

The Last Abortion

The different scenarios in this activity highlight the complex circumstances surrounding a woman's decision to seek an abortion at or after 13 weeks. Participants are encouraged to examine and challenge their biases against certain pregnant women or certain circumstances, as well as their beliefs about abortion policies that restrict access to abortion at or after 13 weeks. This activity illustrates the difficulty and dangers of valuing one woman's reasons for abortion over another woman's reasons.



Objectives

By the end of this activity, participants will be able to:

- Articulate biases they hold against certain women and their life circumstances with regards to abortion access at or after 13 weeks.
- Describe the difficulty and dangers of deciding who should and shouldn't receive an abortion at or after 13 weeks;
- Discuss the challenges posed by restrictive abortion laws and policies.



Materials

- The Last Abortion — Scenarios handout for each participant



Timeline

5 minutes to read scenarios individually
15 minutes to discuss scenarios in small groups
10 minutes for groups to report back
10 minutes for large group discussion

40 minutes total



Advance Preparation

- Photocopy The Last Abortion — Scenarios handout, one per participant.



Instructions

1. Explain to participants that in many countries legal, policy and other restrictions impede women's access to safe, legal abortion services at or after 13 weeks or abortion-method options and negatively impact the quality of care given to women who seek these services.
2. Divide participants into small groups of four to six people each.
3. Tell participants that according to this one (fictitious) country's policy, there can be only one more safe, legal abortion performed at or after 13 weeks. (Acknowledge that this is a contrived scenario for the purpose of this activity.) Explain that you will give them a handout that describes six women who have expressed their desire to terminate their pregnancy and have applied to be granted this last abortion at or after 13 weeks. The small groups represent the policymakers who will decide which woman should receive the last abortion

at or after 13 weeks.

4. Give each participant a copy of the The Last Abortion — Scenarios handout, and ask them to spend five minutes silently reading the scenarios.
5. Tell participants they have 15 minutes to discuss the scenarios in their small groups, decide to which woman they will grant the last abortion at or after 13 weeks, and appoint a spokesperson to briefly present their decision and rationale to the large group.
6. Rotate from group to group to ensure that participants understand the instructions and are able to finish the task on time.
7. Explain that each small group will have up to two minutes to present their decision and rationale. Ask others not to comment yet on individual presentations.
8. Once all small groups have presented, ask each participant to silently reflect on biases they may hold against certain women seeking an abortion at or after 13 weeks and their life circumstances, and how these biases may have affected their decision about whom they did or did not grant an abortion at or after 13 weeks.
9. Ask participants to return to the large group. Facilitate a discussion about the women selected and those not selected and rationales given. Try to maintain neutrality while discussing participants' rationales.
10. Ask participants how this activity relates to how abortion services at or after 13 weeks are often rendered in a given setting or country. You may want to ensure that some of the following points are covered:
 - *Restrictive abortion policies, and even individual providers, often determine which women are more entitled to an abortion at or after 13 weeks than others, based on their biases about women's reasons and circumstances. The decision to grant some women an abortion at or after 13 weeks and not others carries lifelong consequences for those women, their families and communities.*
 - Each of the women in these scenarios expressed a desire to terminate her pregnancy, and it is likely that each woman thought carefully about her reasons before arriving at this decision.
 - Sometimes counselors or providers may try to convince certain women to continue their pregnancy because of their personal beliefs that she should not terminate her pregnancy. This can cause these women to feel pressured to make a decision that may not result in desirable consequences for her life. In some cases, it may cost women their health and even their lives.
 - It is important that we as providers or professionals examine our personal biases and see how they can impact women's decisions and actions.
11. Close the activity by explaining that there is no one correct answer and that it is impossible to objectively decide which woman deserves access to abortion services at or after 13 weeks over another. Question what person has the right to make such a judgment for another human being. Point out that the stakes are extremely high when providers or policymakers restrict access to second-trimester abortion for certain women; this can result in women

risking their health and lives with illegal, unsafe abortion, having to go through added expense and difficulty to obtain a safe abortion from another provider or continuing an unwanted pregnancy and potentially abandoning, abusing or neglecting the child.

12. Conclude with the statement that there can never be one last abortion.
13. Solicit and discuss any outstanding questions, comments or concerns with the participants. Thank the group for their participation.

Activity adapted from:

Marais, Thea. 1996. *Abortion values clarification training manual*. Melrose, South Africa, Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa.

The Last Abortion — Scenarios

Instructions

Each of the following women has asked for an abortion at or after 13 weeks. You must choose which woman will be able to receive the **last** safe, legal abortion at or after 13 weeks. You can only choose **one** candidate. As a group, discuss each of these scenarios and your rationale for choosing the one candidate.

1. A 45-year-old woman is 19-weeks pregnant. She had stopped having regular menstrual cycles and did not believe she could become pregnant. A detailed ultrasound has revealed severe fetal abnormalities. Her 12-year-old son has numerous physical and developmental disabilities and requires constant attention. She does not feel able to manage another special-needs child.
2. A 21-year-old in her second year at university just found out she is 15-weeks pregnant. Because her menstrual cycle was irregular, she did not realize she was pregnant. This is her first pregnancy. Her contraceptive method failed, even though she is quite certain she used it properly. She is the first person from her poor, rural village ever to attend university. She is experiencing acute anxiety at the thought of continuing this pregnancy.
3. A 25-year-old woman is 16-weeks pregnant. She has two children under the age of four, and she lives with a man who regularly physically abuses her. He opposes the abortion, but she does not want to bring another child into an abusive household, especially if it will only make her more dependent on him for financial support. Her depression has worsened considerably since she found out she was pregnant.
4. A 28-year-old woman is 14-weeks pregnant. She is unemployed, an alcoholic and does not use birth control regularly. She does not know who the father of this baby is. Two of her children were born with fetal alcohol syndrome, and all three of her children are being cared for by her mother in another part of the country.
5. A 23-year-old woman with two young children is 17-weeks pregnant. She and her younger child are HIV positive. Her husband died of AIDS-related illnesses two years ago and left her without any financial support. She is not able to afford anti-retroviral treatment, and she has been hospitalized for opportunistic infections several times in the past year.
6. A 15-year-old is 18-weeks pregnant as a result of rape by her stepfather. When she told her mother about the rape and pregnancy, her mother told her to get out of the house. She has been staying at a friend's house. She continues to attend public school, where she has been a top student. She is experiencing great distress about the rape and pregnancy, and her schoolwork is suffering.

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