

Engendering Workplaces – Training Workshop with Employees of American India Foundation (AIF)

Date: May 15-18, 2017

Venue: Hotel Magaji Orchid, Bengaluru

40 employees from the Karnataka regional team of American India Foundation (AIF) participated in a training workshop on engendering workplaces from May 15-16, 2017, which was conducted by trainers from Martha Farrell Foundation and PRIA. The objectives of the workshop were as follows:

- To sensitize about gender norms and inequality in a patriarchal society
- To understand how gender inequality affects the workplace and often manifests in the form of sexual harassment at the workplace
- To build awareness about the Anti-Sexual Harassment Committee (ASH) of AIF and Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.

Expectations and Fears:

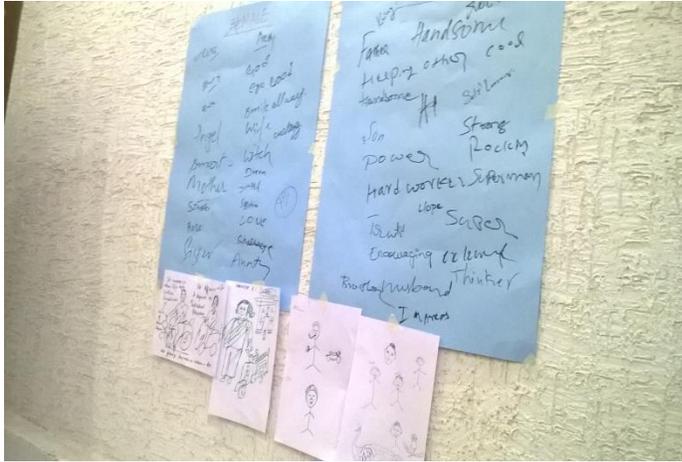
The workshop started with a round of introduction, after which each participant was asked to state one fear and one expectation from the workshop. The exercise was intended to understand what the participants were expecting to learn from this workshop and what were the factors constraining them from doing so.

Expectation: “How to stop sexual harassment at workplace”, “know more about ASH”, “how to conduct oneself at the workplace”, “how to bring this to the schools that we work with”, were some of the expectations stated by the participants.

Fear: “Not comfortable talking about my personal life”, “talking freely in front of others”, “fear of losing relationships”, were some of the fears stated by the participants.

Word Relay – Understanding Sex and Gender:

The participants were divided in two teams called “Male” and “Female”. Each team member wrote down a noun/adjective/verb describing the name of their team and passed the baton (a marker) to the next team member to write another word. The team with the maximum number of words won the game.



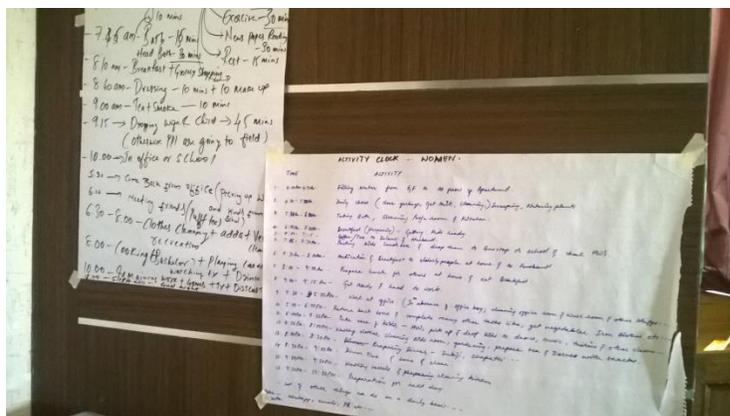
Words Associated with “Female”:

- Cute
- Beauty
- Pretty
- Mother
- Love
- Smile
- Simple
- Ego
- Angel

Word Associated with “Male”:

- Father
- Handsome
- Rock star
- Power
- Hardworking
- Strong
- Thinker
- Superman

The names of two lists were interchanged, where the “Male” list was called “Female” and the “Female” list was called “Male”. Then all the words on the two lists were deconstructed to understand how each word corresponds to a certain gender norm/role set by the society and if these words are freed from their gendered connotations, then any of them can be used to describe both male and female. The trainer explained that while our gender roles our contextual and can vary, our biological sex always remains the same.



Gender History:

The participants were asked to fill a gender history sheet, where they explained that how at every stage of their lives (childhood, teenage, adulthood, post-marriage), they faced the pressure of confirming to gender roles. Then the participants presented their gender histories through role plays, poems, music and drawings.



