

WHERE DOES ABORTION STIGMA COME FROM? EXPLORING OUR BELIEFS AND THEIR ROOTS

MODULE 3

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Activities at a glance	3
3A: Religion and abortion: Cross the line VCAT activity	4
3B: Language and stigma: Things people say	9
3C CORE: Cultural beliefs and practices: Keep the best, change the rest!	13
3D: When religion is weaponized to fuel abortion stigma	17
Key resources	21
References	21

INTRODUCTION

In Module 2 we began to see how our values and beliefs about abortion come from our social upbringing. In this module, we will more closely examine how these values and beliefs are shaped by our cultural and social context—we learn them from our families, communities, leaders, religion, history and other traditions. Sometimes the messages we get from different sources are explicit and sometimes they are subtle and coded, as we began to see in the proverbs exercise in Module 2. Sometimes the messages we get from the people who influence us are consistent and sometimes they are contradictory.

Our values and beliefs affect the way we relate to other people. How we relate to people can be a major source of stigma. Our personal beliefs about what is “normal” behavior can lead us to judge those who live or behave differently, or who have done something that we believe is not “normal.” Ideas and beliefs about what is “normal” are often very personal and subjective.

Much of abortion stigma originates in our learned values and attitudes about sex, gender and morality. Many people hold judgmental attitudes toward women, girls and trans people who seek abortion information and care. These attitudes can result in hostility, denial of services and discriminatory practices, which in turn have severe impacts on people and their families. Because culture is continually changing, our beliefs and values can also change.

Your Module 3 goals as a facilitator

- To support participants in reflecting more deeply on how their attitudes and beliefs about abortion were formed;

- To help participants recognize myths and stigmatizing language about abortion and how to counteract them;
- To help participants understand the role of culture and religion in spreading or eliminating abortion stigma.

ACTIVITIES AT A GLANCE

ACTIVITY NUMBER	NAME	PURPOSE FOR PARTICIPANTS	TYPE OF ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY LEVEL
3A	Cross the line VCAT activity	<p>Articulate their feelings and views on abortion</p> <p>Identify diverse views among group</p> <p>Describe how stigma affects individual and social views and reactions to abortion</p>	<p>Facilitator reads statements and participants cross the line when a statement applies to their belief or experience</p> <p>Group discussion</p>	Introductory
3B	Language and stigma: Things people say	<p>Explore the role that language and name-calling play in creating and perpetuating abortion stigma</p> <p>Identify ways in which they can begin to challenge and change both their own and others' language to reduce abortion stigma</p>	<p>Small group discussion</p> <p>Groups report back and reflect</p> <p>Ideas for action</p>	Intermediate
3C CORE	Cultural beliefs and practices: Keep the best, change the rest!	<p>Identify cultural beliefs and practices that blame and shame people and cause stigma around abortion</p> <p>Identify cultural beliefs that can support action to stop abortion stigma</p>	<p>Discussion in two groups</p> <p>Reflection</p> <p>Develop inauguration speech in three groups</p> <p>Deliver speeches to large group</p> <p>Group discussion</p>	Introductory
3D	When religion is weaponized to fuel abortion stigma	<p>Identify the links between religion and abortion stigma</p> <p>Understand how people sometimes use religion to judge others</p> <p>Identify ways people can tackle abortion stigma in a religious context</p>	<p>Prepare roleplays in small groups</p> <p>Perform roleplays for large group and then discuss</p> <p>Buzz and brainstorm in pairs</p> <p>Create positive messages in small groups</p> <p>Group discussion</p>	Intermediate

3A: RELIGION AND ABORTION: CROSS THE LINE VCAT ACTIVITY

[Adapted from *Abortion attitude transformation: A values clarification toolkit for global audiences*, by K.L. Turner and K. Chapman Page, 2011.]

FACILITATOR NOTES

An important step in challenging abortion stigma is to raise awareness about the link between personal values and experiences and the influence they have on the way we judge other people.

