

Module on Violence Against Women

Background:

Girls and women often experience violence in the public sphere when they go out to study and work. They need to understand that what is passed off as eve teasing is actually sexual harassment and that they have a right to protest against this too. They often suffer silently but are not able to define all this as different forms of violence against their individuality or their independent aspirations. They think this is part of their traditions or customs and therefore it is just normal that they too have to put up with it. Though they are often very disturbed they do not know that this is something they can protest against because it is not normal and should not be justified.

They need to understand that violence is a tool that is used to subjugate girls and women and keep them under the domination of men. They need to understand that there are types of violence and that there are laws to protect women against all of these. They need to know how to address violence when they encounter it.

Objectives:

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

- Recognize different forms of gender-based violence
- Understand why most gender-based violence is prevalent in society
- Become aware of that there are laws to protect women and girls against violence
- Know whom to approach for help when faced with violence anywhere

Activity 1 – Pins and Balloons

Time	Methodology	Materials Required
Game: 15 minutes Discussion: 30 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Game- Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Pins- Balloons- Whiteboard and markers

This is a fun game which acts as ice-breaker as well as prompts further discussion about the purpose of the workshop. To begin with, the facilitator asks the participants to introduce themselves and then tells them they are about to play a game.

The facilitator then divides the participants into two groups. Each participant in Group 1 is given a balloon, which they are asked to inflate. The facilitator then tells this group that since they all took the efforts to inflate their balloons, they must ensure that the balloons are 'used well'. Then the facilitator

hands the members of the second group (Group 2) pins. The facilitator only tells the second group that they should also make use of what they have been given in the best way possible.

Then the facilitator announces that the participants have 5 minutes to use their props and blows a whistle to indicate that the time has started. For this activity to work, the facilitator must not tell the group to actually use the pins to prick the balloons. But usually this is what happens. The second group aggressively begins to burst as many balloons as possible while the first group tries to hide/save their balloons. After five minutes are over, blow the whistle again to stop the participants.

Debriefing:

In the debriefing, ask the participants to share their feelings and reflections. Some questions to prompt them can be:

- *How did participants with balloons feel when they were being chased?*
- *What was their reaction when their balloons were burst?*
- *What was the feeling of the group with the pins when they were chasing?*

The facilitator elicits responses from the participants. Typically, the participants with the pins share that they felt victorious, proud of their 'achievements', even share the number of balloons they popped! The balloon group shares that they felt scared; also hurt when their balloons are pricked.

Then the facilitator asks the participants to think about some more questions:

- *Could there have been a better use for the pins and balloons?*
- *How else could we have kept the balloons from being burst?*
- *Was bursting the balloons the 'best use' of the pins?*
- *Whose responsibility was it to keep the balloons from being burst?*

Discuss what prompted everyone to assume that the only way a pin and balloon could come together was in the act of bursting it! Ask the group with the pins if it wasn't their responsibility also to make use of the balloon. After all, the instructions were to make the best possible use of ALL items given to the participants! But the pins were used to destroy some items, not make use of them. The facilitator also elicits responses from the participants about other ways in which pins and balloons could be used – such as to decorate the room, make a sculpture out of balloons joined together, etc.

The facilitator then summarizes the discussions with the following insights, which need to be shared with the participants:

1. The pins signify power. Any group that has power in society will often make use of it to threaten, oppress, or violate another group. This game is the perfect example of this. **But it is the responsibility of those who have power** to control it, redistribute it to empower others. To use power for constructive rather than destructive purposes
2. Exerting power often takes the form of violence. The groups on whom this violence is inflicted, especially women who face different kinds of violence, feel threatened, isolated, afraid, demoralized and depressed because of it. They also have to face physical and mental pain.

3. Power is distributed unequally and arbitrarily. Some groups have more power than others. There is no 'natural' or divine or even scientific reason for this. Hence, this is not normal. Just as this group was divided into two and one group got balloons while others got pins, the one with the pins immediately felt powerful, similarly, we are given messages by society while growing up that teach whether or not we have power. Girls grow up learning that they are powerless, that men are more powerful, while boys get messages of power, how they can control girls and women.