- *One group of participants presented a role play on how a boy and a girl have access to unequal resources from their childhood to adulthood (beginning from their own families).*

- *Another group sang a folk song about a brother inviting his sister at his wedding but his sister refuses the invitation since she is burdened with innumerable household chores.*

- *Women participants wrote and presented a poem on child sexual abuse.*
- *A group of participants made a drawing on how certain dresses, lifestyles, hairstyles etc. are also gendered.*



Change in Everyday Lives:

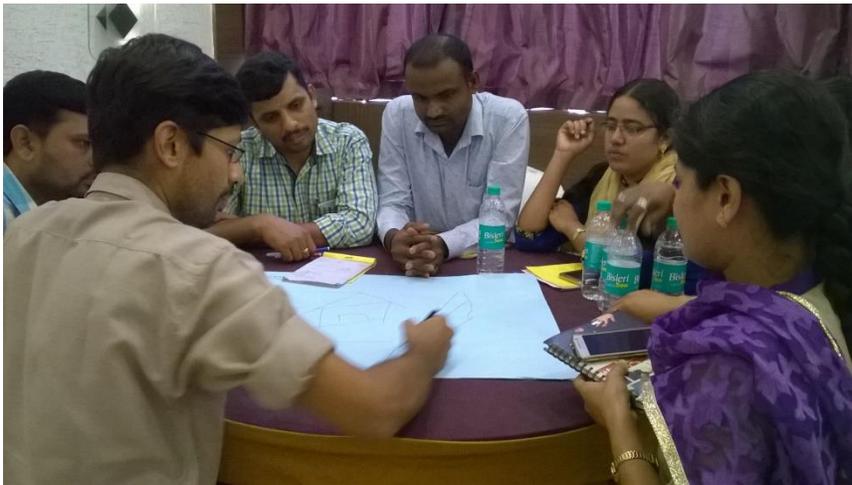
The participants were asked to share one practical change that they would like to bring in their everyday life, which will help them in altering unequal gendered power relationships. Some of them were as follows:

- Some of the men participants shared that they would now share the responsibility of household chores and caregiving duties with their wives, mothers and sisters.
- A woman participant will question her family about taboos and shame associated with menstruation.
- Another woman participant spoke about her history of depression, how she had taken her husband and his support for granted and had reached a stage of complacency. She expressed that she has realized the importance of self-love, how she needs to become more responsible towards herself and work towards her own happiness.
- A Muslim woman participant spoke about questioning the practice of burkha.

- Men participants also considered themselves responsible for sharing caregiving responsibilities in the office and eliminating sexual division of labour at the workplace.

From Home to Workplace:

After understanding how gender inequality affects our families and personal lives, the workshop focused on how the same gender inequality manifests at our workplace, leading to sexual harassment at the workplace. The participants drew their workplaces to understand that any space (beyond the office space), which is directly or indirectly related to our work responsibilities or our work relationships constitutes a workplace.



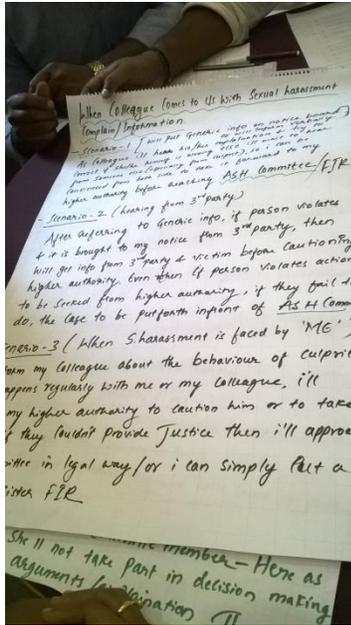
The participants drawing their workplace to show how the office space, the schools, the community spaces or the places that they travel to, constitute their workplace

Sexual Harassment at Workplace:

After understanding what constitutes a workplace, the participants broke down the two words “harassment” and “sexual”, to understand what all is included in sexual harassment at the workplace. It can be:

- Physical (touching, caressing, stroking, patting etc.)
- Verbal (speech, songs, whistles, double-meaning words etc.)
- Non-verbal (gestures, signs, body language, actions, winking, staring etc.)
- Visual (showing pornographic material, videos, photographs, email, messages etc.)

Participants divided into groups to describe and present on how sexual harassment at workplace can be addressed and prevented and what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behavior at the workplace. The trainer informed and explained about the powers, rights and responsibilities of every employee and the ASH committee for preventing sexual harassment at the workplace.



- Participants presented on what they should do if their colleague informs them about the sexual harassment he/she has been facing at the workplace.
- What is appropriate behavior at the workplace? How should co-workers make each other feel comfortable? Participants also discussed and presented on this.
- Participants were also able to question their prejudices and misconceptions related to sexual harassment at the workplace that this form of violence is an expression of power and not a result of someone's dress, behavior or lifestyle.
- The group discussions and presentations also discussed and understood the various forms of redressal that are available to an employee who faces sexual harassment at the workplace.

Learning from the Workshop:

The participants shared their learning from the workshop. Some of them are as follows:

- “Comfort level is increasing”
- “Encouraged to dialogue with family, colleagues and friends”
- “We will speak to teachers and students that we work with on sexual harassment at workplace and implement the act at the schools”
- “I am more aware colleague and a man”
- “Sexual relationships should be consensual and not coerced”
- “Change at a personal level before any other change”
- “Talk about menstruation and sex education in schools that we work with”
- “We should also reach out to schools for differently-abled and make them aware about sexual harassment at workplace”