Use this activity as an icebreaker to raise participants' awareness about the link between religious values, experiences and stigma. You can also use it to bring different views and experiences of abortion to the surface. As the facilitator, try to create a level of safety so that participants feel free to explain their views.

The movement involved in this activity can help energize the group and deal with what can often be a heated discussion—be sure that the activity does not become too long. Prepare your statements in advance and choose up to eight that feel appropriate for the group.

This activity is unique because we have offered an adaptation that focuses on statements relating to religion and faith. This adaptation can be used with religious leaders or with groups for whom religion plays a major influence in shaping their attitudes and beliefs about abortion. These people can play a huge role in either reinforcing or reducing stigma. It is important that we work with them to explore ways that they can join the fight against abortion stigma. In carrying out this activity, it is crucial to create an environment that respects and honors the fact that each person may come to the group with a different set of religious beliefs and experiences, even within shared religious traditions. Emphasize the importance of diversity of thought and each person's right to decide which religion, values or beliefs feel true and authentic to them. All viewpoints are welcome so long as they are communicated respectfully.

For a more in-depth activity on the links between religion and abortion stigma, see Activity 3D: When religion is weaponized to fuel abortion stigma.

TIME:

45 minutes

GOALS:

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

- Articulate their feelings and views on abortion;
- Identify diverse views among participants;
- Identify the ways that religion and religious leaders can amplify and/or reduce the impact of abortion stigma in our communities;

- Describe how stigma affects individual and social views and reactions to abortion;
- Understand how people from varying religious backgrounds can have different opinions about abortion.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Use masking tape to make a long line on the floor.
- Prepare to address the question, 'Is abortion a sin?' by reviewing the information below.
- Review the statements. Choose no more than **eight** that best apply to the group.

IS ABORTION A SIN?

Before facilitating this activity, be prepared to address the question, "Is abortion a sin?" Here are some ideas to help you organize your thoughts:

Due to the wide range of interpretations of various religious texts, religious leaders, religious scholars and people of faith have different opinions about the answer to this question. We believe that people should determine for themselves how to think of abortion within their own set of religious beliefs. In doing so, it is important to respect that people of the same or different religious beliefs may disagree, but that all people deserve compassion and respect.

People of faith have abortions. But because of how vocally some religious leaders and communities oppose abortion, people of faith who have abortions often keep this a secret.

When considering for yourself how to think about abortion within your own set of religious beliefs, we encourage you to think about how you and/or your community are called to extend compassion and respect to people who might make a different decision than you would.

What we know for sure is that stigma and discrimination do not lead to fewer abortions—they simply drive abortion underground, which makes it less safe. This can lead to negative consequences for our communities, including our religious communities.

Some religious leaders and people of faith have been known to help women, girls and trans people access safe abortion care. They believe it is wrong to judge others, and they want to help people live full, healthy lives.

STATEMENTS

Pre-select up to eight statements. We strongly recommend always including statements #6 and either #11 or #12, or some version of positive support that you believe most participants will agree with. It is often powerful to see that no matter how diverse our opinions about abortion may be, many people in the room will know someone who has had an abortion. It is also helpful to end on a critical mass of supportive common ground.

Cross the line if:

1. In your faith community, you were raised to believe abortion should not be openly discussed.
2. You believe abortion is a sin.
3. You believe that someone who has had an abortion should not be allowed to enter the church/temple/mosque/place of worship.
4. Your religious/faith tradition promotes compassion for people who choose to have an abortion.
5. You feel comfortable discussing the topic of abortion in your faith community.
6. You know someone of your faith who has had an abortion.
7. You have heard a religious leader condemn people who have had abortions.
8. You have heard people who have abortions, or health workers who perform abortions, called "baby killers" by someone in your faith community.
9. According to your religion, it is acceptable to get an abortion if the pregnant person was raped.
10. According to your religion, it is acceptable to get an abortion early in a pregnancy.
11. Your faith compels you to believe that people who have had abortions should not be discriminated against.
12. Your faith compels you to believe everyone deserves access to safe, high-quality medical care, inclusive of abortion.

