

Dialogue with young men
Druk-Youth Initiative of Sexual Advocacy
Asia Safe Abortion Partnership
31st August, 2019



We had three young men come over for a small dialogue on feminism, SRHR including safe abortion for about 2 hours. Their names are as follows:

| Sl.no | Name | Mobile number |
|-------|----------------|---------------|
| 1 | Jamyang Tenzin | 17337735 |
| 2 | Gagan Thapa | 17582074 |
| 3 | Probin Yonzon | 17734290 |

All of them are recent graduates from Khesar Gyelpo University of Medical Studies and attended a talk by the coordinator, Wangchuk Dema last year on International day of safe abortion at their university. They were also the respondents for the recent survey that we conducted. In fact, Probin Yonzon is a youth champion from our first local Youth Advocacy Institute (YAI) and he brought along his two friends who were interested to understand and learn more about issues that are hardly talked about in our society. Thus, Wangchuk Dema was glad to have them for a brief sensitization program.

Wangchuk Dema started with the importance of understanding sexual reproductive and health rights (SRHR) and how it is related to the overall framework of feminism as one of the biggest controversial issues that overlaps the two is abortion. When they were asked about feminism, Jamyang and Gagan thought it was to do with female characteristics and Wangchuk Dema shared that most people have similar views. While it is important to respect and embrace the characteristics of female (in other words women – even when they are not same), it is not only about women, feminism is about both women and men and other people. She informed them that feminism means equality for all.



Next we touched upon abortion. One of them thought abortion is sinful and besides Probin, the other two young men thought abortion is illegal in Bhutan and the coordinator teased them that they had not paid attention at all at the talk given by her to them at their university last year and they said they had forgotten. This also goes on to show that perhaps, one sensitization program or talk (large mass) is usually not effective to bring about change in the consciousness. And the coordinator reminded them that abortion in Bhutan is legal, though conditionally legal and they could provide some of the conditions like risk to mother's life and fetal deformity. Then, Wangchuk Dema informed them about two more conditions of rape of the girl/woman/person and severe mental illness of the mother could allow a person to have an abortion in the country.

Interestingly, all of them had some incidents or stories of abortions to share. Jamyang Tenzin had a neighbor who after divorcing her husband continued seeing him and ended up pregnant but without his or her family's knowledge, went to the south border of the country and had an abortion. In the case of Gagan, someone approached him for information on the source to purchase a medicine (neither mifepriston nor misoprostol) he never heard before but when he checked it out online, it was something to do with abortion and he was honest with them that he does not know. Probin also shared a personal story of a friend whose one of the girl friends (yes, had more than one) got pregnant and while the girl was fine with having a child, the boy did not

want to and involved his father in pursuing (or rather forcing) the girl to undergo abortion across border. This particular story of abortion brought a different perspective to the issue of abortion. It was not about the girl wanting to have an abortion but she went for it without her willingness to do it which is completely wrong; no one should be forced to have an abortion. However, if she wanted to have an abortion, then it would be her choice to do it and people should have respected it. Also, she was forced to have an abortion which means that she did not want to have abortion which was her choice and people should have respected that.

It was interesting to discuss the legality of abortions; perhaps, criminalize abortion if someone is forced to have an abortion but if someone chooses to do it on their own will, it should not be criminalized.

Probin has something odd to share with us regarding a recent National Youth Engagement and Health Literacy Meet that he attended from 13th-14th August, A nurse who was there to give a talk misinformed the audience of more than 500 young people that abortion in Bhutan is illegal. Wangchuk Dema said that perhaps, the nurse was really ignorant of the law or misinterpreted it or just chose to say so in order to live up to the religious expectations of seeing abortion as a bad thing (killing). Also, in this same meet, young people were misled on the understanding of feminism; that it is about women only and that it is women trying to be superior to men. The coordinator told the young men what a waste of space and time and money with all the wrong information floating to a huge mass of young minds.

Lastly, Probin expressed that he would like to do a sensitization program on safe abortion at Paro college for about 30 students on coming Saturday (September 7th) and coordinator Wangchuk Dema appreciated his initiative. We also discussed to carry out some programs in a new college called Norbu Rigter College soon.

We plan to have more of such dialogues with young men to have them board in the conversations around feminism, gender equality, sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) including (safe) abortion. This time it was only three of them but hopefully, we can have more programs targeted toward more young men alone (we usually have good mixture of young men with young women for different programs) because it is critical to listen to their views as well and help them understand if they have any wrong idea about feminism and safe abortion.