

The 4th Youth Advocacy Institute



Asia Safe Abortion Partnership

7th -10th September 2015

Venue: Mirage Hotel, Colombo, Sri Lanka



Objectives of the Institute

1. To create a community of trained and sensitized youth champions who have an understanding of access to safe abortion as a gender and sexual and reproductive rights, as well as human rights issue.
2. To facilitate the utilization of social media and other community level networking and communication by the youth champions through capacity building and ongoing mentoring.
3. To support the ongoing engagement of the youth champions, within and outside their community to ensure implementation of the above strategies in order to advocate effectively for improved access to safe abortion services, including medical abortion.

The alumni will be facilitated to emerge as a community with a strong voice on this discourse at local, national and regional levels and to engage with the issues on an ongoing basis through the online network as well as through participation in relevant meetings.

DAY 1

The Youth Advocacy Institute 2015 began with an introduction round, allowing participants from twelve countries across Asia-Pacific to get to know one another. We had participants from Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

The group established ground rules for the workshop that included punctuality, confidentiality, respect for each other's opinions and participating.

Session 1: Understanding Gender and Patriarchy and its linkages with safe abortion issues

Facilitator: Manisha Gupte, founder trustee of MASUM



Manisha Gupte initiated a discussion on gender by trying to assess the level of understanding of gender and biological sex among the participants. She asked the participants about how we as a society determine the difference between boys and girls at different life stages. Participants discussed how social attributes of gender, such as the length of one's hair, are not visible from birth but are still considered to be natural and biological. This social conditioning results in the perpetuation of certain gender myths such as "Women are patient, Men don't cry" among many others.

She then led a discussion on the hypocrisy of GENDER constructs. "When it's unpaid, laborious, unappreciated – it's women's work. When it comes from the private sphere into the public – gets recognition, is paid and appreciated – it becomes men's work." Example given was of women being expected to cook at home but most of the high profile Chefs are men.

She then used this discussion to introduce the idea of how gender conditioning influences reproductive health issues including the use of contraceptives. She asked participants to consider how even though men are actually more "linked to reproduction" because they release sperm each time they have sex and can therefore cause a pregnancy, yet, most contraceptives are geared towards women instead !

So, what is wrong with these gender roles? Participants discussed how gender roles discriminate against some groups, give privileges to some and not others, create risks for certain persons, one gets to choose and give roles to others based on physical traits not on their desires, capabilities etc. They discussed what happens when men and women don't conform to gender roles and expectations and they are discriminated against. A participant from Myanmar shared that in her country girls are required to have higher marks to enter medicine – because there is a perceived concern for their safety due to late working hours. (Although there is no logical connection between the marks and their safety).

The facilitator also introduced the concept of 'heteronormativity' and how it starts from childhood, when we're given dolls to play with as girls and given sports equipment to play with as boys. These same ideas and expectations come into marriage aspirations. The participant from Afghanistan shared that when young girls play with dolls they go through all the stages of growth until the doll gets married and then the game ends.

"This shows the mentality that life is over after marriage and there's no more story left in the doll's life." – Suleiman, Afghanistan, Youth Champion

Patriarchy: 'Rule of the fathers:

Manisha Gupte asked the group to share examples of how conforming to the rules of patriarchy results in rewards and how one's position grows and how non-confirmation is punishable. She explained how women's reproduction is controlled in order to ensure pure lines of 'blood' passed through generations of men. And this control over women's reproduction is done through controlling their sexuality. The group then looked at various

agents of patriarchy that perpetuate this control over women's sexuality, reproductive rights and right to abortion in particular.

Gender stereotyping in mass media

Participants examined mainstream ads and looked at how media is a reflection of social norms and reinforces certain gender stereotype. There was a discussion on male and female gender stereotypes in the media promoted through ads and participants shared examples from their own countries.

“Media takes products such as shampoo sachets to the farthest villages, but information on abortion, reproductive health doesn't reach these corners.” – Manisha Gupte

Session 2: Human rights, sexual and reproductive rights.

Facilitator: Manisha Gupte, founder trustee of MASUM

Right or Need: who gets to decide: Manisha asked the group to consider what are our basic human needs and how these become rights. Participants enquired into how the market influences wants and creates demands.

“If needs become rights then only we can lobby or advocate for them to be provided. If they are just needs then we're dependent on others to grant us these needs and these aren't legally enforceable.”

