

PROJECT REPORT

Martha Farrell
FOUNDATION



#GLOBAL GUYTALK

PREPARED BY :
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INTRODUCTION

The Martha Farrell Foundation, in collaboration with the Swedish Institute, created safe spaces for men and boys as a part of #GlobalGuyTalk, an initiative that fosters conversations among men and boys on understanding and breaking down norms and expectations of masculinity that often create an unhealthy learning, growing and working environment for them.

Through these conversations, men and boys work together in safe, empowering spaces to trace the beginnings of expectations of masculinity and how it impacts them in their daily lives, taking the first step towards unlearning or relearning their personhood outside of these expectations.

The conversations, focused on the themes of love, avoidance, ego, vulnerability, and friendship attempted to look beyond the restrictive “perpetrator lens” imposed on men and boys and placed the behaviours expected of them within the broader framework of patriarchy.

Linkages between norms and expectations of toxic masculinity and the prevalence of gender-based violence cannot be questioned. Through these conversations the effort is also to meet the larger goal of countering sexual and gender-based violence.

Held in Delhi, Haryana, and Andhra Pradesh, the conversations majorly focused on adolescent boys aged 13-18 years and men aged 19-35 years. The Foundation also organised an exhibition in partnership with the Embassy of Sweden and IM Swedish Development Partner in December 2022 as a culmination of the #GlobalGuyTalk initiative to present highlights and learnings from the 52 conversations hosted over a period of five months.

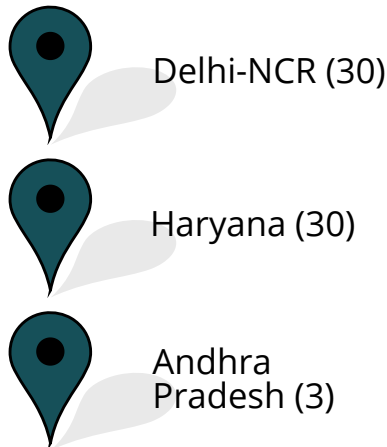
The conversations were designed to engage men and boys on their own experiences and outlooks, for meaningful, sensitive and supportive allyship. Sixty two conversations were hosted between August 2022 to January 2023.

OVERVIEW

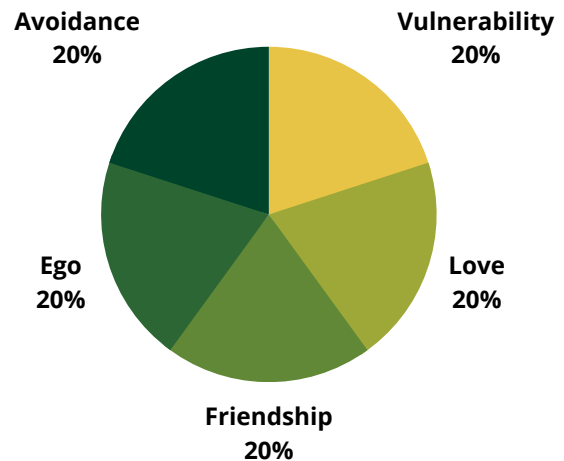
No. of Conversations

September 2022 - January 2023	
With adolescent boys aged 13 - 18 years	30
With men aged 19-35 years	33

Locations



Themes



Participant Profiles

Adolescents (12 - 18)
Government school students,
students in Industrial Training
Institutes

Men (19 - 35)
University students, university
staff, private sector and civil
society staff, informal workers

INSIGHTS & HIGHLIGHTS: MEN

On Vulnerability

- Men do not feel comfortable crying in front of their peers and family, or expressing feelings of sadness or loneliness
- There is a need for a support system in friend circles to share and discuss feelings
- A participant reflected that seeking professional help from a therapist was hard, but helped him understand and manage his emotions better
- Another participant reflected that he is unable to confront others when they hurt or upset him
- There are no platforms available to men to be vulnerable or be sad, and they're forced to cope with these emotions on their own
- There is an internalised pressure among men to appear strong in front of their families and children

If we show our problems to our family, they will get worried and ask us why we are sad. That's why we try to be happy all the time.

A participant in Panipat, Haryana

I've thought of seeking professional help but never been able to. Reaching out to friends is not an option because they won't take me seriously and will make fun of me.

