

CHAPTER 11: UNINTENDED PREGNANCY AND ABORTION

Abortion is a reality in every country regardless of its legal status. Out of 210 million pregnancies worldwide each year, approximately 22 percent, or 46 million, end in abortion. Where abortion is legally restricted, botched abortions are a major cause of maternal death. Young women in particular are at high risk for unintended pregnancy, have limited access to money, and are more likely than women aged 20 to 35 to seek an abortion. A significant percentage of those women who end up in the hospital with complications from unsafe abortion are young. Adolescents may be afraid to tell their parents about a pregnancy and may attempt to induce an abortion themselves or find an underground provider on their own. Such decisions are a matter of life and death. As educators, we need to ensure that adolescents are informed about unsafe abortion and the options available to them should they have an unwanted pregnancy.

It is also important for young people to explore the different moral positions and arguments regarding abortion and discover where their personal values lie. When initiating this discussion, put abortion into a human rights context. Regardless of one's personal feelings about abortion, it remains a fact that where abortion is legally restricted or not universally available, girls and women die and suffer disabling injuries trying to terminate unwanted pregnancies. Women's rights to life and to health, as well as their right to make decisions about their own bodies, must be respected and protected.

Teaching Tips

- Your approach to teaching about abortion and the content of your sessions will be significantly influenced by the actual and perceived legal status of abortion in your country, as well as by the various beliefs and experiences of your students. Even in countries where it is highly restricted, abortion is important to discuss because teenagers and adult women have abortions regardless of laws.
- In most countries abortion is a sensitive topic. Adjust the content of your sessions depending on how abortion is viewed where you live and the circumstances in which you are teaching. At a minimum, you should be able to teach facts about abortion globally and locally, the effects of different abortion laws, and the consequences of not providing safe services.
- Get detailed information about the laws in your country from a reliable source, including the circumstances under which abortion is allowed and what the restrictions are. Although abortion data are frequently unreliable and often difficult to get, gather as much existing data as you can, including methods commonly used for abortions in your country and services where adolescents can get counseling or advice.
- Make a link to previous sessions on decision making about sexual behavior and contraception as ways to prevent unintended pregnancy.
- Decide what terminology you will use before teaching. In some places, there may be confusion about such terms as "miscarriage," "abortion," "menstrual regulation," and "induced" or "spontaneous" abortion. Use the most common neutral terms that are current in your community, clarifying any confusion. The language is often value laden and judgmental.
- Be aware that participants in your sessions may have already experienced an unintended pregnancy and abortion.

Content Considerations

- Help students put abortion into context. Discuss the reasons why a woman would have an unwanted pregnancy in the first place. For example, she may not have access to contraceptive services or the quality of the services may be poor. Or she may have fears about certain methods or disagreements with her partner about limiting childbearing. Or her contraceptive method may have failed. Or she may have been raped.
- Teach about all possible options a woman or couple has when faced with an unwanted pregnancy, including carrying the pregnancy to term and keeping the baby, having an abortion, and carrying the pregnancy to term and giving the baby to someone else to bring up, whether through adoption or fostering. Explore the motivations for each choice and the consequences involved.
- Be clear that there is a link between legality and safety, but that other factors, such as the length of the pregnancy, the skills of the provider, and the type of facility play as great a role in safety as legality.
- If there are many cases of adolescents who attempt to induce an abortion where you live, learn about the consequences and emphasize the risks of self-induced abortion.
- Explore all positions that people take on abortion, but do so carefully, encouraging participants to respect each other's right to their own positions and values. Include information on ICPD and other international agreements.
- Address gender issues related to unwanted pregnancy and abortion. Help students to understand that women bear the greater burden and all of the physical risk in pregnancy, childbirth, and abortion, and ultimately will make decisions about taking those risks. Men, however, share the responsibility for their partners' pregnancies and should understand why and how to support the woman's decisions about pregnancy. Discuss the impact on families and society of high numbers of women dying from unsafe abortions.
- Do not spread or tolerate common clichés about abortion, such as "Abortion is not a method of family planning" (it isn't a method of contraception, but it can be a method of family planning), or "If abortion is legalized, women will not use contraception; they will just have abortions" (history has shown that this is not true).