She encouraged the group to always analyze the needs based approach versus rights based approach and in the case of safe abortion, to always give the decision making power to the woman.

“Difference, disadvantage, disparity = discrimination”

The group then discussed the significance of the paradigm shift at the ICPD, from demographic goals to individual reproductive rights. They learned the history of how reproductive rights emerged within the global discussion on population and development.

“Human rights are universal, equally important and they're interdependent”.

Session 3: Values Clarification and Case Studies

Facilitator: Manisha Gupte, founder trustee of MASUM & Suchitra Dalvie, ASAP Coordinator.
Peer Trainer: Sarah Jane Biton

Notes: Participants had to choose 'Agree' or 'Disagree' with certain statements which required one to make a value judgement such as 'can sex workers be raped', 'does a woman who chooses an abortion violate the right to life of a fetus', 'if the husband wants to keep the fetus, does the woman still have a right to abort it' etc.



The facilitator then explained how we arrive at our values and how these change over time.

“No one was born as safe abortion advocates, we’re all subjected to social norms around us – it’s up to us to decide what our values are”.

She invited participants to question to dominant notion or social norms and arrive at their own set of values related to sexual and reproductive rights.

Power walk and intersectionalities

Facilitator: Sarah Soysa, Sarah Jane

Participants were given an identity that denoted varied levels of class, status, access to information etc. People saw the levels of privilege given to certain groups and a discussion on how this impacts who has access to information on safe abortion.

Film screening: Day one concluded with the screening of Dirty Dancing, a mainstream Hollywood film that highlights the issues of class, education, stigma, sexuality and unsafe abortion.

Participants were then invited to a dinner party so as to get to know each other better.

Day Two

9:00 – 9:30: Recap and review (Nabeela, Danica)

Participants liked the power walk and the values clarification sessions the most. They were challenged to think on a deeper level, and this led to some interesting discussions.

Session 4: Basic updates on reproduction, contraception, safe abortion.

Lead Trainer: Suchitra Dalvie



Notes: Participants were asked to draw male and female reproductive organs (internal and external) based on their own understanding. A group discussion followed on the female anatomy, the clitoris and genital mutilation, the hymen and the patriarchal emphasis on an intact hymen among brides. The facilitator explained how pregnancy occurs, the process of how an egg is fertilized, emergency contraceptive pills and IUDs. Participants were able to ask questions and seek clarifications on certain myths and misconceptions around contraception and pregnancy. They learned how to explain safe abortion techniques and related concerns in simple language to laypersons.



“Chance of getting pregnant is about 240 times during the reproductive years of a woman (18 – 38 years). Can you consider the number of possible unwanted pregnancies a woman might face?”

The group then looked at the male reproductive system and the steps involved in using a condom. Participants discussed how gender discrimination is prevalent in the use of contraceptives. The example of vasectomy was used and participants discussed how although the process was so simple and safe compared to the procedure in women, the number of men undertaking this procedure is barely 10% of female sterilization which is often so widely promoted especially in Asian countries.

Shreejana Bajracharya, our Youth Champion from Nepal led a session on understanding reproduction and contraception in the context of safe abortion. Participants played out different roles including that of a sperm, IUD, ovum, condom etc. They enacted their roles

within a large illustrated uterus and presented scenarios including how fertilization takes place, how a condom works and how an IUD prevents fertilization.



Papaya Workshop: Shirley Jayasekara, Medical Student from University of New South Wales, Australia, undertook a hands on training session using a handheld ultrasound machine to demonstrate the use of this technology. She also co-facilitated for demonstrating the use of manual vacuum aspiration using papayas as uterine models. The papaya workshop allowed participants to use technology and learn method related to the safe abortion procedure that are otherwise privy to health care professionals only. This helped the participants feel more empowered as a result.





Session 5: Abortion laws in Asia.

Facilitator: Shilpa Shroff, Sarah Soysa, Sarah Jane



In order to help the participants understand the variations in abortion laws across the Asia-Pacific, they were divided into country-specific groups and asked to share any laws related

to women's rights and reproductive health and safe abortion from their own countries. Participants also shared about contraceptive access in their countries.