A participant in Delhi

On Ego

- Men feel they are expected to be emotionally and physically strong
- A participant shared that it is very difficult for him to apologise because he grew up believing that men are always right
- Men are perceived to be protectors of the family, which puts pressure on them to be strong
- A participant reflected on how he is ridiculed because he is not as strong as other men in his community

On Friendship

- Friendships are important to men, as they feel most comfortable speaking about their feelings and opinions with other men
- Men are unable to speak as freely, or use language freely in their friendships with women

“
Sometimes I don't even recognise the emotion of embarrassment when I am with my friends, but when I go home and think about the incident, a sense of guilt overpowers me that I am unable to share with anyone

”
A participant in Delhi

“
I'm not as strong as I should be. People say boys have to be strong to protect everyone. I try, but I'm constantly taunted for being too delicate and 'like a girl'. I've begun going to the gym to become stronger.

”
A participant in Delhi

On Avoidance

- Participants shared how when they feel sad or upset, they generally distract themselves through the medium of video games or indulge in substance abuse such as smoking or drinking
- Most participants agreed on how they all tend to avoid speaking to their family members about any problems or issues they may be facing as they do not want them to worry and would rather speak to a close friend

INSIGHTS & HIGHLIGHTS: BOYS

On Friendship

- Peer pressure plays a huge role in the lives of boys
- A participant reflected that even when he knows something is wrong, he sometimes feels compelled to do it to save face in front of his friends
- A participant shared he finds it hard to confront his friends when they're in the wrong
- It is easier for boys to tell their friends that they love them online rather than in-person
- Boys felt the need for a strong friend base and support system
- They are closer to their male friends than female friends
- Boys feel if they share their feelings with girls of their schools, it may become a topic of gossip or conversation

“ At home, we were always taught that boys should not cry. When I feel sad or upset, I don't share it with anyone - my family wouldn't understand and my friends would make fun of me.

A participant in Delhi

“ When I look for someone to be in a relationship with, I look for a girl who knows how to take care of a house, manage responsibilities and who can take care of all the members of my family

A participant in Haryana

On Vulnerability

- Boys shared that it is easier to be vulnerable in front of strangers on the internet than with close friends, as anonymity acts as a shield from judgement
- They rarely share feelings with one another or cry in front of one another, even among friends and family
- A participant reflected that one reason for not crying or sharing his feelings with his family is that he did not want to worry them

On Ego

- Boys often feel compelled to compare themselves to their peers and feel inadequate and competitive, particularly in relation to physical strength
- They also find it hard to apologise but said they would forgive their friends if they ever apologised to them



“

When I'm sad I become very quiet and don't like to speak to anyone. Sometimes, I try to hurt myself.

A participant in Delhi

“

It is difficult to talk about deep feelings with my male friends because they laugh and make fun of it. One has to behave manly, otherwise they will start avoiding anyone who shares too much or is too sensitive.

A participant in Delhi

”