SELECTED LESSON PLAN 11.1: THINKING ABOUT ABORTION

SOURCE

“Thinking About Abortion—Around the World,” by Peggy Brick and Bill Taverner. *Educating About Abortion, 2nd Ed.* ©2003 by Planned Parenthood of Greater Northern New Jersey and reprinted with permission. All rights reserved. www.ppgnnj.org

Suitable for ages 12 to 18

Summary

This solid introductory lesson presents the facts about abortion from a global perspective. The lesson humanizes abortion yet focuses on the facts, giving participants the opportunity to look at abortion as a public health issue as well as a moral issue. The lesson covers important agreements reached by governments at the ICPD in 1994 and asks participants to discuss the meaning of sexual and reproductive rights. Participants brainstorm reasons why women have abortions and compare their ideas to a list based on research. They are provided with information about the legality of abortion worldwide, which enables them to consider the effects of these laws on abortion rates and safety. Participants also learn about the comparative risk of mortality between carrying a pregnancy to term and having a legal abortion, a risk that is often disregarded. A true-false exercise debunks common misconceptions.

Teaching Notes

- When participants list the reasons why women may choose to have an abortion, address answers that blame women. If participants suggest reasons that research has refuted, offer correct information.
- At the end of step 3, the questions posed by participants are not answered or discussed. You may want to return to these questions at the end of the lesson if they remain unanswered after the true-false exercise.
- After the groups finish the Facts About Abortion Around the World worksheets, go through each statement and ask participants if they thought it was true or false and why. Give the correct information as needed.
- If you have time, have participants break into small groups and go through discussion question D in step 6. This question could also be asked about your own country rather than the world.
- Between discussion questions C and D, consider asking participants if they know your country’s laws on abortion, then provide them with any information they do not have about the legal situation. You could also ask: “Why don’t laws that limit access to abortion stop women from having abortions?” “How do laws on abortion affect poor women and rich women differently?” Note that rich women can always get a safe abortion even when it is highly restricted in their country, whereas poor women can usually get a safe abortion only when it is legally and freely available, and even then they may face restrictions.

Adapting the Lesson

- If you have problems making copies, for step 2 you could make a complete list from the participants' ideas and just add those that are missing. For the worksheets you can make displays on large paper, write them on the board beforehand, or use overheads. For the Facts About Abortion Around the World worksheet, you can read out the statements and give participants time to answer.

THINKING ABOUT ABORTION - AROUND THE WORLD

OBJECTIVES:

Participants will:

1. Discuss key facts about abortion around the world.
2. Examine the reasons women give for deciding to have an abortion.
3. Compare safe and unsafe abortion in rich and poor countries worldwide.
4. Evaluate the concept that reproductive and sexual health is a human right, a goal of the International Conference on Population and Development.

RATIONALE:

Every year 46 million women around the world have an abortion (an average of 35 out of every 1,000 women of childbearing age). In every part of the world, these women give broadly similar reasons for their decision. Unfortunately, many of these abortions are dangerous, for while abortions performed in developed nations are extremely safe, many performed in developing nations are done without adequate medical facilities or by people who lack necessary skills. In this lesson participants expand their understanding of the role of abortions worldwide by examining the facts and making hypotheses about important issues regarding abortion.

Source: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide, 1999.

MATERIALS:

- *Worksheet: REASONS WHY WOMEN MAY CHOOSE ABORTION*
- *Worksheet: SAFE AND UNSAFE ABORTION*
- *Worksheet: COMPARISONS - WHEN ABORTION IS LEGAL/ILLEGAL*
- *Worksheet: THE FACTS ABOUT ABORTION AROUND THE WORLD*

PROCEDURE:

1. Write on the board/newsprint:

“Reproductive and sexual health is a human right.”

Introduce the lesson by noting that in 1994 an International Conference on Population and Development set a goal of providing “universal access to a full range of safe and reliable family planning methods and related reproductive and sexual health services by the year 2015.” It established a “Program of Action” based on the proposition above. Ask participants what they think this statement means. Ask what such a Program of Action might include. Jot answers on the board or newsprint.

