



My Body My Rights

The conversation around Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights is important and gaining traction. However, it is still largely confined among the privileged English speaking urban section of society. In an attempt to make SRHR more accessible, Rangeen Khidki teamed up with Chinhari to conduct its My Body My Rights workshop with young people from rural Chhattisgarh. .

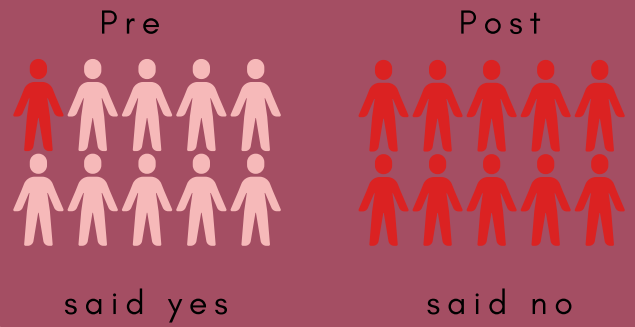


The language barrier was the most challenging aspect of this project, apart from having to conduct it online during a pandemic. This workshop was taken in Hindi, which was the first language of neither the facilitator nor the attendees. Apart from that, terms such as gender, cis-gender, non-binary etc, which we use so casually, did not have concomitant words in Hindi. Despite these obstacles the workshop was successful, in that it brought to light diverse experiences and left its participants with a deeper understanding of SRHR

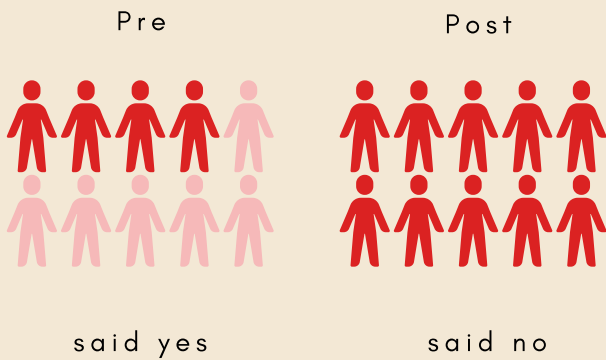


Learning Outcomes

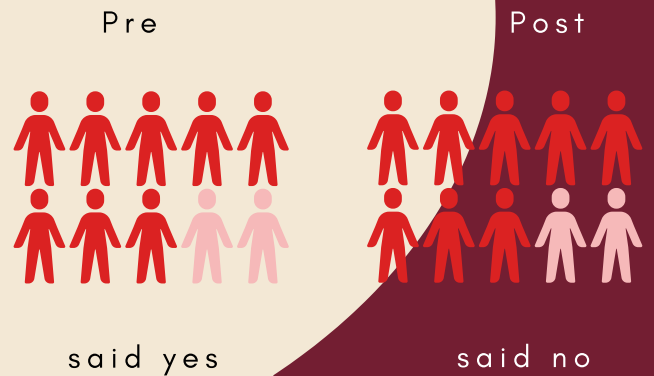
IF YOU LOVE SOMEONE, THEY CAN DEMAND SEX ANYTIME