FACILITATION STEPS:

- 1. Introduce the activity (3 minutes):** *This activity is about exploring how our values influence the way we view and treat others. It is not meant to be about right or wrong. It is about reflecting on how we experience life from our own viewpoint and lived experiences.*
- 2. Explain the activity (3 minutes):** *Stand in a line facing the front of the room. I will read a series of statements. Take one big step forward to cross the line when a statement applies to your beliefs or experiences. There is no in-between, which means you must either stay still or take one step forward. There are no right or wrong answers. Please don't talk during the activity unless you need clarification. Remember to respect each other's opinions.*

Stand at one end of the line and give an **easy practice** statement, such as *Step forward if you have siblings*. Then ask everyone to step back to start the game.

- 3. Read the first statement (3 minutes):** Once some people have stepped forward, invite participants to observe who moved and who did not, or describe how many moved and how many stayed still. Invite participants to notice how it feels to be where they are. Ask if someone who stepped forward, and then someone who did not, wants to explain their response to the statement. If someone is the only person who did or did not move, ask what it feels like to be the only one on that side.
- 4. Continue (25 minutes):** After each statement, ask all participants to step back before you read the next statement. Repeat this until you have read all the statements.
- 5. Processing (8 minutes):** After the statements are read, ask participants to take their seats. Discuss the experience. Some discussion questions may include:
 - *How did you feel about the activity?*
 - *How do our experiences and beliefs affect the way we think about abortion?*
 - *Were there times when you felt tempted to move with the majority of the group? Did you move or not? How did that feel?*
 - *What does this activity teach us about the stigma surrounding abortion?*

6. Summarize (3 minutes):

KEY SUMMARY MESSAGES

- There are a range of experiences and beliefs around abortion in this room, just as there are in our communities. One of the first steps in addressing stigma is to have an awareness of how these experiences and beliefs develop, how they can be stigmatizing and how they can be used to judge others who may be different from us.
- We can learn to simultaneously hold true to our opinions and beliefs about abortion while respecting others' ability to hold true to theirs.
- Religion and religious leaders sometimes play a role in amplifying abortion stigma, but they can also play powerful roles in decreasing the effects of abortion stigma.

3B: LANGUAGE AND STIGMA: THINGS PEOPLE SAY

[Adapted from *Understanding and challenging HIV stigma: Toolkit for action*, by R. Kidd and S. Clay, 2003.]

FACILITATOR NOTES

The language we use is not neutral. It has power and communicates a world view, whether we are conscious of it or not. Some of our most commonly used words and phrases may be harmful to others and fuel stigma, despite our intentions. Because abortion and reproductive health are frequently stigmatized, it can be helpful to examine the hidden meanings of common terms we use when talking about women, girls and trans people, reproductive health and abortion.

In this activity, we will examine commonly used words and phrases related to reproductive health and consider how they may be rooted in stigmatizing attitudes or contribute to abortion stigma. We will explore how we can act by holding ourselves and others accountable for using accurate language—terms that are either positive or neutral—and how we can replace stigmatizing words with less stigmatizing words. The goal of this exercise is not necessarily to find the right words, but to build a consistent practice of thinking about the words we use. Effective stigma-reduction strategies are mindful of the power dynamics that our own language conveys.

TIME:

55 minutes

GOALS:

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

- Begin—or strengthen—a practice of reflecting on the impact of commonly used abortion-related words and phrases;
- Explore the role that language plays in creating and perpetuating abortion stigma;
- Identify ways in which they can begin to challenge and change both their own and others' language as a way of reducing abortion stigma.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Familiarize yourself with [How to talk about abortion: A guide to rights-based messaging](#) from International Planned Parenthood Federation, focusing on the table on pages 15-16. If you have access to a printer, print those pages so you can reference them during the activity.
- Choose three to five words/phrases below (more if you have a large group) that relate to your group, selecting those that you often hear in your context. If needed, add your own options to the list. Consider which ones will help your group

reach the goals of this activity and include some that may make participants feel uncomfortable. We have highlighted in **bold** three options that we recommend including.

