

# REASONS WHY

## Facilitator guide

### SESSION OVERVIEW

In this activity, participants explore the full range of underlying reasons for women's unintended pregnancies, pregnancy termination or continuation, and governments' regulation of pregnancy and abortion. Participants are encouraged to identify how their and others' level of comfort with women's reasons affect reproductive health policies and services and societal stigma.

### OBJECTIVES

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

- Identify diverse reasons why women and girls might have an unintended pregnancy
- Name the reasons why women may make certain decisions about their unintended pregnancies
- Discuss the reasons why governments regulate pregnancy and abortion more than many other medical conditions and procedures
- Differentiate their comfort levels with the different reasons
- Discuss how individuals' subjective level of comfort affects women's and girls' access to safe abortion care

### MATERIALS

- "Reasons why: Participant handout" questions cut into strips
- Sheets of flipchart paper
- Scissors
- Newspapers
- Markers
- Materials that can be used to decorate (glue, colored paper, newspapers, etc.)
- Prize (optional)

### TIMELINE

Total time: 40 minutes

## ADVANCE PREPARATION

- Cut the “Reasons why: Participant handout” questions into strips



### NOTE TO FACILITATOR

Use the question or questions that you deem most relevant to your participants and their context—you do not need to use all questions. This activity allows participants to get comfortable working with each other by discussing the big-picture issues surrounding abortion care. A good VCAT workshop builds from first exploring these larger societal issues to then more exploration of personal feelings and beliefs. That sequence is important so participants can develop a sense of comfort with each other before being asked to share personal feelings.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**STEP 1:** Divide participants into four groups. Give each group a piece of flip-chart paper, markers, any other materials (newspaper, glue, colored paper, etc.) and one of the “Reasons why” question strips.

**STEP 2:** Ask each group to brainstorm all possible responses to the question they have been given. Encourage them to think as deeply and broadly as possible about the range of women and girls and their life circumstances. Let groups know that they can be as creative as possible and draw pictures and use the materials provided to write/illustrate their responses on their sheet of flipchart paper. Let groups know they will have 25 minutes to work on their responses and their “creative flipchart.” Groups should select one person to report back to the larger group. That person will have 2-3 minutes to present to the larger group. *\*Optional: Inform groups that the most creative flipchart will receive a prize.*

**STEP 3:** After 25 minutes, ask each group spokesperson to come up, post their flipchart and present their response to the larger group. After each presentation, ask the larger group if they have any other responses. Suggest any additional responses from the answer lists here:

**Question 1:** What are all of the reasons why women would decide to have an abortion? *Answers may include: rape, incest, family pressure, limit family size, poverty, mental health issues, fetal indications, women’s health indications, sex work*

**Question 2:** What are all of the reasons why women do not leave with a contraceptive method after an abortion? *Answers may include: lack of commodities, lack of training, myths around methods, family planning service in different part of hospital*

**Question 3:** What are all of the reasons why women might continue an unintended pregnancy? *Answers may include: denied an abortion, no access, lack of knowledge of services, delay in care seeking until too late, afraid, ashamed, coerced to continue*

**Question 4:** What are all of the reasons why my agency has a policy on safe abortion care? *Answers may include: to protect staff, clarify stance publicly, consistency in programs, to discourage individualistic responses*

**Question 5:** What are all of the reasons why my agency's staff might not support or be comfortable with the provision of safe abortion care in our projects? *Answers may include: personal beliefs, fear, lack of knowledge of abortion laws, misconceptions about abortion*

**Question 6:** What are all of the reasons why it might be difficult for a provider to provide an abortion? *Answers may include: religious reasons (ex-communication from church), family and friend disapproval, jail time, unsupportive administration, lack of training, lack of resources*

**STEP 4:** After all the groups have presented, facilitate a discussion using some of the following questions:

- What reasons for women having an unintended pregnancy are you uncomfortable with?
- What reasons for abortion make you uncomfortable, and what might be the source of your discomfort?
- What reasons for women continuing an unintended pregnancy are you uncomfortable with?
- How do your values and beliefs influence your discomfort with certain reasons?
- How does social stigma and/or culture affect people's comfort levels with women who have abortions and providers who perform abortions?
- How does our discomfort with certain reasons (for women having sex, unintended pregnancy, abortion) affect our work as an agency and, specifically, in the provision of safe abortion care? How might our agency's clients experience this discomfort? What impact might this have on the quality of health care we provide?
- What reflections or comments do you have about the reasons why our agency's staff might not support the provision of safe abortion care in our projects?



#### NOTE TO FACILITATOR

You may need to prompt participants to think deeply to identify the core values that influence their comfort levels. You may need to present local examples to illustrate the point about governments regulating pregnancy and abortion more than most other conditions.

**STEP 5:** Close the activity by discussing the following points:

- Individuals' discomfort with some women's reasons (for having sex, unintended pregnancy, abortion) results in the implementation of reproductive health policies, laws and service-delivery systems that deny certain women access to safe, high-quality abortion care. This can lead to women risking

their health and lives to procure a (possibly unsafe) abortion. In other words, it creates health disparities and often tragic health outcomes for some women but not others.

- Ensure participants grasp that this disparity in access to safe abortion care is often based on individual, subjective beliefs about what are “acceptable” versus “unacceptable” reasons for pregnancy and abortion.

**STEP 6:** Solicit and discuss any outstanding questions, comments or concerns with the participants. Thank the group for their participation.

**STEP 7:** Optional: Ask the group to vote for the most creative flipchart. Participants cannot vote for their own flipchart. The group whose flipchart receives the most votes gets a prize.

**STEP 8:** Summarize the key points this activity is intended to convey if they haven’t been adequately discussed already:

- Discomfort with women’s reasons for having unintended pregnancies and abortions can result in restrictive laws and policies that deny certain women access to safe abortion care. For example, if there is discomfort around young, unmarried women having sex, there may be restrictive policies that deny them access to contraceptives or safe abortion care.
- Subjective or personal beliefs can have an impact on who can receive abortion services and the way women are treated when they seek a service. Health-care providers or staff may be more sensitive to a woman coming in with a reason for abortion that they feel is acceptable and may treat a woman poorly or deny her services if they feel her reason is unacceptable. 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 the reasons may challenge our personal beliefs.

# REASONS WHY

## Participant handout: Questions

### INSTRUCTIONS

Cut the following statements into individual strips of paper to hand out to groups.

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**Question 1:** What are all of the reasons why women would decide to have an abortion?

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**Question 2:** What are all of the reasons why women do not leave with a contraceptive method after an abortion?

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**Question 3:** What are all of the reasons why women might continue an unintended pregnancy?

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**Question 4:** What are all of the reasons why my agency has a policy on safe abortion care?

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**Question 5:** What are all of the reasons why my agency's staff might not support or be comfortable with the provision of safe abortion care in our projects?

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**Question 6:** What are all of the reasons why it might be difficult for a provider to provide an abortion?

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