A participant from China talked about the one child policy and how this influences those accessing abortion. Another shared how contraceptive pills are very hard to purchase in Burma and how the government and police enforced a ban on emergency contraceptives during a national festival in an effort to curb the young people's sexual activity. A Youth Champion from the Philippines shared her experience of running the ASK-MADS hotline and the backlash they receive for being RH activists, including being blogged about by pro-life activists. Participants from Bangladesh shared how they use Menstrual Regulation to circumvent anti-abortion laws and are able to provide services despite the restrictive in-country environment due to religious or cultural sentiments. A participant from Afghanistan shared how the country's penal code penalizes the woman or health care provider monetarily (through fines) if they seek or provide abortions. It's considered a crime and is permitted only if the mother's life is at risk.

The group then identified and discussed about traditional gatekeepers -- such as partners, parents, health care providers -- and how they influence those who access abortions as well as the implementation of laws. Gatekeepers interpret the law from their own biases and this restricts access to abortion services.

Group Exercise

Participants were asked to play the role of decisions makers on abortion laws and had to



choose or rank cases where they would grant or not grant the women access to safe abortions. The discussion brought out personal biases, perspectives and showed how easily

women's rights could be reduced to 'needs' that others get to prioritize or decide on. Participants shared the process they went through to arrive at their choices and how these were coloured by their own perspectives.

"It felt powerful", said one, "to make decisions for others". The facilitator emphasized how important it is to give decision-making power back to women and let them decide.

Participants watched two videos made by ASAP Youth Champions from Sri Lanka and the Philippines on women's experiences of having an abortion:

[It's her Right - To Mr. President](#) and [Tainted](#)

Both films depict how abortion stigma affects those seeking to terminate unwanted pregnancies; their health and dignity. The group shared how women who undergo abortions feel 'guilty' after the process on account of this stigma and attribute any misfortune that might follow the abortion to punishment by God. This highlights how religious sentiments promote abortion myths and have a psychological impact on women who've had or want to have abortions.

Session 6: What does it mean to be prochoice?

Facilitated by Suchitra Dalvie



Day 2 concluded with a thought provoking session on who makes decisions for women that impact the amount of control they have over their own bodies? Are choices made in a vacuum? Or are there external pressures that influence the choices a woman makes about terminating a pregnancy? Governments, for military and economic reasons, control population and dictate how many children a family should have.

"You stand by women's right to make choices for themselves"

Participants discussed their own role as pro-choice activists and change agents who challenge the status quo/ norm. They learned about the 'Advocacy cycle': identify the problem, gather information, make a decision, plan, take action, evaluate. They also learned

how to challenge the status quo by using 'Subversion' and turning issues upside down or looking at issues from a different angle.

Day Three – Wed 9th Dec 2015

YAR Day One

YAI volunteers Neelam and Suleiman presented a recap of the previous day's sessions and YAR participants were given a warm welcome.

Session 8: Interpersonal communication

Facilitated by Dakshitha Wickramaratne

SAY WHAT? Chinese whispers and the communication loop



Notes:

Participants played a round of Chinese whispers and quickly realized how easily a message can be distorted within a small group of recipients and that what the sender wants to convey is rarely received in its entirety. There was a discussion post this activity, on the different types of messages – internal and external, importance of receiving feedback, various mediums etc.

Session 9: Communicating for feminist movement building

Nadine Moawad, APC

What is the Internet? Is it virtual? It is a cloud in space?

Although we use the Internet prolifically, few of us know what it actually is. Nadine Moawad, a feminist activist working on issues related to the Internet and rights, gave participants an overview of the Internet and how it evolved. To illustrate how the Internet is

actually something physical and not simply virtual, she gave an example of how in Armenia a goat ate the country's Internet cable, and it cut off the country's Internet for 7 hours. She asked participants to analyze how the Internet runs, who owns it or makes decisions about usage and the politics behind it.

What constitutes harmful content online?

Participants were then divided into groups and asked to discuss what they think is harmful Internet content and should be banned. Groups came up with several points including nonconsensual sexual content, portraying sexuality in an obscure manner, child pornography, sexual violence etc. The facilitator asked participants to examine who gets to decide what content is appropriate for others to watch? She gave the example of how controls over Internet content are being exercised under the guise of 'protecting children'.

“Children are always curious about sex and sexuality and if we put enough content out there on being safe and consent and reproductive health – they're likely to find it”

The Ideal Internet

Participants then discussed issues related to how the Internet is evolving, including - privatization, monopoly of some companies and net neutrality. They were asked to imagine what sort of Internet they wanted:

“Freedom of speech, two way communication, accessible, affordable, gender sensitive, privacy and confidentiality, safe, fact-based...”