2. Explain that the goal includes access to family planning services, prenatal care, and safe abortion. The best estimates are that 46 million abortions (some safe, some unsafe) are performed throughout the world each year. Divide the group into small groups of four or five, and ask them to list as many reasons as they can, “Reasons Why Women May Choose Abortion.” After five minutes, distribute the **Worksheet: REASONS WHY WOMEN MAY CHOOSE ABORTION**. Ask groups to compare their answers to the list.

Source: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide, 1999. Note this figure translates to an average of 35 out of every 1,000 women of childbearing age every year.

Discussion Questions:

- a. Which of these reasons did your group not identify?
 - b. Which of these reasons seem most important to you?
3. Note that almost every nation permits abortion for some of these reasons and makes it illegal for other reasons. Ask participants to remain in their groups. Distribute **Worksheet: SAFE AND UNSAFE ABORTION** and **Worksheet: COMPARISONS - WHEN ABORTION IS LEGAL/ILLEGAL**.

Ask groups to examine the **Worksheets**, and write down questions raised by the statistics shown on the charts. As preparation before the groups begin, review the charts with the whole group, and elicit one sample question. For example, “Does outlawing abortion decrease the number of women who die from abortion?”
 4. After several minutes, ask each group to share one or two of their questions. Then distribute **Worksheet: THE FACTS ABOUT ABORTION AROUND THE WORLD**.

5. Ask participants to again work in their small groups to hypothesize whether each statement is true or false. If members of the group cannot agree, they are to put a question mark by the statement.

6. When all groups have completed the *Worksheet*, tell them that according to current data, **ALL** statements are **TRUE**.

Discussion Questions:

- a. Which of these facts surprised you?
- b. Why do women have abortions even when they are illegal and unsafe?
- c. Why do countries make abortion illegal?
- d. If you were hired by an international agency devoted to reducing the number of abortions worldwide, what strategies would you recommend?

Worksheet:
REASONS WHY WOMEN MAY CHOOSE ABORTION

In every part of the world, women who have had an abortion give broadly similar reasons for their decision:

To stop childbearing

- I have already had as many children as I want.
- I do not want any children.
- My contraceptive method failed.

To postpone childbearing

- My most recent child is still very young.
- I want to delay having another child.

Socioeconomic issues

- I cannot afford a baby now.
- I want to finish my education.
- I need to work full-time to support (myself or) my children.
- My children go to bed hungry almost every night.

Relationship problems

- I am having problems with my husband (or partner).
- I do not want to raise a child alone.
- I want my child to grow up with a father.
- I should be married before I have a child.

Age

- I think I am too young to be a good mother.
- My parents do not want me to have a child.
- I do not want my parents to know I am pregnant.
- I am too old to have another child.

Health

- The pregnancy will affect my health.
- I have a chronic illness.
- The fetus may be deformed.
- I am infected with HIV.

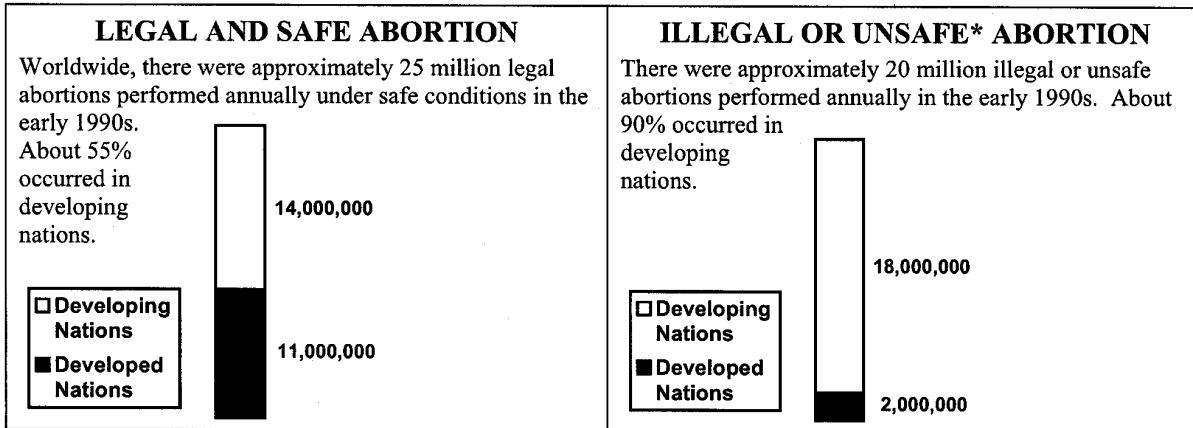
Coercion

- I have been raped.
- My father (or other male relative) made me pregnant.
- My husband (or partner or parent) insists that I have an abortion.

