

PERSONAL BELIEFS AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Facilitator guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

This activity is intended to help participants assess where their personal beliefs are in alignment or in conflict with their professional responsibilities to provide or support provision of safe abortion care. It emphasizes the responsibility of medical-humanitarian organizations to ensure women have access to reproductive health care, including safe abortion care, to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality linked to unsafe abortion.

OBJECTIVES

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

- Identify reasons that prevent or facilitate their provision or support of their agency's safe abortion care work
- Articulate how attitudes can affect the provision of or support for safe abortion care
- Identify and articulate their personal and their agency's responsibility to provide/support safe abortion care services for women
- Examine and potentially resolve any ambivalence about their support for safe abortion care

MATERIALS

- "Personal beliefs and professional responsibilities: Participant handout" (one per participant)
- "Personal beliefs and professional responsibilities: Small-group facilitator handout" (one per small-group facilitator)
- Copies of the agency's policies, practice and resources related to safe abortion care

TIMELINE

Total time: 60 minutes

ADVANCE PREPARATION

- Print copies of the participant handout and small-group facilitator handout.

- Print copies of the agency's policies, practice and resources related to safe abortion care.
- Familiarize yourself with your agency's policies, practice or guidance on responding to situations where staff are unwilling to provide safe abortion care even though it is a requirement of their position (it is important to be prepared to respond in case this topic comes up in a discussion).
- Familiarize yourself with the abortion laws and policies in the relevant countries (so that you are prepared if questions come up).

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1: Introduce the facilitators and the activity and facilitate a short discussion.

Suggested introduction for short discussion:

When a woman or girl is determined to end her pregnancy, she will usually seek out an abortion regardless of the safety of the procedure. Even in places where safe abortion care is available, she may be reluctant to seek professional medical help and will risk her life to terminate the pregnancy through unsafe means. This reluctance is often due to perceived or actual stigma she fears she may face from health-care providers or non-medical support staff for wanting to end her pregnancy. A refugee or displaced woman may face even greater barriers to accessing safe abortion care due to lack of freedom of mobility, income, language barriers and limited knowledge of services. As a result, she may seek an unsafe abortion and face one of the many complications, such as severe bleeding, infection, trauma to the vagina and uterus, and death.

This example highlights how conflicts between personal beliefs and professional responsibilities among medical or support staff concerning safe abortion care provision can affect a woman's ability to obtain appropriate medical care and avoid death or injury.

Possible discussion questions include:

- Reflecting on the example just shared, what kind of conflicts do you think may influence a health-care provider's willingness to provide safe abortion care to a woman or girl? What about non-medical support staff's willingness?
- Please share your experiences, or those you have heard about from colleagues, regarding conflicts between their personal beliefs and professional responsibilities concerning safe abortion care while working at your agency.
- What other factors do you think might affect your agency's staff's willingness to provide safe abortion care?

This activity will help us explore conflicts and other factors concerning safe abortion care provision by identifying reasons we may have to support safe abortion care and weighing those against our professional responsibilities.

**NOTE TO FACILITATOR**

Nearly all countries have one or more legal indications for abortion. It may be helpful to quickly review the legal indications for abortion in the country.

STEP 2: Divide participants into groups of four to six people each. Ask each group to select a facilitator to assure they stay on task and on time. Distribute a worksheet to each participant and facilitator instructions to each small-group facilitator.

STEP 3: Small-group facilitators instruct participants to take up to five minutes to complete Part A of their worksheet. Ask participants to think carefully about their responses and assure them their responses will be kept private.

STEP 4: After participants have completed Part A, small-group facilitators lead a short discussion about reasons to provide, refer or support access to safe abortion care.

Possible discussion questions for small groups:

- What were your reasons for providing or supporting access to the provision of safe abortion care?
- What people and life experiences have influenced these reasons?

STEP 5: Still in small groups, facilitators ask participants to complete Part B of their worksheet.

STEP 6: After participants have completed Part B, small-group facilitators lead a short discussion about professional responsibilities.

Possible discussion questions for small groups:

- How would you describe your responsibilities to women seeking safe abortion care, relative to your job?
- How would you describe your responsibilities to refugee or displaced women seeking safe abortion care in humanitarian settings?
- How would you describe your agency's responsibilities to provide or support refugee or displaced women seeking safe abortion care in humanitarian settings?
- What factors influence your sense of professional responsibility to provide safe abortion care to a woman or girl who requests it?
- Have there been any situations in which you did not act in accordance with your perceived responsibilities? What were the reasons for this?
- What consequences do women face when your agency's staff do not follow safe abortion care policies?

STEP 7: Have participants return to the large group. Facilitate a discussion about the various reasons to provide or support access to safe abortion care which are based on personal beliefs, and factors that influence professional responsibilities.

Possible discussion questions for large group:

- What are your observations about personal beliefs and how they relate to professional responsibilities to provide or support access to safe abortion care?
- Please summarize what you interpret as your professional responsibilities with regard to safe abortion care.
- Please summarize your organization's responsibilities with regard to safe abortion care.
- What are some ways we can maintain our personal beliefs about abortion, while adhering to our professional responsibilities?

STEP 8: Close the activity by directing participants' attention to the agency's internal policy on abortion care. Read one or two sections of the policy that underscore the agency's responsibility to ensure that safe abortion care is an available medical service option for women in humanitarian settings. If possible, tailor the sections you read to align with key points made or reflections shared during the large group discussion.

STEP 9: Summarize the key points this activity is intended to convey:

- We have a professional responsibility to ensure women receive safe abortion care. If we are uncomfortable providing services, we should refer women to safe services.
- Women may avoid safe abortion services because they are afraid of being mistreated by health-care providers or staff. As providers/health-care staff, we should ensure that we treat women professionally and with respect, regardless of their reasons for terminating a pregnancy—even if their reasons may challenge our personal beliefs.



