



Sensitization Workshop

ISAY-India Safe Abortion Youth Advocates

Asia Safe Abortion Partnership (ASAP)

9th and 10th March, 2018

Grant Medical College and J.J. Hospital, Mumbai



Introduction:

India Safe Abortion Youth Advocates (ISAY) conducted its 3rd Sensitization Workshop in Mumbai on 9th and 10th March, 2018 where a total of 11 medical students from various colleges across Mumbai participated, and were sensitized on issues relating to gender, sexuality, and access to legal and safe abortion services.

Background:

ISAY is a network of medical students (based at JJ Hospital, Mumbai), who work together to promote women's right to safe abortion. Started formally in 2017, ISAY aims at establishing itself as an advocacy group working to sensitize key stakeholders (primarily medical students and healthcare workers) on sexual and reproductive rights and the understanding behind why safe abortion and its access must be a human right.

Vision:

A society in which Indian medical students (and doctors) empathize, recognize and advocate dignity, sexual and reproductive rights and health for women.

Goal:

An increasingly broader and deeper network of medical students and key stakeholders (like doctors and health service providers) in India across different ages and discipline so as to collaborate to change the way in which medical students are taught in colleges.

Mission:

To educate and sensitize young medical students in India about women's sexual and reproductive rights and health in India by promoting knowledge about the necessity of universal access to comprehensive safe abortion services.

DAY 1

The day started with an introductory session where the participants and the organizers got to know each other. This was followed by a quick briefing about ISAY, ASAP and their work and motive as an advocacy group.

Session 1: Understanding the concept of gender & sexism in mass media



The first session of the workshop which was based on understanding gender and sex was conducted by Zainab Engineer. She started off by asking the participants if they knew the difference between the two terms. Some people had a fairly good idea about the definitions while some admitted to never being taught about it. Some of them had trouble understanding gender fluidity owing to the fact

that they'd never even been exposed to these concepts before. She explained the terms in greater detail and discussed the various types of people existing among us. The participants then talked about how to interact with people lying at different points of the gender spectrum and the 'do's and 'don'ts while talking to people who may have different gender identities.

The second half of the session discussed the sexism that is prevalent in the social media, and more specifically among the advertisement industry. Various examples of advertisements were showcased via a PowerPoint presentation in which different products were being sold by targeting the gender roles constructed by our society or men's products made attractive by their ability to either attract or overpower a female. Most of the examples didn't seem offensive to the participants in the beginning but as the discussion proceeded they learnt how to identify the not so subtle hints of sexism prevalent right in front of our eyes.

Session 2: Opening up about sexuality



This session was conducted by Simran Garg. She began by asking the participants to close their eyes and raise their hands if their answers were affirmative to assess the knowledge they had before the workshop. She followed by explaining sexuality as a form of expression of every sexual being, how it's affected not only by gender identity and hormonal influence but also societal views. She asked the

classes of different types of sexual orientation they had heard about. The participants were well versed with term such as heterosexual, homosexual but hadn't heard about asexuality, demi-sexuality and

skolio-sexuality. She briefly spoke of the hetero-normative culture, the use of the terms 'straight', 'gay', coming out before introducing her activity. There were four 'situation' chits and four 'reaction' chits which were picked by four groups of participants at random.

1. Boy reveals that he is bisexual to his ultra-masculine (macho) friends – Hesitant

Participants perfectly portrayed the anxiety and fear felt by young individuals before coming out, and the response of the friends who tried to pass it off as 'a phase'. They expressed fear with regards to him having seen them change clothes. This especially highlighted the taboo of perversion that members of the LGBTQ community face with added stigma of men who are bisexual.

2. Explaining asexuality on your first date – Trying to reform them

Participants enacted this scenario where it was their first date despite being married. They started by expressing interest in taking their relation to the next level. He initially deflected but then explained to her that he had never experienced sexual attraction or the want to have sex. To which she asked him if he was gay, on receiving a negative answer she said he would get used to it and start enjoying it after a while. She offered to take him to a counselor. He stood firm and explained that there was nothing wrong with him. He explained that he loved her, but he didn't want to have sex with her. She eventually left him. This highlighted the expectation of sexual want in men, pressure of producing children, difference between romanticism and sexuality.