Activity 2 – Understanding Violence on Women and Girls

Time	Methodology	Materials Required
30 minutes	Interactive discussion	Whiteboard with markers

After starting the discussion on violence and power, the facilitator asks the participants to share, in the bog group or in small sub-groups, if they have faced violence of any kind just because they were women/girls.

Following this, the facilitator discusses the different types of violence. S/he can use the experiences shared by the participants as examples of different kinds of violence. Introduce physical, sexual, economic and emotional violence. The facilitator can also give more examples.

The next part of the session is to understand WHY violence takes place on girls and women. The facilitator starts with some questions to the participants:

1. *What do you think are the reasons for different types of violence?*
2. *On who is most of the violence is directed against and who is the perpetrator?* (Facilitator makes note of this on the whiteboard)

Facilitator writes who the perpetrator and victim are in two columns against each case of violence.

This leads to the fact that girls/ women are the victims in the majority of cases of violence. A discussion on inequality (patriarchy causing it) being the root cause of violence and its many manifestations should follow, including the following points:

- How patriarchy affects the status of girls and women and makes them easy targets of violence
- How the female sex is objectified and seen as a source of entertainment or sexual fulfilment leading to sexual harassment and assault
- How the unequal status of the two sexes gives men the power to be violent against women
- How lack of opportunity, choice and decision making prevents girls and women from building their lives according to their own free will
- How violence is a means of subjugation of women and propagating the superiority of men
- How gender-based violence can be perpetrated by men of any age, caste, religion, etc and upon women of all ages, castes, religions. Need to break the myth that 'certain' men are

more likely to be violent. In reality, 80% of the cases of violence are all perpetrated by known/familiar men.

Activity 3 – Sexual Violence

Time	Methodology	Materials Required
45 minutes	Mannequin activity Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Woman's body outline- Bindis/stickers of different colours- Whiteboard with markers

The facilitator invites the participants to understand sexual harassment as the most prevalent form of gender-based violence. In order to do this, the participants are encouraged to participate in the following activity:

The participants are given the coloured stickers and shown the outline of a woman's body. They are asked to stick the stickers on any part of the body where they have personally experienced groping, unwanted touch, staring, lewd comments, or assault. Different stickers can indicate the different kinds of sexual violence – staring, touching, etc. After the participants have put the stickers, ask them to look at the outline and reflect for a moment. Usually, the entire body will be covered with stickers, most densely at the chest and pubic regions.

Following the activity, the facilitator introduces sexual harassment as the most common form of gender discrimination and violence against women which is a part of the everyday life of students and disturbs the healthy environment that should ideally exist between boys and girls. Sexual harassment ranges from staring to sexual assault. Exhibitionism, showing pornographic images, capturing unwanted photos or videos is also a form of SH. So is the commonly used term 'eve-teasing', which tends to convey that it is just harmless fun that boys indulge in and which girls are also believed to enjoy to a certain extent. It hides the serious nature of this form of harassment against women.

Here, the facilitator should emphasize that sexual harassment, and rather any form of violence against women, is anything that degrades, hurts, and insults women, takes away their control over themselves and their bodies, and is done without their consent. Violence against women is also a way to control women and exert power over them.

Akshara, in 2011 undertook a massive survey on sexual harassment and found that 95% women and girls have faced SH of some form in public places in Mumbai. This shows just how prevalent sexual harassment is even in a so-called 'safe city' such as Mumbai.

This should be followed up with a discussion on the ways in which the victim of sexual harassment is affected. Usually, a girl or woman will feel:

- Feels humiliated
- Suffers mental stress and physical trauma
- May be forced to change daily route to college

- May stop attending college
- Mobility may be restricted if parents come to know about it

Activity 4 – Dealing with VAW - Strategies

Time	Methodology	Materials Required
30 minutes	Group discussion Film/PPT screening	- Projector and sound system - Chart on Myths and Facts

After understanding violence against women, the facilitator asks the participants to discuss how we can deal with violence and reduce it. The facilitator talks briefly about the laws which enable women to seek legal recourse after facing different kinds of violence. The facilitator can also share website links or distribute handouts which cover the laws in more detail, including the steps to file a complaint.