To be used with *Educating About Abortion, Second Edition*. Peggy Brick and Bill Taverner, Planned Parenthood of Greater Northern New Jersey, 2003.

Worksheet: SAFE AND UNSAFE ABORTIONS

OCCURRENCE OF ABORTION



* Unsafe abortion is defined as being undertaken either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking the minimal medical standards or both.

DEATH RATES FROM ABORTION

Abortion, like any medical procedure, carries medical risks, including death. The risk of death magnifies when abortion is performed under unsafe circumstances, particularly in developing nations.

	Total number of abortions in the early 1990s	Deaths from unsafe abortions	Deaths from safe and legal abortions
DEVELOPED NATIONS	13,000,000	700	500
DEVELOPING NATIONS	32,000,000	69,300	500

COMPARATIVE RISKS

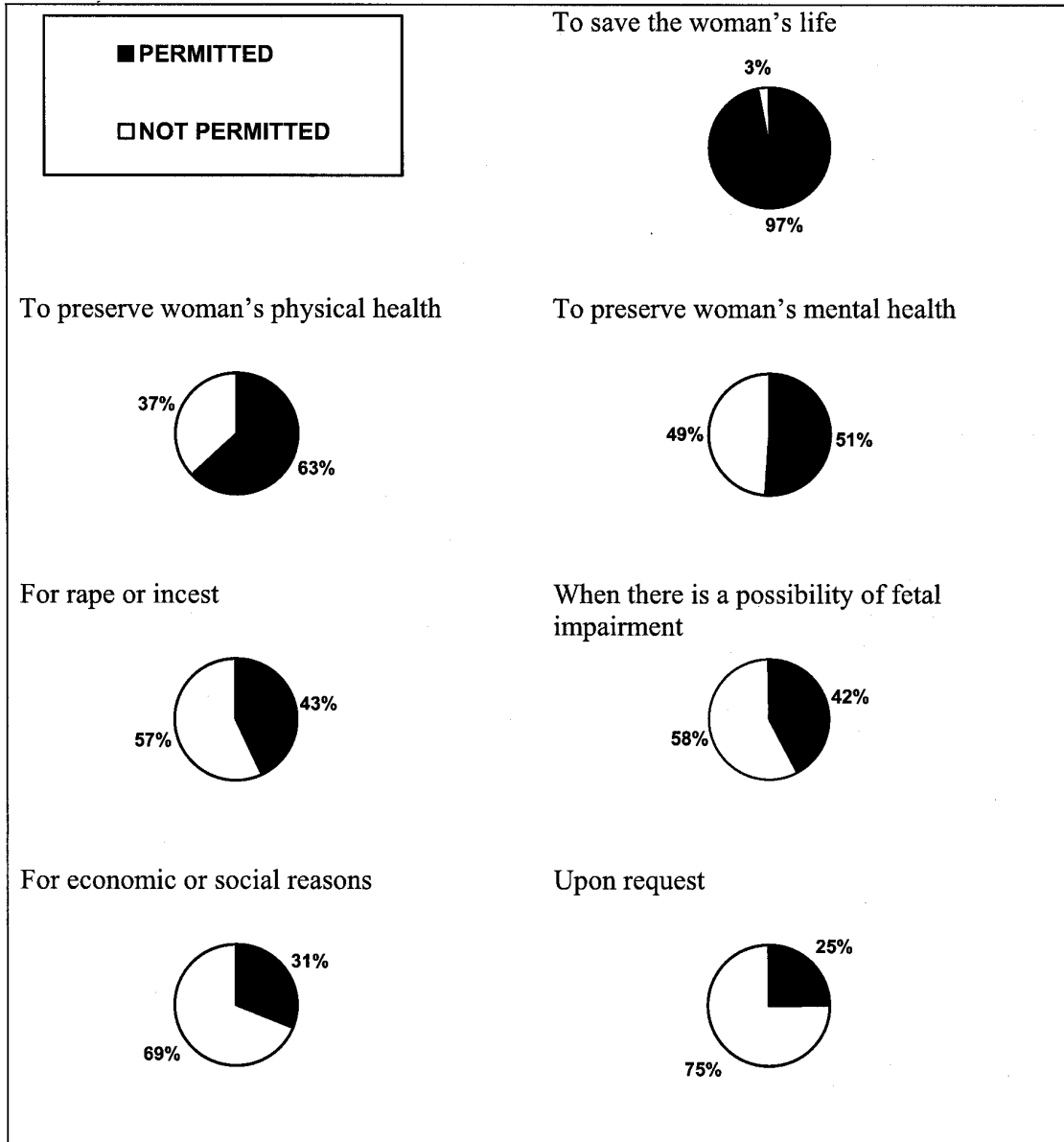
<u>Risk From:</u>	<u>Chance of Death in a Year</u>
Continuing pregnancy	1 in 10,000
Legal abortion	
Before 9 weeks	1 in 262,800
Between 9 and 12 weeks	1 in 100,100
Between 13 and 15 weeks	1 in 34,400
After 15 weeks	1 in 10,200