3. Women coming out to her family a month before her arranged marriage – Confusion: They had heard of it before but they really didn't know how to handle a member of their family being a member of the LGBTQ community

Participant playing the role of daughter, expresses anxiety about coming out to her parents, her sister shows little support. Parents react badly, worrying about the opinions of society and fall in their social standing. They express woe regarding the shame of a broken marriage and worry about the consequence for their other daughter. They suggest that she move away to a more LGBT-accepting community. They understand what it means to be gay but don't want to deal with the struggles of explaining it to the rest of the world. It highlights the arranged marriage culture in India and its impact on the LGBTQ youth.

4. Adolescent asking his/her grandparent about his/her feeling for members of the same gender- Disgust

Participant sits with his 'grandmother' and tells her he's not been identifying with the boys in his class lately. They've been expressing attraction towards girls in their class and he has eyes only for the grace with which a particular boy plays. His grandmother instantly shuts him down and explains that he has a role to fulfill, and he has to beget strong men who will carry on the family name. Such feelings that he has are due to the modern western culture. His mother shows up and tries to reason with her mother but to no avail. His brother who initially expressed embarrassment over

having an 'abnormal' brother learns to accept him. But the grandmother explains she would never accept such a thing

Session 3: Brushing up on contraception



YC Mubasshir Babar started the session on contraception by asking the participants about their views and knowledge on contraception. He explained to them about the importance of contraception in not just family planning but also how contraception is an important way of ensuring that a woman has total control over her body and reproductive health. With a lot of input from the

participants the different types of contraceptive both male as well as female methods such as Condoms, Hormonal method, IUDs, Surgical method, etc. were discussed. He also covered the mechanism and working of each of the contraception. The session ended with a talk about how to actually use the contraceptive methods and not just be theoretically informed. This was followed by a short activity where the participants were asked to put on a condom on a banana. He concluded by explaining the lack of access to contraception, and resulting higher rate of unwanted pregnancy which causes women to seek abortion in an improper or unlicensed setup and the link between contraception accessibility and availability was highlighted.

Session 4: Let's talk about abortion

Conducted by Shwetangi Shinde, this session talked about abortion as a medical procedure and its legal framework and implications. She began by defining abortion and then went on to talk about the types of procedures, namely, surgical and medical along with their techniques and indications. She then asked the participants about the abortion law in India, and



found out that most of them were aware of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (1972). She also talked about consent as a part of the Act and compared it with the abortion laws in other Asian countries to show that the law is still quite liberal. Then, she talked about how in spite of that, when we come to the actuality of it, unsafe abortion still continues to be the third most important cause of maternal mortality in India, and presented some lethal statistics to make them realize that access to abortion is still an issue that has not been discussed in the open. She concluded the session by presenting the idea that there is no such thing as 'no abortion' it's either 'safe' or 'unsafe' abortion.

The day ended with the screening of 'If these walls could talk', and the participants were asked to create content based on the knowledge they gained on day one of the workshop.

DAY 2

The day started with a quick recap from the previous day, and a short discussion on the film 'If these walls could talk', where the participants enumerated the various obstacles the woman seeking abortion faced and the social stigma surrounding abortion.

Session 5: Barriers to access to safe abortion



This session facilitated by Riti Sanghvi, started with an activity where the participants were asked to imagine a woman, the conditions she lived in, and the barriers she would face while trying to seek an abortion in India. Most of them thought of economic barriers, lack of information on contraception and awareness regarding abortion, but the most common problem each one of them faced was social stigma. She then explained to them how gender

patriarchy, gender roles, sexism in day to day life, and the stigma around sexuality contribute to being a barrier to abortion and its provision, which ultimately leave women with no choice but to opt for unsafe abortion practices.

Emphasis were made on the fact that how unmarried women are rejected safe abortion services and shamed for having pre-marital sex, whereas a married woman is expected to bare children after marriage even if she doesn't wish to. Further discussion was carried out on the difficulties women face for even negotiating a condom with their partner(s), domestic violence, and lack of contraception availability and accessibility especially in the rural areas, and in general about the unmet need for safe abortion services in India. She concluded the session with stating that there are multiple barriers to abortion, and how it is not viewed as a right of the woman, instead a decision made for her by her family, partner and even the doctor providing it.

Session 6: What it means to be a Youth Advocate?

This session was conducted by YCs Simran Garg and Riti Sanghvi. In order to give them a better understanding about Accompaniment, they held an activity wherein the crowd was divided into 2 and one side was represented by a person seeking an abortion and the other side was represented by an abortion provider.

Simran took on the group of the abortion seeker where the participants contributed widely, bringing forth many points in the backstory. They coordinated well with each other and decided upon all the details beforehand. One of them was chosen to speak on the phone and she played her part with

emotion and sincerity. She stuck to the backstory and had the required urgency in her voice as one would expect.