- Abort a child
- Abortion is illegal
- Abortionist
- **Baby/Dead fetus/Unborn baby/Unborn child**
- Conscientious objector
- Female feticide/Gendercide/Aborting girls
- Get rid of
- Keep the baby/Keep the child
- Mother/Father/Parent
- Partial birth abortion
- Prevent abortion/Reduce the number of abortions
- **Pro-life**
- Promote abortion
- **Repeat abortion/Multiple abortion**
- Late-term abortion
- Illegal abortion, when we mean unsafe abortion (and vice versa)
- Unwanted pregnancy, when we mean unintended or unplanned pregnancy
- Write each selected phrase at the top of separate flipchart sheets and hang them around the room. On one flipchart in the front of the room, write the following questions:
 - Reflect: Where have you heard this word/phrase? How has it been used? How did you feel when you heard it?
 - How might this word/phrase contribute to abortion stigma?
 - Are there words/phrases we can use to replace this one?

FACILITATION STEPS:

1. Introduce the activity (3 minutes): *The language we use can be very powerful. Sometimes language can lift us up and encourage us, but it can also be used to stigmatize and stereotype individuals and groups. In this activity, we are going to take a closer look at the language we use to discuss abortion. Our goal is to understand how the words and phrases we hear—and may use—can contribute to abortion stigma. Once we have reflected, we'll think about how we can act.*

2. Small group discussions (15 minutes): Have participants separate into as many groups as words/phrases you have chosen using a group splitter (for example, if you have chosen four phrases, have them separate into four groups). Then explain the instructions for the activity.

To begin, please separate into small groups. Before you get started, select a person who will be the recorder for your group. Then, as a group, reflect on the word or phrase at the top of your flipchart. Use the questions written on the flipchart at the front of the room to help guide your discussion. I will let you know when to move on to the next question.

After five minutes have passed, encourage them to move on to the next question. After 10 minutes have passed, they should move on to the final question. After 15 minutes have passed, move on to Step #3.

3. Report back (10 minutes): *Please come back to the circle. Will one person from each group report back on what you discussed in your small group?*

Be sure each presenter discusses the feelings the word/phrase evokes. If they leave this part out, ask them: *Did your group discuss how this word/phrase made you feel?*

Give each group two to three minutes to report back. Use *How to talk about abortion: A guide to rights-based messaging* to help guide the conversation and fill in the gaps if anything has been left out.

4. Reflect (12 minutes): *Reflect on the words and phrases that you heard. Let's discuss as a group:*

- *What did you notice from this activity?*
- *What language made you most uncomfortable and why?*
- *What happens when language like this is used regularly?*
- *What are we learning about stigma and language?*

5. Ideas for action (12 minutes): *While reflecting on our language is essential—and we all should have a regular practice of doing so—it is important to think about what we can **do** about the existence of these words and phrases in our wider culture. Let's begin to think about action. Pair up and discuss: How can we empathetically hold ourselves and others accountable for the language we are using? The key word here is empathy. How can we challenge ourselves and others, but do so with an understanding and compassionate heart?*

After five minutes, bring the group back to the full circle and take one idea from each pair. If there is time, take questions from the group.

6. Summarize (3 minutes):

KEY SUMMARY MESSAGES

- The language we use can be very powerful. It can have a positive effect, but it can also lead to negative consequences and contribute to abortion stigma.
- We can practice thinking about the words we use and the words we hear. We can also practice challenging the words and phrases that perpetuate abortion stigma and begin to think about other words and phrases to use instead.

3C CORE: CULTURAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES: KEEP THE BEST, CHANGE THE REST!

FACILITATOR NOTES

Culture and tradition have a strong influence on our environment. Culture determines if abortion stigma thrives. The more we understand our own context, the more we can sway the attitudes and values that fuel abortion stigma.

