



GENDER SENSITIZATION TRAINING

24th June, 2022

Regional Training Institute, IA&AD, Govt.
Of India, Kolkata.



RANGEEN
KHIDKI



Rangeen Khidki Foundation conducted a Gender Sensitization Training in the Regional Training Institute at Salt Lake in Kolkata on **24th June, 2022**. The training was conducted in-person at the CGO (Central Government Office) Complex with **22 participants** who have 7+ years of audit experience. There were **20 male and 2 female** participants hailing from diverse backgrounds.

As an icebreaker, the participants were asked to share their name and any one thing in their day or life that made them smile that day which encouraged the participants to ease out and participate freely. The session started with an engaging conversation that encouraged participants to recall the time when they first identified their gender as a man or a woman. Responses emerged from the discussion had one thing in common- every participant was conditioned to perform their gender and digression from the norm brought in consequences. As explained by one participant “I realized I am a boy when I tried to fit in my mother’s salwar suit but struggled because the entire attire fitted me differently”.

Discussions were steered towards understanding the gendered socialization process where children are encouraged to act in masculine or feminine manner to comply with their sex as male or female. All the male participants present, collectively responded to identifying themselves as masculine. For the male respondents to be a man entailed the physical attributes, sacrifices, role of breadwinner and protector of his family. The participants through collective effort engaged in decoding how the socialization process since infancy is gendered. Interestingly, one male participant stated that he “likes pink” and forwarded that not everything has to be strictly masculine as there may be feminine inclinations and can be a mixture of both traits. The participants were then invited to think if they would encourage a boy child to play খেলনা বাটি (cooking games), to which all of the participants responded that they were not comfortable in encouraging male child to play cooking games. However, some participants felt that differences in children’s activities are the marketing gimmicks of manufacturing clothing, toys and even promoting colours as gendered and hence, segregated.



Gradually, some participants eventually found themselves grappling with nature versus nurture questions. This frames a crucial aspect of the gender sensitization training as it challenges the perception of men and women being 'naturally' different since birth to be able to procreate. Instead it made the participants re-look at the existing debates of nature versus nurture and conclude that the aspect of nurture is based on societal factors. Hence, one of the participants acknowledged that gender socialization is a psychological process assisted by social aspects in which "society plays a bigger role and where nature is secondary".

The course of the session was then directed towards gender based roles. The aim of this section was to dismantle the notion that men specialize in earning while women specialize in domestic chores and care work. As the session progressed, through discussions the participants identified cooking to be a voluntary task and that it can be a matter of choice for all genders. The collaborative learning experience with the facilitators enabled the participants to understand that anyone irrespective of their gender can play the roles of other genders. It further helped the participants to understand that gender sanctioned roles are not rigid and changes should be encouraged to bring equality to all genders. As evident one participant commented, "if earning money or working is a personal choice for a woman she should be encouraged to pursue it".

The participants had varying perceptions on patriarchy and on the widely stated notion “boys don't cry”. The male participants reasoned that men are perceived to be strong which means men can be emotionally vulnerable but they are discouraged from expressing their emotions in an uninhibited manner. Eventually as the discussion deepened, participants acknowledged it is crucial for all human beings irrespective of their gender to possess qualities like- strong, methodical, logical, emotional for navigating their life without much limitations. Similarly, drawing on the question of women’s safety on streets, one participant stated that like men women too should be able to feel safe and strong when traveling alone at night.

While navigating through the concepts of patriarchy, one of the participants shared their belief that most gender-based violence cases are commonly seen in the “lower rung” of the society as these people lack the resources to utilize the protective laws. The facilitator took the opportunity, first to clarify to the participants that gender based violence is a broad spectrum within which domestic violence, intimate partner violence, structural violence, sexual violence etc are also recognized. Secondly, the facilitator added that in certain classes domestic violence when inflicted may be more visible owing to limited access to private spaces. While for other upper classes or sections of society domestic violence can erupt in close spaces which makes it non-visible owing to the shame and stigma attached to it. Hence, throughout the discussion it was recognized that the survivors of any form of gender based violence should be accorded a safe space to share their trauma and seek legal, medical redressal. Simultaneously, at individual levels, efforts should be made to bring about structural changes.

The participants were eager to unpack the issues of gender equality and gender equity. Some of them expressed that acceptance and awareness to imbibe gender equity especially to individuals who identify themselves beyond the cis-het binaries must also be included in the framework of gender equity. While navigating through the concepts of gender equality in the domestic sphere in terms of child rearing and managing domestic chores, one of the participants expressed that “undertaking responsibilities domestic or career should depend on the individual’s personal preference. Everyone must not be compartmentalized in boxes to play gender based roles”. The participants were then exploring the arena of parenting to understand if one gender has a bigger role to play than the other. As the session progressed, there were discussions/conversations where participants reflected and shared that even though at times the child’s inclination towards the mother is natural but “parenting is plurality” hence, both parents should take equal onus to rear and care for the child.



CHALLENGES

- Since, gender expectations are deep rooted in the society and manifests through the social structure, the time span of two hours posed a limitation for the gender sensitization training to engage in a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of gender issues and sexual harassment.
 - The session on Gender sensitization achieves its full potential when all the participants are able to participate and communicate without much inhibitions which would have been ideal in case of a day long session or several segments of the session spanning across a number of days. Nonetheless, most participants expressed their viewpoints and showed great zeal to break free from harmful stereotypes and behavior. However, some participants took some while to open up or in some cases were not choosing to participate.
 - Due to the time restrictions which lead to a fast paced training session, some participants grappled with the sensitivities of touch in case of sexual harassment while other participants made efforts to perceive reservation through the gender equality and by dismantling pre-conceived notions about gender biases. Even though the facilitators provided enriching responses to all of the queries, it can be viewed that the tendency to perceive gender equality and equity as a threat to men stems from years of conditioning and patriarchal privileges. Hence, it would take some time, perhaps a couple of gender sensitization training sessions to re-learn and be equal stakeholders in creating a just society.
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CONCLUSION

The insights and knowledge which were shared in the training, encouraged the participants to question the contradictory court laws that views domestic chores as unworthy and prompted the participants to perceive domestic chores as legitimate work that one does within the household, irrespective of one's gender. Nevertheless, more active participation of the two female participants would have enriched the discussion. A day long session where further topics around gender would have allowed participants to unpack their own biases better. So we'd recommend that such trainings are organized more regularly.



REFLECTIONS

— “ —
Include us (men) in the conversation as it makes us (men) feel heard and welcomed.

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— “ —
U.S abolished abortion on religious ground but despite India seen as less civilised we have better abortion laws. “আমরা তাও এগিয়ে যাচ্ছি” (we are still progressing).

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“ “
Gender Sensitization is a must in the workplace in order to reduce patriarchal stigma.

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There is still a dearth of stringent laws to protect transgender* . However society is changing as we now accept the gender-sex disconnection. But still “প্রদীপের তলায় অন্ধকার থেকে গেছে” (darkness looms under the candle).

— ” —

“ “
দুজন কে মিলে মিশে বাচ্চার দায়িত্ব নিতে হবে” (Both parents have to take equal responsibilities of raising a child).
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