Riti explained to the other half about how to be a Youth Advocate and how to speak and reassure any abortion seeker. She told them about what to ask, when to ask and how to make the abortion seeker feel at ease. The group member selected to act as the abortion provider spoke well in response to the seeker, asking all the right questions and making her feel comfortable.

They spoke about what it advocacy really is, why it is required and why are the participants chosen to be sensitized. They put forth many suggestions on how to advocate for safe abortion throughout the population including medical and people from non-medical background. They also understood the need for awareness and why as medical students, they are at the crux of making an important and required change in mindset of society and in the medical field. In retrospect, the participants really grasped the importance of advocacy and the role they had to play as a Youth Advocate.



Session 7: Mind your language



Suyash Khubchandani took the session that was meant to help the participants to have a check on the words we speak in our everyday lives. The objective was to identify the demons in our language such as subtle sexism, assumptions of heteronormativity, and patriarchal gender roles among others.

We started off by discussing the importance of open, free, and appropriate communication. The session progressed by talking about casual lingo and how it affects in reinstating the values that we possess.

Additionally, a conversation about how necessary language is for lawmakers and stakeholders to implement laws appropriately and particularly in the field of SRHR. The session ended by figuring out a middle ground on how to communicate appropriately and effectively.

Session 8: Talking about abortion and arguments against abortion

In this session led by Suyash Khubchandani, participants were divided into pairs and were given statements of an anti-choice sentiment. The objective of the whole activity was to defend arguments in an authoritative, yet logical manner.

The following statements were debated over -

- 1) You provide abortion to young women who are still children themselves. Why would you do that?
- 2) How does it feel to help young women enjoy sex without any consequences? They should be punished for having sex in the first place, and not be allowed to have abortions.
- 3) Young women are not mature enough to make such an important and terrible decision to have an abortion. They will always regret it.
- 4) Why don't young women use birth control? There is no excuse for abortion nowadays! There should be no unwanted pregnancies!
- 5) Adolescents are too young to have sex in the first place.
- 6) Making abortion available to young women will encourage promiscuous behavior and make it easy for them to use it as a method of birth control.



Suyash spoke from the opposite perspective and set the participants up for discussions. The focus was based on making concrete points, using appropriate language, backed up by adequate studies/ scientific facts/ logical statements. However, having counter-arguments put forth requires a 100% understanding of the topic you're speaking on. Most of the statements revolve around the women's right to control their own fertility, the necessity for access to comprehensive sex education, and how the issues stigmatizing access to abortion are basically prejudiced mindsets against pre-marital sex or people expressing their sexuality which does not fit into the societal norms.



Creating Content

The workshop ended with a display of the contents that the participants created which reflected upon their understanding of the topics covered during the workshop, and also as a way to spread awareness on various topics relating to access to safe abortion.

The participants were awarded with a workshop completion certificate which marked the closing of the sensitization workshop.

Annexure 1: Agenda

Timing	Name of Session	Facilitator
DAY 1		
9:00-9:15am	Introduction	
9:15-9:30am	Briefing about ASAP, ISAY and our vision	Suyash Khubchandani
9:30-10:00am	Identifying sexism in mass media & understanding the concept of gender	Zainab Engineer
10:00-10:45am	Opening up about sexuality	Simran Garg
10:45-11:00am	Break	
11:00-11:45am	Brushing up on contraception	Mubasshir Babar
11:45-12:30pm	Let's talk about abortion	Shwetangi Shinde
12:30-1:00pm	"if these walls could talk"	Film Screening
Closing day 1 and creating content assignment		

Timing	Name of Session	Facilitator
DAY 2		
9:00-9:30am	Recap, discussing short film, and abortion in mass media	Suyash Khubchandani
9:30-10:20am	Barriers to access to safe abortion	Riti Sanghvi
10:20-10:50am	What it means to be a Youth Advocate?	Simran Garg and Riti Sanghvi
10:50-11:05am	Break	
11:05-11:20am	Mind your language	Suyash Khubchandani
11:20-12:00pm	Talking about abortion and arguments against abortion	Suyash Khubchandani
12:00-12:30pm	Creating Content	
12:45-1:00pm	The Road Ahead	All YCs
Closing Day 2 and Valedictorian Ceremony		

Annexure 2: Participants' List

Anahita Shroff

Arshita Kaur

Pallavi Vemula

Pooja Pednekar

Radhika Bagaria

Ravi Chauhan

Shreya Sanghvi

Smita Bhokare

Somiya Siddiqui

Shubham Adate

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