Unlearning Gender Stereotypes

‘Hume apne aap ko check karte rehna padega, aur apni soch badalni padegi taaki hum society mea badlaav laa paye’ (We will have to keep checking ourselves and change our thinking to change the society.)

Session on Gender Stereotypes with adolescents in Gautampuri and Gurgaon

Highlights from the Session

Gautampuri
Date: 29th July 2022
Number of participants: 16 adolescents (15 girls and 1 boy)
Field Facilitators: Nidhi

After the workshop with the adolescents of Gautampuri and Gurugram which focused on self, introducing gender concepts, socialization and advocacy through poetry, the next session focused around strengthening the learnings and identifying and unlearning one’s own stereotypes.

The session started with a game based activity in which the participants were given a few statements and they had to choose whether they Agree/ Disagree with the statement followed by a discussion amongst them.

Gautampuri Key Highlights-

During the game based activity the participants led a discussion about various statements -

‘Men are better drivers than women.’ - Neha shared that recently she observed that a truck driver moved to the side and was driving rather very slowly, because he was scared of a woman driving a car. She discussed with the participants that men drive better than women. This discussion was opposed by a few of the participants, who shared that driving is actually a skill and that men and women can drive equally if they practise enough. Ranjan said ‘Aisa kuch nahi hota, jo ladke karakte hai vahi ladkiya bhi kar sakti’ (It is nothing like that, whatever men can do, women can also do the same tasks). Ranjan and Namita were convincing the rest of the participants that women can drive cars, bikes, metro, buses, autos etc. everything. Namita quoted her own example stating ‘Mai bhi toh bike chalaati hu, aur mai bahut acchi bike chalaati hu, mai practise karke behtar hogayi hu’ (I do ride a bike and after practising I have gotten better, rather I ride pretty well.)

After this statement the participants discussed ‘Women are better caregivers than men’. The participants discussed that it is not necessary that women are better caregivers. One of the participants pointed out that her father has been the sole caregiver and she believes that men can be equally good caregivers as women. Some of the participants opposed this and a few participants agreed and changed their opinions. In the next statement - ‘It’s okay for
girls to change their careers if they are getting married, because they are the pride of the family. The participants discussed that if the family wants then the girl can change their careers but a few participants disagreed with this and stated that, a lot of women are asked to leave their jobs and do jobs which gives them time at home also. They pointed out that they have always heard people say that girls should be teachers, since with that they can manage home as well as work equally well. The younger adolescents said that they have also heard such things by their relatives and families and discussed that they do not agree to this at all.

The adolescents had a participatory discussion with each other about their opinions on every statement. They tried to convince each other through the game based activity about why they agreed/disagreed on every statement. After the activity completed, the facilitator did a debrief, in which the discussion started with strengthening the learnings about Gender and Sex. The participants discussed the difference between males and females. They talked about the biological differences and revised their learnings from the previous sessions. The participants acknowledged that there are only biological differences between males and females and the rest of it is a social construct.

When it was linked to the current session there was a participatory discussion where all the statements were discussed again with the participants. The participants discussed that things like driving, caregiving are learnt by practice. Men and women can be equally good at it. Namita pointed out that ‘Hume apne aap ko check karte rehna padega, aur apni soch badalni padegi taaki hum society mea badlaav laa paye’ (We will have to keep checking ourselves and change our thinking to change the society.) The adolescents discussed their own stereotypes and discussed that they have been constantly listening to such things in films, their surroundings, schools, parents etc. that they have formed such opinions. During the discussion it was prevalent that participants felt it was a safe space to discuss their stereotypes in front of everyone and were open to learning. It is women and girl's responsibility to be safe at night. They can do this by coming on time because the world is full of crime. There was a very interesting discussion led by Ranjan on this statement, where she pointed out that on the stance of safety women and girls are not allowed to do a lot of things and are discriminated against. She said ‘Kitni ladkiyo ko naukri karne se, school jaane se, kahi bahar jaane se rokk diya jaata hai, ye kehke ki zamaana kharab hai, ladkiya safe nahi hai. Kya ye sirf humari responsibility hai apne aap ko safe rakhna. Kya society, government, police, men inn sabko kuch nahi karna?’ (So many girls are stopped from doing jobs, going to school, going outside on the stance of safety and telling them that the world is not safe for women. Is it only our responsibility to keep ourselves safe? Shouldn't society, government, police, and men also do something about it?) The participants were very moved when Ranjan pointed out that and discussed how they have always heard that women should keep themselves safe and be very careful. The discussion had taken a very serious turn and most of the participants were very introspective at this point. They were reflecting on the activity and every statement they discussed earlier. After this the facilitators did a grounding exercise with the participants to calm them down. The participants then discussed how it is their responsibility to change their own thinking first and keep checking themselves over and over again. Ranjan shared how recently when she was travelling in a metro, she saw a man with long hair and felt very awkward and discussed with her friends about how
different he looked. She shared it with the group and talked about how she should not have been discriminatory towards his looks. She discussed that it is through this session she was able to check herself. The facilitator then made the participants watch a video on Gender and sex which also talked about stereotypes. The participants watched the video very enthusiastically and discussed how their thinking has started to change. The session ended on a note where all the participants pledged