This activity explores the broad cultural context in which abortion stigma exists. Some cultural practices and traditions worsen negative attitudes toward abortion, while others focus on the positive aspects of supporting access to safe abortion information and care. Sometimes, people believe some things should be stigmatized. For example, many cultures value women more highly if they are mothers; women are viewed as failures if they cannot—or choose not to—have children. In this context, abortion is seen as preventing motherhood, and abortion stigma reinforces gender norms about motherhood.

Cultures change over time. They are always in flux. Now that many of us get information online and through other new media sources, we're exposed to many different points of view. People in many settings are becoming aware of the need for change around issues like gender-based violence, the right to decide whether to have children, LGBTIQ rights, child marriage and education for girls. An essential part of the struggle for gender equality is realizing and protecting the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women, girls, and trans people, young and old.

As we challenge abortion stigma, we can learn lessons from other movements. The HIV epidemic has highlighted the need for access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services. Successful prevention strategies have included working with traditional leaders and cultural gatekeepers. Those strategies have helped identify appropriate ways of discussing previously taboo subjects and ensuring widespread access to accurate information.

One of this activity's final steps is for participants to give an inauguration speech as the country's leader. As the facilitator, keep this lighthearted, but also use it to focus the group on the most urgent changes that need to happen.

TIME:

1 hour 10 minutes

GOALS:

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

- Identify cultural beliefs and practices that blame and shame people and cause stigma around abortion;
- Identify cultural beliefs that can support action to stop abortion stigma.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Write “what is culture?” and “what is tradition?” on a flipchart.
- Read through these definitions of “culture” and “tradition” (below) to ensure you can explain them clearly. Then write them on flipcharts.
- Think of some examples of positive cultural changes you’ve witnessed or heard about that may help the group in the reflection. For example: an increase in the number of girls going to school; the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States; the fall of apartheid in South Africa.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Culture is a way of life. It is the sum of attitudes, customs and beliefs that distinguishes a group of people. We spread culture through our language, objects, institutions, art and more. We express it in different ways, including how we dress, what we eat and how we relate to others. Culture changes all the time.

WHAT IS TRADITION?

Traditions are the practices and beliefs that we pass down from one generation to another. Those practices and beliefs have a symbolic meaning and special significance to our culture. Traditions persist for thousands of years. They also evolve over time.

FACILITATION STEPS:

- 1. Introduce the activity (3 minutes):** *In this activity, we will explore which aspects of our culture and traditions make abortion stigma worse. We’ll also look for aspects of our culture and traditions that can support changes in attitudes about abortion and help to reduce stigma. We will start by considering the words “culture” and “tradition.”*
- 2. Culture and tradition (8 minutes):** Divide participants into two groups. Put the questions on the wall and read them out loud:
 - **Group 1:** *What is culture? Who defines our culture? What is the difference between culture and tradition?*
 - **Group 2:** *What is tradition? Where do we learn about our traditions? What is the difference between culture and tradition?*
- 3. Report back (5 minutes):** Put the definitions of “culture” and “tradition” on the wall and read them out loud. Ask each group to report back on their questions.
- 4. Reflection (9 minutes):** *Now spend a few moments reflecting silently about a positive cultural change you’ve witnessed during your lifetime. Then find a partner and share your example. Give your own example of a positive cultural change, if they need help thinking of one. Finally, take a few examples from the group.*

5. Inauguration Speech (30 minutes): Divide participants into three groups. Give the groups this task: *Imagine you have been made leader of the country for a day. You have the power to change the harmful cultural traditions and practices that fuel abortion stigma. As a group, develop a three-minute inauguration speech. Outline the cultural changes you want to see happen during your presidency. Also highlight the positive cultural practices that are helping to make abortion more acceptable. Ask the people of your country to spread these practices across the land. Finally, choose one person from your group to deliver the speech to the entire group. Make sure the rest of the group cheers in the right places!*

To help ensure high-quality, productive speeches, write the following tips on a flipchart or PowerPoint slide:

Tip #1: Think of one positive cultural change you've seen that can be used to help prompt change on the topic of abortion.