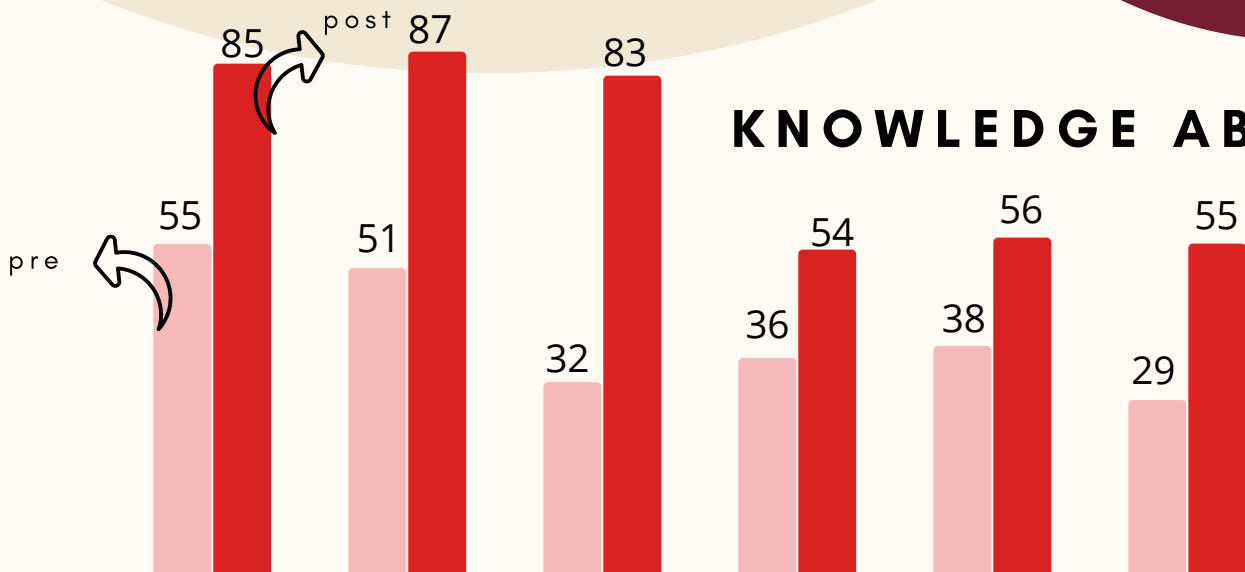
MASTURBATION IS ONLY FOR BOYS



ABORTION IS ILLEGAL



KNOWLEDGE ABOUT



reproductive anatomy



consent

pregnancy



gender identity and sexual orientation

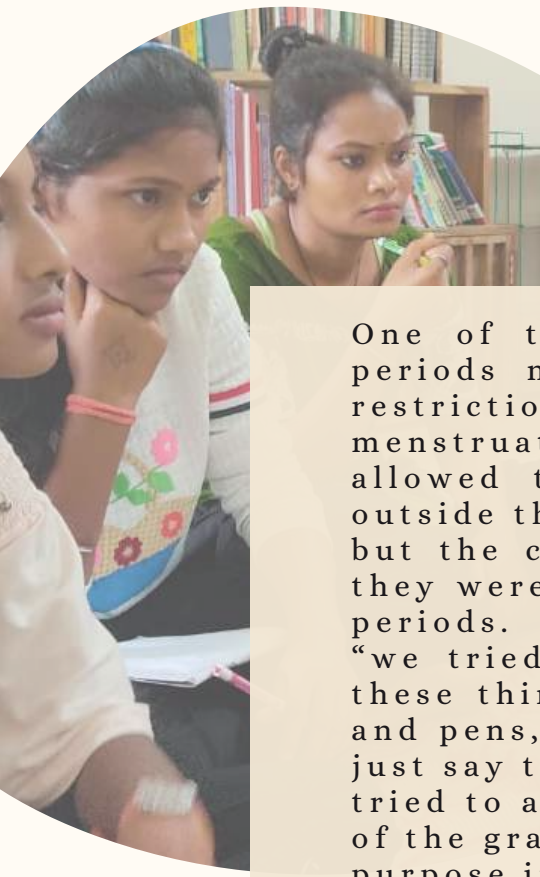
contraception



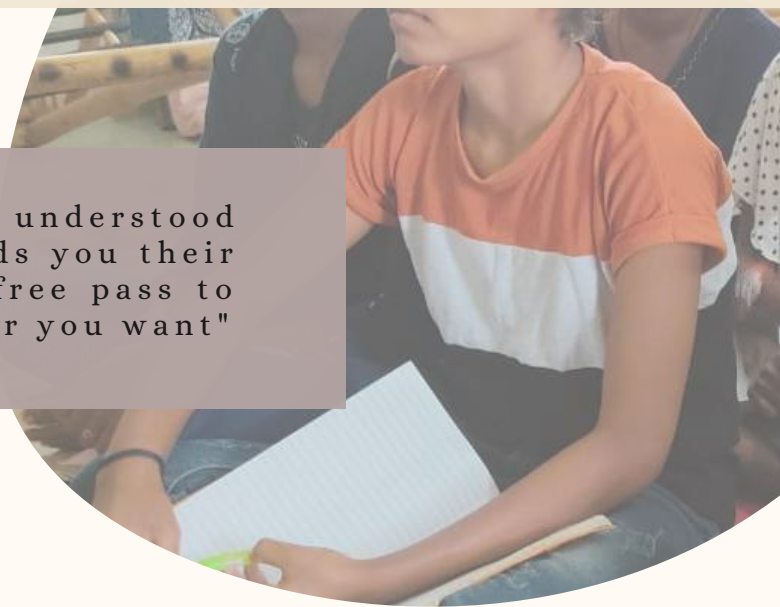
abortion

Discussion & Experiences

The workshop material is designed to not only disseminate knowledge but also encourage deliberation. Topics such as puberty, menstruation, unpaid care work, domestic and gender based violence and freedom of movement covered through the socratic method brought forward opinions and experiences which helped the group unlearn stereotypes and broaden their perspective.



One of the girls said that she had not thought about periods much before the session. She identified certain restrictions on girls in her village when they are menstruating. She says, “..until two years we were only allowed to bathe in a particular lake and had to live outside the house during periods. We never wanted to do it but the community made us”. Other girls mentioned that they weren’t allowed to cook, touch aachar or pray during periods. Why do these norms exist? Another girl said that, “we tried a lot to understand why they don’t let us do these things, we even went to them prepared with copies and pens, but never got a satisfactory answer. They would just say that this is how things have been since before”. We tried to answer these questions by putting them in context of the gradual evolution of customs which may served their purpose in the past but are irrelevant in today’s world.