**Gurugram Key Highlights**

**Date:** 4th August 2022  
**Number of participants:** 13 adolescents (6 boys and 7 girls)  
**Field Facilitator:** Sarita Aarti

The session was conducted in a different way with the adolescents in Gurugram. They were shown a few pictures where they had to guess the gender of the person. The participants discussed how a person in the robot costume is definitely a boy, since he is wearing a belt. There were other pictures in which there was a woman with moustache and beard, to which the participants pointed out that she is a definitely a man or a transgender. The presentation continued to present the real people behind those pictures. The participants were very surprised to know the answers. This led to a discussion about Gender and Sex and revised their previous learnings.

The participants were a bit uncomfortable in speaking sex, to which the facilitator pointed if they had ever filled a form before. This helped the adolescents relate the term sex to the forms and they got very comfortable after the facilitator mentioned that. The participants revised their learnings from the previous session and workshop and had a participatory discussion busting each others’ stereotypes. Aksar pointed out that, *Mujhe pehle laga ki robot costume mea ladka hoga, kyunki robot costume toh ladke hi pehente hai:* (I felt that there might be a boy in the robot costume since earlier I thought only boys would wear robot costumes.) Yasmin stated that she thought that the person in costume had long legs, which is why she thought it might be a girl. The adolescents’ revised their learnings about Gender and Sex and Jyoti pointed out, that she felt it could be anyone behind the costume. The participants had a discussion about how they have been stereotyping people. Abdul led a discussion about how they should unlearn the stereotypes and try to check themselves as much as possible.

The facilitator then conducted a game based activity in which various Gender Statements were discussed. The participants discussed the statements in detail and talked about how they have been socialised to think in a certain way.

Sakim shared that he used to think men are better drivers, since he had always heard this from his neighbours, parents, peer groups etc. but he said that if there are only biological differences, then the rest of it is just society and the thinking. During the statement- **Boys and girls are not equal because they are biologically different,** the participants had a very long discussion that if there are just biological differences then why are girls and boys not equal. Some of the participants said that they’re not equal but the rest of the participants
were convincing them that it has nothing to do with equality. By the end of the discussion amongst the participants, all of them agreed on the same stance. It was observed that the participants led a discussion amongst themselves and had a pretty strong understanding about Gender and Sex that the could point out their stereotypes by the end of the session and openly talk about it.

Key Learnings

- It was observed that the participants led a discussion on the basis of their experiences, like a girl form Gautampuri shared that her sole caregiver has been her father and she has never felt that women can be better caregivers than men. The participants' opinions had been formed on the basis of their personal experiences, which helped them challenge each other's stereotypes by experience sharing.
- Peer to peer learning was observed amongst the participants, since a lot of participants learned from each other's experiences. When Namita from Gautampuri shared that she rides bikes and is very good at it, a lot of the participants changed their opinions on men being better drivers than women.
- It was observed that the participants felt that it was a safe space to discuss their own biases and experiences, since a lot of them opened up about how they have judged people in the past on the basis of their own stereotypes.
- The session turned very emotional, when Ranjan of Gautampuri community talked about discrimination done on the stance of safety for women and girls. The participants could relate to it and later a grounding exercise was done to calm everyone down.
- The adolescents could create the link of sex by the example of forms, which made them comfortable in saying ‘sex’ and understanding the biological differences between males and females.
- While talking about Gender Stereotypes the adolescents revised their learnings from the previous sessions and workshop, which helped them challenge and unlearn stereotypes.
- The Participatory methodology of the session helped the participants deeply challenge their stereotypes and also created a space for the participants to talk openly about what they think.

Next Steps

Now that the adolescents have deeply reflected on Gender stereotypes and their learnings on Gender and Sex has strengthened, the next step would be to conduct a workshop with the adolescents on Gender Based Violence and various forms of it.