Tip #2: Identify your main "call to action" in your speech.

Tip #3: List three good reasons why people should change and/or three positive outcomes that would result from this change.

Tip #4: Address at least one counterargument and show why it is inaccurate, flawed or wrong.

Tip #5: At the end of your speech, summarize your call to action in an inspiring way. When presenting your speech, speak passionately to help make your call to action effective.

Allow 10-15 minutes for this task. Then ask each speaker to deliver their speech. After listening to all the speeches, ask the group which person they would vote for and why.

6. Processing (12 minutes): (1-2-4-All)

- Ask participants to think about what they have learned about how culture and tradition relate to abortion stigma (1 minute);
- Then ask them to pair up and share their thoughts (2 minutes);
- Ask each pair to join another pair and pick three key points to share with the full group (4 minutes);
- Ask each group to share their key points with the full circle (5 minutes).

7. **Summarize (3 minutes):** Highlight the points from the processing section, plus these key summary messages:

KEY SUMMARY MESSAGES

- Culture and tradition affect whether stigma toward abortion thrives or dies out. The more we understand our own communities and society, the more influence we can have on people's attitudes and values.
- Some people promote acceptance of abortion and women's, girls' and trans people's right to control their bodies. We can help support these attitudes and make sure acceptance of abortion—rather than stigmatization—becomes the new norm.

3D: WHEN RELIGION IS WEAPONIZED TO FUEL ABORTION STIGMA

FACILITATOR NOTES

Religion can have a powerful influence on people's beliefs and actions. When people face difficult situations, they many turn to their faith communities for support and look to religious leaders for guidance on the teachings of their faith.

Cultural beliefs around sexual and reproductive health, and particularly abortion, are often highly influenced by religion. While many faiths and religions hold a diverse range of perspectives on these issues, religion is frequently weaponized to fuel abortion stigma, patriarchy and chauvinistic nationalism. Conservative interpretations of religious texts are used to promote and perpetuate ideas of male dominance, traditional gender roles and ultimately, inequality between women and men.

Conservative and patriarchal religious interpretations promote an ideal for women as nurturers and mothers, and condemn behaviors that do not fit this ideal, including having sex for pleasure, having sex outside of marriage, and abortion. While these conservative interpretations may be the dominant voice in many contexts, we must recognize that people of faith and religious leaders have beliefs that may be more accepting. Sometimes it is hard for people to share their beliefs openly when they contradict with the dominant or more visible discourse.

While it is common to hear religious leaders condemn abortion, there are many religious leaders who have devoted their lives to helping people access safe abortion, fighting abortion stigma and providing alternative interpretations of religious texts.

This activity helps participants explore the link between religious teachings and abortion stigma. It looks at how religious leaders can play a role in creating acceptance and reducing abortion stigma. If you are looking for a more introductory-level activity related to the links between religion and abortion stigma, please see Activity 3A: Religion and Abortion: Cross the Line.

As a facilitator, make sure you understand the links between some religious beliefs and abortion stigma, and work toward establishing those links in this activity. Create an environment that respects the fact that each person may come to the group with a different set of religious beliefs and experiences. Reiterate that we are a group that values diversity of thought and respects each person's human right to decide what religion, values or beliefs feel true.

TIME:

1 hour

GOALS:

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

- Identify the links between conservative religious forces and abortion stigma;
- Understand how people sometimes use religion to judge others, particularly women and trans people;
- Identify different ways people can tackle abortion stigma in a religious context.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

- Write these five roleplay scenarios onto flipchart sheets and post them around the room.
 - A respected religious leader brings up the topic of abortion in his sermon. Instead of condemning people who get abortions, he talks about how terrible it is that members of the community are dying from unsafe abortions, and that being pro-life means supporting access to the health services that people need.
 - A women's group at a place of worship tells one of its members that she can no longer belong to the group. They say they heard that she helped another woman have an abortion and they need to protect their image.
 - A young girl becomes pregnant after being raped by her uncle. Her mother is inconsolable and approaches a trusted religious leader to seek advice on what to do. The mother is surprised when the religious leader brings up abortion as a possible option.
 - A very religious family disowns their teenage daughter when they discover she had an abortion. The father is worried about the family's honor and his relationship with the religious elders.
 - A university student realizes she is pregnant and travels to another town to get an abortion because she doesn't want to be seen in the local health clinic. When she arrives to the neighboring clinic, she is scared because she sees members of her church/temple/mosque protesting abortion outside the entrance.

