

WHY DID SHE DIE?

Facilitator guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

This activity features a case study that highlights the cultural context around sexual violence against women, unintended pregnancy and lack of access to safe abortion care in humanitarian settings. Participants are confronted with the tragic consequences that can result when access to safe abortion care is restricted. Participants discuss one woman's story and are asked to articulate their personal beliefs and professional responsibility to provide necessary medical care and avoid preventable deaths.

OBJECTIVES

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

- Discuss the cultural context surrounding sexual violence, unintended pregnancy and abortion
- Explain the tragic outcomes that can result from restricting access to safe abortion care
- Articulate their personal beliefs and professional responsibility to promote health and prevent deaths from unsafe abortion

MATERIALS

- Copies of "Why did she die? Participant handout"
- Ball of string
- Presentation and discussion questions on global/regional/national/local data on abortion and morbidity and mortality related to unsafe abortion

TIMELINE

Total time: 45 minutes

ADVANCE PREPARATION

- Adapt the story in the "Why did she die? Participant handout" for relevance, if necessary.
- Review and adapt the questions and discussion prompts in Steps 5 and 6 below to make them more relevant to the participants or workshop content, if necessary.

- Familiarize yourself with your agency's policies and practices (standard operating procedures, clinical protocols) related to safe abortion care.



NOTE TO FACILITATOR

It may be necessary to change the names and certain elements of the story to be more culturally, geographically or organizationally appropriate for the audience and setting. You may want to adapt an actual story from your experience at your agency or from the media, making sure to change any potentially identifying information to protect people's privacy. It may be helpful to provide participants with more local data on abortion rates and morbidity and mortality related to unsafe abortion to illustrate that women's deaths from unsafe abortion are common and preventable.

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1: Introduce the activity's facilitators and the activity. Use the text in the "Session overview" and "Session objectives" provided above, if helpful. Invite and answer any questions from participants.

STEP 2: Ask for a volunteer (a participant) who will play the role of the woman and recount her story to other participants as realistically as possible. Ask participants to stand and form a half circle around the volunteer participant who is playing the role of the woman.

STEP 3: Have the volunteer who is playing the role of the woman recount her story as realistically as possible.

STEP 4: Ask participants the question, "Why did she die?" Have the volunteer hold the end of the ball of string. As each participant answers the question "Why did she die?" take the ball of string to the person answering the question. Ask the person to wind the string around their waist and give the ball of string back to you. Bring the ball of string back to the volunteer. Once each participant has responded (if you are facilitating for a small group; if it is a larger group, solicit 8-10 responses), the string will have formed a "web" that is a tangible connection among participants, representing their responsibility to the woman and all women in her situation. Ask participants to reflect on these connections and responsibilities.

STEP 5: Ask participants to return to their seats and facilitate a large group discussion. Suggested discussion questions to choose from are listed below. Be prepared to offer a couple of example answers to each question you pose, to get the discussion started if no one talks initially.

- How does this story make you feel?
- What choices did Beatrice have?
- What could have been done to prevent her death? Who could have helped prevent her death?
- What could have made this situation better for Beatrice?
- What information, resources and health-care services could have helped her avoid this situation?

- In addition to the woman, who else was directly affected by her death?
- What does this story tell us about our responsibility to ensure women have access to comprehensive medical care, including safe abortion care?
- What could you do, personally and professionally, to prevent deaths such as this one from occurring?
- Who has experienced or heard about a story like this woman's through their work that they would be willing to share? What happened, and was the woman able to access safe abortion care? If yes, how? If not, why not? (This could be an emotional question for some participants, and should be asked with careful consideration.)

STEP 6: Discuss this woman's story in the context of a brief presentation on global, regional, national and local data on abortion and morbidity and mortality related to unsafe abortion. Use data on maternal deaths and disability caused by unsafe abortion, or other data directly relevant to your work, if available.

Suggested discussion topics:

- Discuss how these data relate to women's lack of access to safe abortion care.
- Discuss how restricting access to safe abortion care does not decrease the number of abortions, but instead increases the number of women who are injured or die from unsafe abortion.
- Ask participants who they think could help a woman if she came to a clinic supported by your agency seeking safe abortion care.
 - Example answers include: medical staff trained in safe abortion care provision, other medical staff not trained in safe abortion care but knowledgeable on the topic (to refer the woman to safe care), other non-medical staff who are knowledgeable on safe abortion care and could provide factual information to the woman, or help her seek the service.
- Ask participants what they could do to help a woman seeking safe abortion care if they met her, relative to their role at your agency.

STEP 7: Solicit and discuss any outstanding questions, comments or concerns with the participants. Thank the group for their participation.

STEP 8: Summarize the key points this activity is intended to convey:

- Restricted access to abortion care means that women will seek unsafe abortions.
- It is important to remember that if a woman wants an abortion, she will get one—whether it is safe or unsafe.
- Women can die or have permanent injuries from unsafe abortions.

WHY DID SHE DIE?

Participant handout

My name is Beatrice. I am intelligent and hard working. I am the eldest daughter in my family, and I support my family financially by assisting my mother with selling items to travelers on the road next to our village. I love school, though, and have always been one of the top girls in my class. I dream of attending university one day.

My dreams were dashed the day one of the rebel groups stormed into our village. Men with guns came into our home. My parents told my siblings and me to run while they distracted the men, and we all lost sight of each other. Our village was in chaos, and I do not know what happened to my family.

I was able to escape, and I eventually arrived at a camp that was set up for people forced to leave their homes like me. Although I am thankful for the people here who are helping me and the food and shelter they provide, our shelters do not offer much privacy, and I do not feel safe at night.

One night when I was sick and alone in the shelter, I heard footsteps, and soon after, a man entered. I recognized him as the man who had been staring at me for weeks. He said I had been tempting him for too long. He forced himself upon me and continued to rape me for what seemed like forever. When I tried to call for help, he slapped me hard many times and said he would hurt me more if I did not stop talking. After a long time, I felt weak and went unconscious. When I finally came to, I hurt all over but was too ashamed of what happened to tell anyone. I thought I must have done something to make him think that he could do that to me.

Although I tried to push that horrendous night out of my mind, I felt more distraught with each passing day. I finally noticed that I was feeling sick. My parents and teachers had never talked to us about pregnancy, but because I had missed two periods, I was afraid that I was carrying a child. I felt so ashamed to tell someone, but I was sure I did not want to have that man's baby. I still hoped that one day I could go home and continue my studies.

I went to the camp clinic and told the nurse that I might be pregnant. When she confirmed my pregnancy, I cried and said I did not want to carry the baby of this man. I begged for her help. Even though she was from my tribe, the nurse told me she could not help because she did not have the equipment, and anyway, abortion was against the law. A few days later, I gathered my courage and asked a midwife in the camp for help. She told me the same thing. I had heard that there are pills that could help bring my period back, but I didn't know where to find them. When I told my secret to another girl, she said a friend had had the same problem, and she took care of it by drinking a mixture of medicine and cleaning supplies.

Over the next few days, the girl and her friend helped me collect the medicine and supplies. I waited until I was alone, and I drank the mixture. I began to feel sick with a terrible burning in my belly. The last thing I remember, I was lying face down on the floor in my vomit, in agony and moaning for help. I was too young to die.

Why did Beatrice die?