Sources: Hatcher, R. et. al, *Contraceptive Technology*, 17th Edition, 1998.
New York Times, June 7, 1998; Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

To be used with *Educating About Abortion, Second Edition*. Peggy Brick and Bill Taverner, Planned Parenthood of Greater Northern New Jersey, 2003.

Worksheet: COMPARISONS - WHEN ABORTION IS LEGAL/ILLEGAL

Percent of countries that permit abortion under certain circumstances



Worksheet:
THE FACTS ABOUT ABORTION AROUND THE WORLD

Directions: Based on what you've heard and read, mark each of the following statements regarding family planning worldwide T for True or F for False. The purpose of the *Worksheet* is **not** to test you, but to encourage you to think about the topic.

- _____ 1. The majority of nations permit abortion under some circumstances.
- _____ 2. About 46 million abortions are performed worldwide each year.
- _____ 3. Because women throughout the world increasingly desire smaller families, family size has fallen from an average of six children in the 1960s to less than three today.
- _____ 4. In the last 40 years, contraceptive use has increased from less than 10% of couples worldwide to 60% of couples today.
- _____ 5. Worldwide, of the 210 million pregnancies (excluding miscarriages and stillbirths) each year, about 25% are terminated by abortion.
- _____ 6. The current worldwide abortion rate implies a lifetime average of about one abortion per woman.
- _____ 7. Worldwide, more than 40% of abortions are performed illegally.
- _____ 8. The lowest abortion rates are in countries that rely on contraception and where abortion is legal under broad conditions, and services are provided without charge to the woman.
- _____ 9. Contraceptive use drives down the abortion rate.
- _____ 10. Legalization of abortion and access to abortion services do not lead to increased use of abortion for fertility control in the long run.

THE FACTS ABOUT ABORTIONS AROUND THE WORLD

Answer Sheet

All of the statements are TRUE. See below for references and more information.

