

Her Story: A guided discussion about Women's abortion stories

Introduction

In society today there is large stigma when it comes to talking about abortion. Below you will see research explaining this stigma and how it is impacting society. To address this issue we have collected a variety of different stories shared by women who had abortions. All stories are real experiences women went through, but all names have been changed to protect their privacy. These women all received abortions for a variety of different reasons, but all shared one thing in common. Wanting to share their story to help de-stigmatize the topic of abortion.

Program Overview

We have created an easy-to-run yet impactful program that will help address the topic of abortion. While this can be a complicated topic to discuss this program comes with a facilitation guide, research/context, different abortion stories and a discussion guide. The goal is for this to be a resource to facilitate an impactful program in the setting of your choosing. This program can be run in youth groups, synagogue groups, community groups and any place willing to have an open non-judgemental conversation about abortion.

Research/Context

Through our research we have determined that the abortion stigma can yield to serious consequences for women's health. This stigma impacts on the available information and its accuracy. Most sources pointed to the positive effect of women sharing their abortion narratives. The challenge is overcoming the barriers to an informed and personalized discourse, we need more people to share their stories. The narratives should include among others: health practitioners, advocates and women. Therefore, we have concluded that talking about abortion is taboo and it is the social problem we plan to tackle.

Stigma surrounding the abortion is often addressed in literature dealing with abortion advocacy. Typically, when studied the stigma is examined vis-a-vis the woman who had an abortion. Abortion Stigma can be defined "as a negative attribute ascribed to women who seek to terminate a pregnancy that marks them, internally or externally, as inferior to ideals of womanhood." Additional research points to the broader groups that are affected by the stigma - specifically, abortion providers, researchers, advocates and those who provide direct support to a woman having an abortion. The stigma plays out in many different areas. The effect is near universal, general silence around the topic of abortion. Women are not encouraged to share their narratives, providers do not promote their work, supporters qualify their work.

Five reasons to explain why abortion stigmatized:

1. Abortion violates "feminine ideals" of womanhood: women are meant to be mothers
2. Attributes personhood to the fetus: and therefore abortion is murder.
3. Because of legal restrictions: criminalization of abortion.
4. Abortion is viewed as dirty: associating it with back alley's and unhealthy.
5. Anti-abortion forces have found stigmatization to be a powerful tool:

The stigmatization of abortion directly affects the public's understanding of approach to abortion. Research conducted in Ireland explored "the potential for storytelling platforms to effectively raise awareness and promote public engagement around abortion rights and advocacy." (Miche, et al., 2018) Encouraging people to talk about abortion and share their abortion narratives helps to destigmatize the topic.

NOTE - add in a few more statistics about how many abortions happen per year, percentage of what trimester they are in ect.

Facilitation Guide

This program can be run in many different ways. We have compiled the stories, research and general guide, but as the program facilitator it is up to you to figure out the best way to run this program based on your participants. There is no right or wrong way to run this program as long as it is done in a respectful and open space.

ADD IN - this is just one way this can be done based on audience ect.

Steps to running the program

1. Pick a time and place and promote the program. This can be done through directly reaching out to people, email listserv, fliers, social media ect. If you choose to use a more public platform like social media, please keep in mind there are many people on social media who are disrespectful to those who want to openly discuss this topic. We suggest only using private accounts if posting on social media.
2. Before the program starts read through the stories and discussion questions. Feel free to use all of them or pick the stories and discussion questions that feel most appropriate for the participants you are expecting.
3. At the start of the program please read the moderator guide below to set the appropriate tone and space for the program.
4. Have copies of the stories printed out. You can either assign them to people in advance or ask for volunteers in the moment to read each story out loud.
5. Depending on the size of your group break into smaller groups or stay in one group together for the discussion portion of the program.

FOR THE MODERATOR TO SHARE WITH THE GROUP AS ESTABLISHED BOUNDARIES.

Introduction: We want to welcome everyone to this space for an open conversation about abortion. Today we will be hearing a variety of abortion stories women have gone through that have all been adapted from true stories that have happened. In this room there probably are many different view points and perspectives when it comes to the topic of abortion. No matter your personal perspective we are here to share these stories and respectfully discuss this topic. In order for this program to be as successful as possible we ask you all to follow a few guidelines.

Assume Positive Intent: In this space, assume that everything said is to progress our knowledge. Nobody is trying to hurt or offend you, but it is possible, especially if misunderstandings occur. If you are unclear or even a bit caught off-guard, ask someone to clarify. Someone may say something that offends you without realizing it or intending to do so. If that happens, let's use it as an opportunity to educate each other.

Define Your Terms: Assume people don't know what you're talking about and define the terms you use. It will keep everyone on the same page and ensure that no one misunderstands you because they are hesitant to ask what certain words or names mean.

Know the Space you Take up in Conversation: Some people speak right when they have an idea or when the floor is opened for comments. Others take a moment to process before speaking. If you tend to monopolize group conversations, take a step back to allow for other voices. If you usually take a moment, push yourself to share so that we can all learn from your input.

No judgment zone: There is a possibility someone will say something you disagree with. Disagreeing as long as it is done respectfully and non-judgmentally is completely appropriate to do in this space. We want everyone to feel comfortable sharing how they feel so mind the words you use as to keep this a non-judgemental zone

Keep in Mind Cultural Differences: There are participants from all over the world attending this conference and in your group for discussion. Please keep in mind both language barriers and cultural differences during this conversation.

Political Affiliation: This program does not have an political affiliation. We understand this topic has become very politicized in today's climate. The only stance this program takes is abortions happen and we encourage people to find respectful ways to discuss abortions. We assume everyone who has agreed to attend this program is open to this conversation. While this topic can be political we encourage everyone to try to keep politics out of this conversation and focus on the topic at hand.

Stories

Discussion Questions

- Which profile stuck with you?
- Why did you decide to attend this program?
- Did you learn anything new from these stories?
- Did anything surprise you from any of the stories?
- How do you want to take what you have learned today and share with others?

- Do you think the person's partner should have a say in whether someone gets an abortion?
- Do you think there is an ethical line when it comes to having an abortion? If so where do you draw that line?
- A few of the stories include a fear of judgment, what do you think about this concern? Why are these women concerned about the opinions of their friends and family?
- How does fear of judgment impact the discourse on abortion?

Sub groups

Glossary

Additional Resources