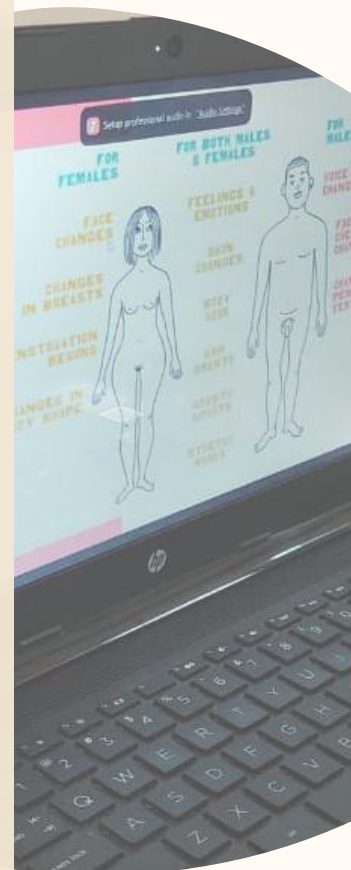
With the example of a pen, the girls understood consent - "Just because someone lends you their pen once, doesn't mean you have a free pass to use it whenever you want and however you want"

Discussion & Experiences

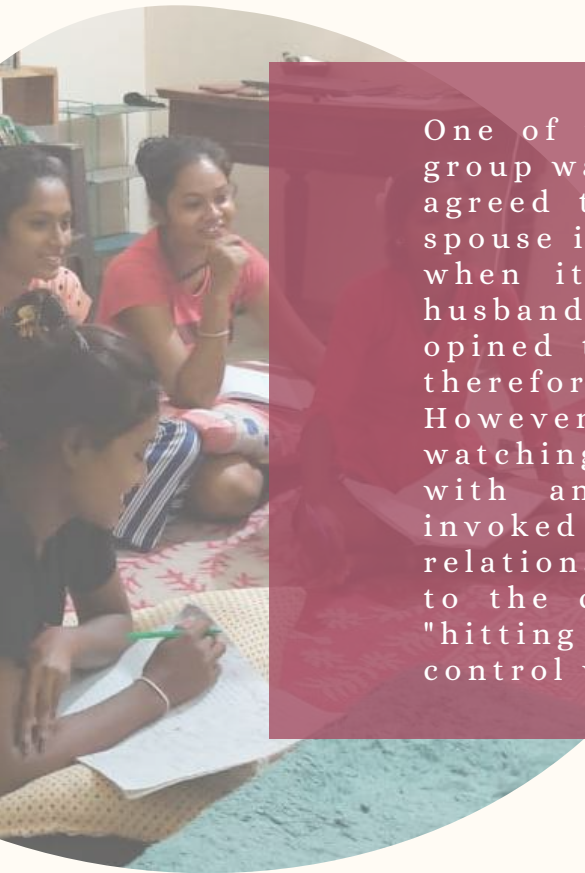


After our discussion about peer pressure and bullying, which covered topics such as trust in relationships and, exerting undue influence on others, one of the participants introspected that she exerts a lot of peer pressure. She said that she thought such pressure was for the good of her friend but now realizes that there is no space for peer pressure, even if well intentioned in a healthy relationship. The discussion about relationships left a lasting impact on Kavita. She says "there was also so much about human bonds and emotions that I did not know. Everyone wants to be in a good, loving relationship but we didn't really think about what goes into making these relationships work. I know know the importance of trust, honesty, consent, respect and communication. A healthy relationship enhances mental well-being".

The topic of gender led to conversations about differences in the socialization of male and female genders. One girl noted that she was told "not to go out at night, not to talk to boys, behave and dress a certain way". They were asked if they felt that their life would have been different had they been of a different gender. "Yes, there are meetings in the town that only boys are allowed to participate in in, boys are allowed to work outside and have fun outside", said Lalita. But, they believed that some restrictions on both men and women were essential, such as not going out at night, because the it is at night, especially for girls. Kavita said, "both boys and girls should stay inside at night, but it is easier for boys. If a girl goes out and something happens with her, everyone blames her". Responding to a situation where a girl is harassed at a coffee shop in the evening, another girl said that, " if she had not gone, she would not be harassed". Prying this line of thought further, it was highlighted that this mindset was a way of exercising control over women (a trademark of patriarchy) and limited their freedom to make choices and reaching their full potential.



Discussion & Experiences



One of the most energetic conversations with the group was about gender based violence. Some people agreed that it was okay for a husband to hit his spouse if she made a mistake. But everyone laughed when it was suggested that can a wife hit her husband if he makes a mistake! The former group opined that the wife was his "responsibility" and therefore "a little bit of" hitting was justified. However, after discussion with the group and watching the movie - "Thappad" and juxtaposing it with another popular film "Kabir Singh", they invoked our earlier conversation about healthy relationships, consent, respect and trust, and came to the conclusion that there is no such think as "hitting with love", it is only a way to exercise control which evokes obedience not love or respect.

To understand the intricacies of seemingly binary gender identities, we discussed the case of queer-trans people in some depth. The group was asked why queer-trans people beg on the street or engage in "badhai". Lalita replied, "because they are not allowed to complete their education, not given secure employment in jobs and are shunned by both their parents and society". The conversation on systemic oppression of marginalised gender identities and communities was eye-opening for many participants. A short video of Gauri Sawant, a trans woman and loving mother who adopts a child left everyone with persuasive and emotional message to advocate for dignity and rights for people of all gender identities. Different sexual orientations included in the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, demisexuality etc. also invited considerable curiosity from the group.