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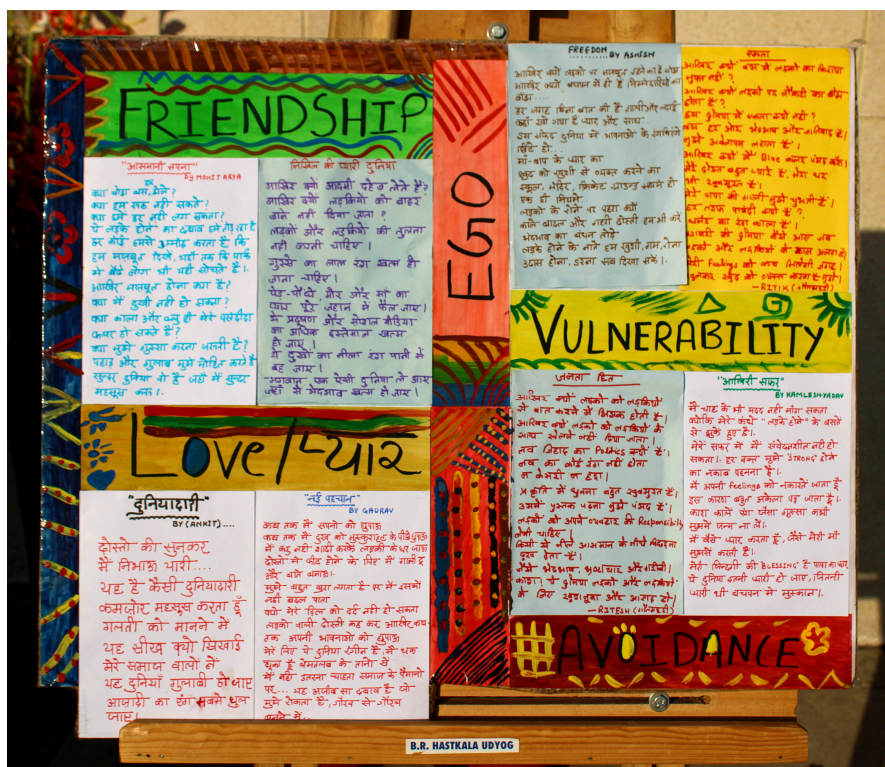
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Conversations on these subjects had rarely been initiated before and men and boys have had no such spaces to really talk about these themes and issues. *"No one has ever provided a space for us to talk about these topics. I would like to attend more sessions like these,"* a participant reflected
- There is a need for open channels of communication within family, peer circles and friends, to overcome this inability to speak the silence around these themes
- Knowing they are not alone in their feelings, knowing others are going through this as well helped participants feel more comfortable, open up more easily, and trust one another
- Repression is a common coping mechanism; across the board, participants reflected that they needed to appear strong in front of their friends and families
- Socio-cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds have impacts on men and boys' experiences as well. For instance, caste or class marginalisation furthered the sense of insecurity that men felt, impacted their self esteem. At the same time, experiences of isolation, inability to speak up and express themselves is shared among all men and boys despite differences in class, caste and social economic factors
- The need to begin having these conversations much earlier to result in more confident, sensitive and empowered men. *"I wish these conversations had happened when we were in school,"* said a participant
- Impact on mental health because of these expectations and rigid structures of masculinity norms is very high. An unnamed participant shared how he grappled with thoughts of suicide and could not reach out for help or open up easily
- The methodology of hosting the conversations was unique. Although allyship was the focus and objective of the conversation, the methodology did not adopt a perpetrator lens, which really helped men and boys to open up, introspect and share their thoughts and feelings within the focus groups

IMPACT

Exhibition:

An exhibition was hosted as a part of the project, showcasing the conversation insights and highlights in New Delhi on 14 December, 2022. With over 60 guests from government, civil society and corporate organisations in attendance, the exhibition drew active participation from boys from Delhi and Haryana in the form of poetry recitation, public speaking and a dance installation, focused entirely on the themes and issues that they spoke about in conversations. The poetry is captured below.



A video presentation on the experiences of young men and boys as participants of the #GlobalGuyTalk project was also showcased. You can find the video [here](#).



Learning to find space, voice and network:

An adolescent boy in Faridabad, Delhi NCR, shared how he had been grappling with thoughts of ending his life. As someone who was 'different' from other boys in his community, he felt alone, isolated and had no friends or avenues to express himself. After participating in the #GlobalGuyTalk conversation, he shared that this space helped him feel stronger and more able to express himself. He also found a network of friends from among other participants from the community, which helped him overcome the feeling of loneliness.

Learning to overcome my fears and take on leadership

A participant from Haryana shared that he had always believed that in a relationship, slapping and strangling his partner, if she refused to listen to him or cheated on him, was normal and expected of him.

After attending a conversation on love and relationships, he realised that these were beliefs that were taught to him, but were not necessarily correct. He began reflecting on his own beliefs, and even went on to lead conversations in his friend circle on these themes and issues.



WAY FORWARD

The #GlobalGuyTalk project initiated conversations with men and boys, on topics that are rarely spoken of among them. The focus of these conversations was to identify the ways in which masculinity norms and expectations play out in their lives, and their linkages to the challenge of gender-based violence in the larger society.

Insights and learnings from these conversations will now inform a manual on facilitating these discussions in educational systems. Advocacy with state governments will be a key aspect to enable integration of the manual into curricula.



Further, as a part of its mission to create a safe, gender-just and inclusive world for all, the Martha Farrell Foundation will continue to host conversations with men in India's formal and informal workforce, and adolescent partners to continue creating such safe spaces for conversations with men and boys.



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SUBMITTED BY MARTHA FARRELL FOUNDATION

TO

**THE EMBASSY OF SWEDEN, NEW DELHI &
IM SWEDISH DEVELOPMENT PARTNER**