Session 10: Using Social Media effectively

Facilitated by Nadine Moawad, APC

This session examined how the Internet can be used for social advocacy. Nadine shared how social media transformed journalism because it gave everyone the power to share content and for that information to go viral and reach the masses. In essence everyone became a reporter.

Participants were then divided into groups to discuss social media campaigns that were successful in their own countries and the reasons why. These were some examples that they shared:

India: Kiss of love – Youth protested against moral policing in India by kissing in public / publically displaying affection and posting these photographs. The group chose this example because it brought in other supporters and generated conversations across groups. The facilitator noted how social media could create a viral effect for smaller campaigns that started offline.

Iran: My stealthy freedom - Asked woman and girls to take off their veils in the open (not necessarily in public spaces) and to post these on their social media pages. Received over 800,000 likes and defied exiting norms.

Myanmar: Black Ribbon Day - Health care professions / medical students participated by changing their profile pictures using black ribbons to protest against the recruitment of soldiers in health systems. The Minister of health apologized and stopped the process.

Nepal: Breaking the record to unite hearts – People mobilized online to participate in forming the largest flag of Nepal (35,000 people gathered to form the flag).

Philippines: Purple Ribbon campaign - Participants changed their profile picture to include a purple ribbon that symbolized their request for the reproductive health bill to be passed. Offline rallies and campaigns were also conducted to rally for the bill to be passed.

Sri Lanka: ItsHerRight – ASAP Youth posted hundreds of multi-lingual post-cards on behalf of youth around the country to the president – challenging the abortion law in the country.

The group further analyzed what made these campaigns successful and what tactics and strategies they could adopt for their own social media activities. They worked in groups to identify networks comprising groups from their respective countries that could possibly help their cause and promote their work.

FACEBOOK: GETTING NOTICED

Nadine concluded the day with a presentation on how to get noticed on Facebook. She discussed the need to have a strategy for one's page that could include wanting to share information, show support, recruit volunteers and supporters, influence discourse, interact with supporters, showcase activities etc. She emphasized that the more contextual the content, the more success the page has – so explain why the information you're sharing is relevant at this point. Similarly, it is important to cite sources because it makes your content more authentic and to post original, timely content. She urged participants to vary their content and to analyze how other similar organizations in their regions were faring and set their own benchmarks accordingly.

“Ask yourself what would others (on your page or your twitter followers) like to share? Who is my audience and what content can I create that they would want to share”?

Day Four– Thursday 10th Sept 2015

YAR Day Two

Youth Volunteers Yadanar and Bonita gave the group a recap of yesterday's sessions and shared that the emotional feedback from the participants was very positive on account of the new information and skills they were learning about online social media campaigns.

Getting my tweeps to follow! Navigating Twitter

Facilitator Nadine started day 4 of ASAP's YAI by giving the group some tips on how to build an audience on Twitter. She shared that people are more likely to follow personal accounts on Twitter and organization pages on Facebook. Therefore on Twitter one needs to be

concise, use trending #hashtags, build your group of followers by following those who interest you and use videos

Online Security

What was the FIRST security breach in History? - Ali Baba overhearing the password 'Open Sesame'!!

Participants learnt how an email gets sent from one point to another and how our security and confidentiality can be compromised during the process. The facilitator emphasized that digital security gives confidentiality, authentication, integrity and anonymity and how today technology makes online security is difficult. As SRHR activists we need to make sure we're digitally secure because otherwise we compromise the security and confidentiality of others in our networks.



Threat Modelling

There was an exercise where participants were grouped by regional commonalities and asked to chart what online security issues they're likely to face in their work, the data they want to protect, whom they want to protect it from, how likely is it that they will need to protect it and the consequences of not doing so.

Participants identified anti-choice, religious and government agencies as groups that they needed to protect themselves from. They shared how consequences of security breaches could be immense – including identities of those seeking help and those working in the organization. And in countries where reproductive health rights are limited, security compromises could result in legal prosecution for those in our networks. Participants learned measures they can take at a personal level to enhance their online security such as creating secure passwords.

Youth champions from previous YAls shared their own experience of receiving small grants and the projects they carried out. Participants were then given an opportunity to create their own project proposals.

VALEDICTORY SESSION

All the participants were asked to fill our post evaluation and feedback forms.

Certificates and visiting cards were given out to all of them and we had some dancing to end these wonderful 4 days in a happy mood!



Annexe 1 'Participant List

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