NOTE TO FACILITATOR

For participants with personal beliefs that oppose abortion, you might need to offer suggestions. Research available information on their agency's latest policies, practice or guidance on responding to situations where staff are unwilling to provide safe abortion care even though it is a requirement of their position.

PERSONAL BELIEFS AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Small-group facilitator handout

INSTRUCTIONS

PART A

After participants have completed Part A of the participant handout, small-group facilitators should lead a short discussion about reasons to provide, refer or support access to safe abortion care.

Possible discussion questions for small groups:

- What were your reasons for providing or supporting access to the provision of safe abortion care?
- What people and life experiences have influenced these reasons?

PART B

After participants have completed Part B, small-group facilitators should lead a short discussion about professional responsibilities.

Possible discussion questions for small groups:

- How would you describe your responsibilities to women seeking safe abortion care, relative to your job?
- How would you describe your responsibilities to refugee or displaced women seeking safe abortion care in humanitarian settings?
- How would you describe your agency's responsibilities to provide or support refugee or displaced women seeking safe abortion care in humanitarian settings?
- What factors influence your sense of professional responsibility to provide safe abortion care to a woman or girl who requests it?
- Have there been any situations in which you did not act in accordance with your perceived responsibilities? What were the reasons for this?
- What consequences do women face when your agency's staff do not follow safe abortion care policies?

PERSONAL BELIEFS AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Participant worksheet

INSTRUCTIONS

PART A: PERSONAL BELIEFS

Please read each of the statements below about barriers to providing abortion care or supporting your agency's provision of abortion care. **Check all that apply.**

- I find abortion personally objectionable.
- I am concerned about my professional reputation.
- My colleagues are not supportive of abortion.
- My family is not supportive of abortion.
- People who are important to me and whom I respect oppose abortion.
- I am concerned about my personal safety or the safety of my loved ones due to the threat of violence from people who oppose abortion.
- I am concerned about risks to my agency due to safe abortion care provision.
- My agency's safe abortion care policies and procedures are not clear.
- I have not been adequately trained on safe abortion care relative to my role within my agency.
- I am not clear about how my agency's staff should respond if they have a problem related to providing safe abortion care.
- If there were a problem related to safe abortion care provision, I am not confident that my agency would handle it appropriately.
- I do not always support women's reasons for seeking an abortion.
- Abortion laws and policies don't authorize abortion in the contexts where I work.
- There are no reasons that would prevent me from providing or supporting my agency's provision of safe abortion care.

Please select all reasons that may facilitate your provision or support for your agency's provision of safe abortion care.

- All women should have access to safe abortion care.
- Many women seeking safe abortion care are not able to receive it.
- Refugees and displaced women have a disproportionate need for safe abortion care.
- I am committed to preventing women's deaths and disabilities due to unsafe abortion.
- My agency has a medical responsibility to provide safe abortion care.

- Unsafe abortion is a public health problem.
- I believe women have the right to make their own sexual and reproductive health decisions.
- I believe safe abortion care is an integral part of reproductive health care.
- I am committed to ensuring that abortion remains safe, legal, accessible and high-quality.
- If I do not provide or support my agency's provision of safe abortion care, services may not be available to the women who need them.
- I want to foster a supportive environment for women's access to safe abortion care within the medical-humanitarian sector.
- Providing abortion services could increase overall revenue for SRH programs and increase sustainability.
- There are no reasons that facilitate my provision or support for my agency's provision of safe abortion care.

Reflection: Count and compare the number of barriers and motivations. Reflect and summarize below whether you have more barriers or motivations and what this says about your willingness to provide or support the provision of abortion care.

PART B: PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Please select all statements that represent your responsibilities to women who seek safe abortion care.

- I have a responsibility to provide compassionate, factually-correct information about all pregnancy options to pregnant women, including safe abortion.
- I have a responsibility to encourage pregnant women not to have an abortion if they live in a country where abortion is legally restricted.
- Whenever I hear someone making false statements about abortion, I have a responsibility to offer correct information.
- I have a responsibility to refer women seeking an abortion to appropriate care.
- I have a responsibility to abide by the abortion laws of the country I am currently in.
- If I do not support safe abortion care, I have a responsibility to inform my agency about my position.
- I have a responsibility to provide women with the abortion information and referrals they need, even if abortion is legally restricted in that country.
- I have a responsibility to be informed about abortion laws and policies in the countries in which I am working.

- I have a responsibility to provide safe abortion care regardless of the laws and policies in the country where I work.
- I have a responsibility to support women in making abortion decisions according to their own values and beliefs, regardless of my personal beliefs.
- I have a responsibility to minimize my agency's organizational risks with regard to safe abortion care provision.
- I have no responsibilities to women with regard to safe abortion care.

Please select all statements that best represent your agency's staffs' responsibilities with regard to women who seek safe abortion care:

- My agency's staff have a responsibility to provide information to pregnant women about their pregnancy options, including abortion.
- My agency's staff have a responsibility to provide safe abortion care or support the provision of safe abortion care in a discreet manner.
- My agency's staff have a responsibility to refer women who request abortion to appropriate safe abortion care.
- My agency's staff have a responsibility to provide safe abortion care or support provision of safe abortion care to women who meet legal indications in that country.
- My agency's staff have a responsibility to provide safe abortion care or support the provision of safe abortion care to any woman who requests it.
- My agency's staff have a responsibility to be leaders in providing safe abortion care to refugees and displaced people.
- My agency's staff have no responsibilities to women with regard to safe abortion care.

Reflection: Please reflect on the items you selected and briefly summarize below your and your agency's responsibilities regarding provision of safe abortion care.