

Body Map



To explore issues around health and sexuality, women's rights and violence against women.

Steps in the Process

- Draw the outline of a woman on the ground or on a large sheet of paper. A quick way to do this is to ask one of the participants to volunteer to lie down on the floor and draw around them. However, this may not be appropriate in some contexts and so the body can be drawn freehand.
- Start the exercise with quite a general question such as: "How does life in this community impact on your body and your health." Participants then indicate on the body map, using words, drawings or objects, the positive and negative impacts that they have experienced. For example, headaches as a result of carrying heavy water containers for long distances.
- The body map can also be used to discuss abstract notions such as qualities, skills or emotions, the participants will need to discuss how to place the cards - there will not necessarily be a correct position. For example, some may feel that a card representing fear would be best placed on the head while others might chose to place it on the stomach or heart.

Suggestions for Use

- A body map could be used to look at the various health problems associated with the different parts of the body. Participants may go on to discuss issues of prevention and cure as well as possible sources of information and help. A specific health issue may be chosen as the focus of more detailed discussion.

- Focusing on a woman's body, the group could discuss issues surrounding pregnancy. What should the woman do / not do? What should she eat? What kind of support and advice is available?
- A body map could use to explore the relationship between tax, lack of quality public services, and the violation of women's rights. See Tax body map.
- A body map could be used to explore the different qualities that participants perceive as being necessary for finding employment and draw attention to the skills and experience that they already possess.
- The group could use a body map to analyze the qualities that represent for them the ideal citizen, parent, teacher or student, for example. They may then go on to contrast this with a body map representing the reality of the situation. How different are the two body maps? How easy is it to live up to the ideal model? Is it even desirable? What help is available in each situation?
- Body maps can be used to explore the ways in which conflict or disasters have adversely impacted upon the lives of children and young people, as well as highlight the ways in which children and young people demonstrate resilience. They are also useful for describing common rights violations faced by children and young people in their daily lives
- If you rigorously document who takes part in a body map process, get consent, or ensure you've been appropriately anonymous, and photograph the end result, you can use your body maps to build an evidence base. If you can generate a sufficiently large sample and repeat the exercise over time or in different locations, then you can begin to respond to research questions such as 'how has women's relationships between tax and public services changed over time?'. Or you could triangulate evidence gathered elsewhere, for example, sense checking whether the impact of tax on violence against women has - in practice - impacted women.

Challenges

People may find it embarrassing to talk about issues relating to the body. Depending on the context and the topic under discussion it may be appropriate to divide the group into men/women and young/old so that people feel more confident to share their experiences and talk about personal issues.

Related Tools

- Tax body map - to explore the relationship between tax, lack of quality public services, and the violation of women's (or other marginalized group) rights.

References

- Reflect Mother Manual, ActionAid International, 1996, p. 176.