But many girls and women refuse to go to police station and file a complaint. The reasons behind this are many. Quite often attention is diverted from the perpetrator and the victim is blamed. People might imply that the victim's clothes, time, or attitude had something to do with it.

Reasons why girls hesitate to complain about S.H. are –

- That people will not believe them
- Fear of gossip
- They do not know where to complain
- It is taken as a part of boys' natural behaviour
- They are scared their parents will control their mobility and stop them from attending college

While steps need to be taken to change public mindsets so that the culture of victim-blaming will change, at an individual level too, girls and women need to get over their fear and break the silence around violence. This can be done in the following ways:

- S.H. should be recognized and dealt with
- Awareness programs on gender equality and its benefits to both sexes should be organized in colleges
- Students should address this issue on a public platform through events
- WDCs are mandatory in all colleges and can help to sort out such issues

Finally, the facilitator can also talk about certain myths and facts pertaining to violence against women. Some common myths about sexual harassment may also be discussed and participants may also be asked to add to these. The facts given after each myth should be discussed after discussing the myth.

Myth	Fact
"Whistling is a sign of appreciation. Women should instead feel flattered or complimented"	It is a form of harassment and unwanted attention.

<i>"Girls who wear tight or short revealing clothes get sexually harassed."</i>	Even women clad in burkhas or dresses like sari and salwaar-khameez are harassed.
<i>"Only fast/sexy/loose women are harassed."</i>	Any girl or woman may be harassed just because she is a woman and men think of women as a source of entertainment or fun.
<i>"Women should not be out late nights and in dark, lonely alleys or roads."</i>	Women have an equal right to be out late or wherever they may need to go without the fear of being attacked.
<i>"Men who sexually harass are perverts or psychologically disturbed."</i>	Boys and men harass women because they can get away with it as we live in a male dominated society and girls and women are scared to protest or complain because they fear further retaliation. Absolutely normal men also think it is their right to harass women.
<i>"Not in India. Women are respected in our culture."</i>	Statistics tell us that women in India have been facing and are still facing all sorts of violence ranging from sex selective abortions, malnutrition, lack of medical care, child marriages involving sexual assault at a very young age, harassment and even burning alive for dowry, wife-beating to gang rape trafficking.
<i>"Many women make up stories of sexual harassment out of vengeance."</i>	Women hesitate to relate incidents of harassment because they feel people will point fingers at them and blame them instead of blaming the man. So it is very rare that a woman may make up a story out of vengeance.
<i>"Girls should ignore sexual harassment. It will soon go away."</i>	Sexual harassment does not go away by ignoring it. It has to be stopped by either confronting the perpetrator or complaining against him.
<i>"Men don't mean to harass. It is just time pass for them."</i>	It is the feeling of power over women that prompts men to indulge in harassment. The crime cannot be measured by the intention of the perpetrator. It is measured by the impact it has on the victim.
<i>"Boys eve-tease to attract attention and make friends with girls."</i>	Boys will never be able to befriend a girl by harassing her. It will only distance them from girls.
<i>"Girls also enjoy eve-teasing and respond positively."</i>	Girls never enjoy sexual harassment. It intrudes into their private space and makes them feel uncomfortable and insecure. They are even forced to give up their education or change their route to work and take a longer route to avoid the harassers.

Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion, the facilitator asks the participants to share one new thing they have learnt from the workshop. After the round of sharing is done, the facilitator summarizes the learnings from the workshop along with the following points.

- Do women deserve to be harassed or physically abused? Those who dare to question this subjugation, generally face further violence in the family & society. Our beliefs about self are generally influenced by the way society looks at us. We need to explore these qualities in us and try to bring about a change in ourselves. The process of self-awareness starts with changing one's own beliefs about self and also how one looks at other women.
- What is the definition of a good woman and a bad woman? Are all women who stay out late or are forced into sex work bad women? Very often women look down upon women working as prostitutes, deserted women, rape victims, women working till late at night. We need to re-examine our values.
- We need to break the silence surrounding different forms of violence.