- 1. TRUE.** A study by the United Nations Secretariat shows that 97% of nations permit abortion in order to save a woman's life while only 25% permit women to decide for themselves whether to have an abortion regardless of the reasons. (*New York Times*, June 7, 1998; Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.) A rapid process of liberalization occurred between 1950 and 1985 in most countries of the developed world, as a response to growing concern of health and risks to life posed by unsafe and back-room abortions. (The Alan Guttmacher Institute. Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide. New York: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1999.)
- 2. TRUE.** An estimated 46 million women around the world have abortions each year, 26 million in countries with liberal abortion laws and 20 million where abortion is restricted or prohibited by law. Despite variations in the legal status of abortion, overall rates are quite similar under both conditions - 39 and 34 abortions per 1,000 women, respectively. (The Alan Guttmacher Institute. Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide. New York: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1999.)
- 3. TRUE.** As nations have modernized and become more urbanized and as women have achieved higher levels of education and begun to work outside the home, smaller families have increasingly become the norm. (ibid.)
- 4. TRUE.** Globally, 58% of married women practice contraception. Use is higher, 65% to 80%, in developed regions, Latin America, the Caribbean East Asia; it is lower in the rest of Asia, 42%, and quite low - only 20% - in Africa where large families are still the ideal and access to birth control services poor or non-existent. (United Nations, Population Division, Levels and Trends of Contraceptive Use as Assessed in 1998. New York: UN, 1999.)
- 5. TRUE.** Worldwide, of approximately 210 million pregnancies occurring every year an estimated 38% are unplanned and 22% end in abortion. In developed countries, 49% are unplanned and 36% end in abortion; in developing countries, 36% are unplanned and 20% end in abortion. Unwanted and mistimed pregnancies occur primarily because sexually active women who do not want a child are not using an effective contraceptive method, but also because all methods have some risk of failure and methods are not always used correctly. (S.K. Henshaw, et. al, "The Incidence of Abortion Worldwide," *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 25, Supplement (S35), 1999.)

6. **TRUE.** Given the current rate of 35 abortions annually per 1,000 women age 15 - 44, over the course of 30 years (roughly the span of a woman's childbearing years), about 1,050 abortions will occur per 1,000 women. Of course, rates differ greatly in different regions and the likelihood of a woman having an abortion differs accordingly. However, whether a woman lives in a developed or developing country, her average chance of having an abortion is much the same. (The Alan Guttmacher Institute. Sharing Responsibility: Women, Society and Abortion Worldwide. New York: The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1999.)
7. **TRUE.** See chart on *Worksheet: SAFE AND UNSAFE ABORTION*. About 20 million of the 46 million abortions annually are performed illegally (about 43%). (ibid.)
8. **TRUE.** The lowest documented abortion rates are in Belgium and the Netherlands, countries that rely on contraception to maintain low fertility. In both countries, abortion services are provided without charge to the woman, and abortion is legal under broad conditions. (S.K. Henshaw, "The Incidence of Abortion Worldwide," *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 25, Supplement (S36), 1999.)
9. **TRUE.** It is common during periods of rapid fertility decline for populations to increase their use of both abortion and contraceptives to meet the desire for smaller families and to time births more exactly. Eventually, however, contraceptive use drives down the abortion rate. South Korea illustrates this pattern: Between 1970 and 1996, the total fertility rate fell from 4.5 to 1.8 lifetime births per woman, while contraceptive prevalence among married women increased from 25% to 79%. Meanwhile, estimates of the abortion rate increased from 44 per 1,000 in 1970 to a peak of 64 per 1,000 in 1981 and then fell to 20 per 1,000 by 1996. (S.K. Henshaw et al., "Recent Trends in Abortion Rates Worldwide," *Family Planning Perspectives*, 25:1, 1999.)
10. **TRUE.** Recent trends in legal abortion rates are predominately downward. The most likely reason for the decline is greater use of modern contraceptives. Rates in the former Soviet Union and in Eastern and Central Europe declined by one-fourth to one-half during a period when fertility was also declining, demonstrating that even populations with a long history of reliance on abortion can rapidly increase their use of contraception and decrease use of abortion. (Westoff, C.F. et al., Replacement of Abortion by Contraception in Three Central Asian Republics. Washington, DC: The Policy Project and Calverton, MD: Macro International, 1998.)

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SELECTED LESSON PLAN 11.2: ABORTION: TEACHING ALL SIDES

SOURCE

"Abortion: Teaching All Sides Without Taking Sides," *Filling the Gaps: Hard to Teach Topics in Sexuality Education*, Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), New York, 1998. Reprinted with permission of SIECUS. 130 West 42nd Street, Suite 350. New York, NY 10036. www.siecus.org

Suitable for ages 15 to 18

Summary

This lesson is particularly useful in places where abortion is hotly debated and provides a very good model for discussing any controversial topic without taking a position. The lesson focuses on opinions and feelings about abortion, with an emphasis on getting participants to see different points of view. Participants brainstorm what they have heard about abortion and the law and categorize the information. Small groups are given different hypothetical laws on abortion and asked to create a statement defending that law, even if they do not personally agree with it. Each group presents its case and then can rebut other groups. The lesson concludes with processing questions about the exercise and its emotional impact.