FACILITATION STEPS:

- 1. Introduce the activity (2 minutes):** *Religion can have a powerful influence on people's beliefs and actions and it plays an important role in many communities. Religious leaders can unite people and they are often highly trusted members of a community. Sometimes, however, this power—along with conservative interpretations of religious texts—is used to divide us. While these conservative interpretations may be a dominant voice in many contexts, we must recognize that many people of faith and religious leaders themselves can hold beliefs that are more accepting.*

This activity examines how some religious leaders have used religious teachings to spread abortion stigma, while others work to reduce stigma against women, girls and trans people, including abortion stigma. We will explore how we can use religion to bring forth unity, love and support for people who are going through difficult times. We will start by exploring the issues through roleplay.

- 2. Roleplays (10 minutes):** Divide participants into small groups and give each group a scenario. Read the scenario out loud for each group. Ask groups to prepare a three-minute roleplay to demonstrate their scenario.
- 3. Report back (20 minutes):** Bring the group together to watch the roleplays. After each one, check participants' reactions and understanding. Ask: *What did we see in this roleplay? What effect does this reaction have on individuals and families?* Take a few responses.
- 4. Buzz and brainstorm (8 minutes):** Ask participants to discuss with the person next to them:
 - *Have you seen someone being **stigmatized** by members of your religion because of abortion?*
 - *Have you seen someone being **supported** by members of your religion during their abortion experience?*

Back in the full group, take one point on each question from each pair.

- 5. Positive counter messages and teachings (8 minutes):** *Now we're going to split into small groups. I want you to think of messages or teachings from your religion or faith practice, or another that you know of, that can help demonstrate support for abortion access or counter abortion stigma. For example, many religious faiths have teachings on love, respect and/or acceptance.*

Each person in the group is responsible for remembering one of the messages. Back in the full circle, ask each person to say one positive counter teaching or message and how it can be used to combat abortion stigma.

- 6. 1-2-4-All: Action (10 minutes):** Ask participants to discuss: *How can you imagine using these positive counter messages to counteract abortion stigma in the religious contexts you work or live in?*

7. Summarize (2 minutes):

KEY SUMMARY MESSAGES

- Many people turn to religion for support and comfort during difficult times. If we work with religious leaders to raise awareness about the importance of access to safe abortion and the dangers of unsafe abortion, they may be less likely to think or talk negatively about people who have abortions.
- Religious leaders can play an important role in teaching acceptance and love and counteracting the weaponization of religion to attack women, girls and trans people. Working with religious leaders to decrease abortion stigma is crucial. They can encourage faith communities to have open dialogue about abortion, without shame or blame. They can also help build greater understanding about the harms abortion stigma can cause.

KEY RESOURCES

[Abortion attitude transformation: A values clarification toolkit for global audiences](#) (Turner et al, 2014)

[Abortion stigma around the world: A qualitative synthesis](#) (Inroads, 2016)

[How to talk about abortion: A guide to rights-based messaging](#) (International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2015)

[Developing a scale to measure stigmatizing attitudes and beliefs about women who have abortions: Results from Ghana and Zambia](#) (Shellenberg, Hessini, and Levandowski, 2014)

[Partnership note: On faith-based organizations, local faith communities and faith leaders](#) (UNHCR, 2014)

[Faith, gender & sexuality: A toolkit](#) (Institute of Development Studies)

[Muslims' perspectives on key reproductive and sexual health issues](#) (Africa Regional Sexuality Resource Centre)

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