

ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS (AAP)

AAP in Action case study: Why it is important to take account of, give account to, and be held accountable by those whom humanitarians seek to assist

TRAINING EXERCISE | MAY 2020

This exercise is designed to be conducted as part of the training module, “Using AAP indicators in Multi-Sector Needs Assessments (MSNAs): A training module for assessment teams and enumerators.” **See Section 3: AAP in Action** in the training presentation (slides 10-14) for additional information about facilitating the exercise.

Accountability in action: Maryam’s story

You’re currently living in a small tent in a camp in a former industrial zone on the outskirts of a Greek city with your five children: Maryam (18); Amira (16); Zak (12); Sara (7) and baby Joram (18 months). You’ve been here for several months now. Both your husband and Ahmed, Maryam’s husband, are waiting in Germany for you all to join them. Life in the camp isn’t easy at all. It doesn’t feel safe and you are particularly worried about your teenage daughters – you’ve heard about several cases of rape and sexual violence. You don’t allow any of your children to go out after dark, and even during the day you don’t allow them to walk around alone. Lighting is sporadic, and night sets in early.

Maryam is pregnant. It’s hard to tell exactly how far: she didn’t show for a while, and kept it hidden for the first few months at least. She is pale and tired. She was already quite tall and thin for her age before the pregnancy, and now you worry that she isn’t getting enough good food.

One afternoon, Maryam complains of a sudden cramping pain in her abdomen. She has a small spot of blood on her skirt. Over the next hour or so, the contractions are getting closer together. You know what this is – you’ve given birth five times yourself.

There is a small portacabin health clinic staffed by doctors and nurses on site. You ask Amira to watch Zak and Sara, then hurry there carrying baby Joram in your arms and supporting Maryam who stops and doubles over in pain every few minutes. It’s a long walk at the best of times, past a mountain of uncollected rubbish and some scary looking wild dogs. There’s quite a queue at the entrance, but the young European nurse gives you a red card. Other Syrian-Kurdish refugees outside tell you that this means “urgent”.

After a while, Maryam is taken into the “red” side of the cabin and examined. She is shouting with pain by this point. The medical staff say a lot of things that you don’t understand, but their faces look worried. They call for a woman named Letya to translate. She appears and tells you that a taxi is coming and that Maryam needs to go to hospital. The taxi finally arrives but the driver refuses to come all the way to the portacabin, so the medical staff help Maryam to the entrance of the camp. The driver seems cross when he sees Maryam and exchanges words with the European nurse, but she shrugs and helps Maryam into the back seat. Baby Joram is becoming quite fractious now and needs feeding.

You arrive at the hospital. It’s all quite noisy and chaotic, and Joram is crying loudly. Maryam is taken behind a screen by several medical staff. A nurse motions for you to wait on the chairs outside with Joram. Letya is no longer with you, but you are unsure why not. The secretary motions for you to come over and speak on the phone. A translator is on the end of the line, and she tells you in Arabic that Maryam has to have a caesarian. You reply in Kurmanji that you don’t understand why a caesarian is necessary and that you have never had one yourself, but the translator doesn’t understand your reply.

Joram is howling by this point, so you take him to a quiet corner to feed. After some time, you hear crying and a nurse comes around the corner with a tiny baby wrapped in cloth. Tremendous relief. Maryam's baby is healthy. You ask for Maryam and the nurse mimes a sleeping action. You learn later that she was given a full anesthetic.

Maryam is kept in the hospital to recover. The secretary hands you the phone again: this time it's a different Arabic speaker. She explains that Maryam's aftercare will be handed over to the NGO staff in the camp's medical clinic. She will need to take some medicines, including a powder to help her go to the toilet. You explain that the toilets are quite far from your tent and that she can't go after dark, but the translator continues. She says that the stitches will need to be checked and that the NGO nurse will tell you when they should be removed.

When Maryam is finally ready to go back to the camp with the baby, you feel relieved. The new baby looks strong and healthy, and you are confident that you can help Maryam get started with breastfeeding. The clinic and hospital experiences were stressful and difficult, and you still don't understand why Maryam was given a caesarian. There are several different posters, boxes and phone numbers for feedback in the hospital waiting room in the reception centre at the camp. They all have different logos and colours. You think about giving feedback, but in the end it just seems too complicated – you have two babies in your arms now, and you just want to go back to the camp with Maryam and introduce your new family member. You are also concerned that Maryam won't receive good treatment when she attends her follow-up visits if you complain now.

Questions for discussion

1. As Maryam's mother in the story, how do you feel?
2. What could have been done differently to improve accountability to the affected people in this situation?