money. We only rely on donations of pills. Not money. Now our main goal is to decentralize. We made a zin<sup>1</sup>, we want to give resources for people to self-organize. Gradually it became bigger, bigger, and bigger, and now we want to be completely decentralized.

**You mentioned earlier a lot about people who are underage. How much do they know about reproductive health and how informed they are about contraception? How many people contact you per month?**

It's hard to give a number. We don't have statistics. It can be 10 up to 20, weekly.

<sup>1</sup> *Samopomoc i DIY* [source: [https://archiwum.aborcynydream-team.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/zin\\_dzienpo.pdf](https://archiwum.aborcynydream-team.pl/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/zin_dzienpo.pdf)]

No... more...  
Average... more than 20 people.

**Wow... per week?**

Yes. But as I said it's more or less.  
We helped a few thousand.

And people who contact us... most of them are young, but not all of them. Young I mean under 18, or close to 20 years old. There are some older people. And what was your other question?

**If they seem to be informed about sexual education, because for example in Romania it is a big issue. People don't have enough information and they get into bad situations because of that.**

I would say younger people very often don't have a lot of information about sexual health. But still, they have enough to know how to contact us. That they probably need to take a morning-after pill because there is some risk involved.

I think they are mostly ashamed.  
I think this is the effect of a lack of education. Often we got too long emails full of details... people are writing to us: sorry, I am so stupid and so irresponsible... but you are not stupid either irresponsible. There is so much stigma. And people are ashamed. The only information we need to know is what city they come from and how much time has passed since the intercourse.

**Yes, I have exactly the same experience from Ciocia Czesia<sup>2</sup>. People often feel they need to justify their decision. But we never ask why you need an abortion. The only important information to us is the week of pregnancy.**

<sup>2</sup> Informal collective who helps Polish people to obtain legal abortion in the Czech Republic.

Yes, yes! They think they should give you a proper answer and explain why they need a pill... We are not like a commission that decides who deserves a pill and who doesn't. And this is probably because of education, not only sexual education but about the whole system and how it works. Constantly you need to explain why you deserve something... Something which is a super-basic thing that everyone should have access to.

**I was wondering if there was any case when it was too late or the pill didn't get there on time?**

Oh, it sometimes happens. There was a situation the pill didn't work and she got pregnant. It happened twice. But if the pill didn't work, you just contact Aborcyjny Dream Team, instead of us.

**Are you working with Aborcyjny Dream Team, or maybe more with Abortion Without Borders? Or any other umbrella organisation?**

Yes, we got support from all of those organizations, Women Help Women, Ciocia Basia. Aborcyjny Dream Team was with us from the very beginning. We were in touch with them about our personal and cyber security.

**You mentioned earlier that some people have a limited amount of information but still, they have information to get to you. I'm wondering how people can find you? What is the platform you are using?**

Whisper marketing? Is it called like this? But also during the strikes, where there was Abortion Without Border involved, there were many grassroots initiatives that



included our email in various places. There was this spontaneous sharing of resources between people. So many people, big websites related to the strike, were sharing numbers and emails about the safe source of contraception. We don't have a fundraiser or Facebook page. We don't use social media but bigger organizations are sharing our email address with their audience. We organize benefits, we also had some interviews before, and in that way, information is spread. We just don't want to be on social media.

But this is also a power of gossip - traditionally feminine thing, also they gossiped about how to access abortion or emergency contraception and how to survive in the oppressive system.

Abortion was always a gossip... Always sexual and reproductive things were private, a secret area. So it's in the tradition. But also for example the zin we made, you can download it from the Aborcynny Dream Team site. The electronic version. We also distribute the hard copy with pills and so on.

Maybe it's worth mentioning, we were supposed to be only 3 of us in our collective. For a long time, it was only us who were responding to the requests. It was quite exhausting. Then some of our friends who are in different initiatives wanted to join us and now our collective is twice bigger. It was a huge relief...

**How many people are in the collective now?**

Around 6. But the network is much bigger. Few dozens.

... I was thinking... you said there are 20 people per week asking you for help. All the pills you receive are from donations, either by private people or bigger NGOs. And this is how you manage to distribute so many.



Mostly they are grassroots, feminist initiatives, Polish activists who live in other countries. They are collecting pills. Mostly they are just people who are giving us... not so many organizations but sometimes it happens. The organizations are usually abortion providers.

**Can you tell us what a donation looks like? Should we do it by post, or in person?**

Usually, we meet in person. Hyzia was always a coordinator of donations, no? She has the biggest knowledge.

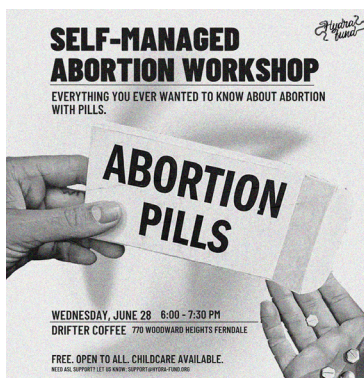
We are not a super serious organization. We don't have a structure. This is also awesome and we would love to encourage people to organize between themselves. You don't really need to be operating in the style of an NGO.

But it was not the question... the question was how to donate us the pills...

Aaaa, okey. Write us an email. We will figure out how to do this. There is no procedure. The safest way is just to meet. But a small amount is possible to send

For a while, we were getting regularly pills from Holland and they were mailed to us by post. You can manage to do this. There is really low risk, we were getting packs of five, so it was not problematic. It qualifies as a "personal use", but to be honest when people want to donate some small amount of pills, like 3-5, then we usually encourage people to keep them for themselves so we are not like the "central committee" of distribution. And just to distribute them among friends.

**We will do so. Thank you so much for your work and time!**



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