Teaching Notes

- In steps 11 and 12, you could ask participants questions to bring out the summary points, such as: "Do you think this issue can be resolved to people's satisfaction?" or "Why do you think it is useful to understand all sides of the debate?"

Adapting the Lesson

- In steps 3 to 9, substitute the word "states" with "countries."
- In step 12, ask participants how they can make their views known, and adapt the possible responses to suit your situation.

ABORTION: TEACHING ALL SIDES WITHOUT TAKING SIDES

Adapted with permission from Mary Krueger, Ph.D., Emory University

RATIONALE

This activity asks young people to think about all of the abortion issues with which they are familiar and to take a position and defend it. By having to defend a position with which they might not agree, participants will become aware of the reasoning and beliefs of other people and, hopefully, gain some understanding of positions different from their own. This exercise will also help participants think about their own values and beliefs on this controversial topic and to reaffirm them or think about altering them.

AUDIENCE

Senior high school

TIME

One class period

GOALS

To help participants:

- Recognize and understand the various positions on abortion
- Clarify their own values about abortion
- Learn to take and defend a position on a controversial topic

MATERIALS

- Prizes for the winning “state” (candy, gum)
- Newsprint and markers

PROCEDURE

Note: The lesson is more powerful when students are asked to defend positions counter to their own.

- 1 Ask participants to brainstorm a list of issues they have heard discussed in the media or elsewhere about abortion and the law.
- 2 After mentioning all issues (the facilitator may add some that the group missed), the participants will put

them into categories. Some examples of categories might include:

- *Questions of age.*
Should minors have access to abortion services?
- *Questions of consent.*
Should minors need parental consent to have access to abortion services? Should women need their partner's consent to have access to abortion services?
- *Questions of rights.*
Do women have the right to control their reproductive lives? Do fetuses have a right to life?
- *Questions about when life begins.*
Should abortions be outlawed after the first trimester? Second? Should all abortions be outlawed at conception?

3 Explain to the group that they will explore sides of the legal debate on abortion by role-playing citizens of states with different laws regarding abortion and abortion services.

4 Divide the participants into four groups. Each group goes to a corner of the room.

5 Inform the participants that each corner represents a state with different abortion laws.

The laws are as follows:

- **State A**
All first-trimester abortion is legal on request from a pregnant woman, regardless of age.
- **State B**
Pregnant women under the age of 18 need the signed permission of one or both parents in order to have an abortion.

• **State C**

Pregnant women, regardless of age, need the signed permission of the father of the pregnancy before having an abortion.

• **State D**

Abortion is illegal under any circumstances. *(Explain that although abortion is presently legal in all states, an assumption that State D exists will be made for the sake of the activity.)*

Note: Other “laws” could be designed to reflect issues identified or salient in class discussion.

6 Each group is given 10 minutes to create a three-to-five-sentence statement defending the abortion laws of their state. All members of each state must participate in writing the statement. Inform students that the state with the most convincing argument will win a prize.

7 The facilitator should stand in the middle of the room. Tell participants that each state will have the opportunity to present its argument without interruption, with all members of the state participating in the presentation.

8 At the conclusion of all four presentations, allow each state to rebut any or all of the other states. Whenever a particularly convincing rebuttal or defense

statement is made, the facilitator should take one step in the direction of that state. (Doing this usually encourages other states to scramble to refine their own arguments.)

9 When all points in the debate have been offered for rebuttal and defense, declare the “winning” state. (Allowing more than one state—or all states—to win is usually a good way to end this activity.)

10 Process the activity with some questions for the whole group:

- What was it like to defend a point of view counter to your own?
- Did this exercise challenge or reinforce your own view? If so, how?
- What did you learn from this experience regarding how and on what basis people form their opinions on controversial issues such as abortion?

11 Summarize by stating that the abortion issue will probably always be very controversial but that understanding all sides will help people be more tolerant of views different from their own, as well as more respectful of others who hold those beliefs.

12 Discuss how citizens make their views known on controversial issues such as voting, writing legislators, and calling talk shows.