



# सुची U-We

आपला संवाद

Series: Best Practices in South Asia of Engaging Men and Boys to Transform Gender Discriminatory Practices

## Using Communications

### For Exploring Masculinities

#### Working with Young Men in Maharashtra

Centre for Health and Social Justice  
&  
MenEngage Alliance South Asia

## CASE STUDY : 5

#### WORKING WITH MEN AND ON MASCULINITIES

What does it mean to do work that is 'Women centered and men focussed'? The organisation SAMYAK defines its work since it was set up in 2007 with this statement, clarifying that though it works with men it is never men-centered.

It frames its work as a composite 'Work with men and on masculinities.' Conceptually these are two distinct areas, it argues, saying that work with men should not be termed as work on masculinities. "Though work with men or mobilising men

and boys is loosely termed as work on masculinities, the real work on masculinities can be so different and transformational– it could even be working on media, on culture etc. At SAMYAK we are creating this argument and putting it out through all our work and training workshops in India and the South Asia region," says Anand Pawar, founder of SAMYAK, an NGO based in the state of Maharashtra, India.

Emphasises Pawar, "This critical point must be impressed upon practitioners and translated into projects, actions and activities that 'mobilising men' to stop

violence against women may have them saying 'No violence against women' but men don't end up reflecting on the idea of masculinities; it is only when they

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Founder of SAMYAK,  
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do so that the work with them becomes truly transformational and sustainable. Though there is understanding that working with men or 'mobilising men' is different from working on masculinities, but when it gets translated into projects then it gets narrowed down into 'working with men' and its context is gender based violence and all that."

SAMYAK's programmes and training build a critical understanding linking issues of gender, masculinities, health and development with larger structural and systemic issues like patriarchy, caste-class-religion-based discrimination and violence, globalisation and economic changes, nationalism, militarisation and peace building. The organisation started with youth-led interventions in the area of gender, masculinities and violence against girls and women in public and private spaces.

One of its initial project's, working with youth in campuses for a poster making project, led to its idea of using communications or media as a development intervention. Since then, it has always remained focussed on communications



and men.

### Reaching the Unreached 'Not so easy to access' Young Men

It was the year 2008 and a group of young men in the parking lot of a college in the city of Pune in the state of Maharashtra, India were excitedly discussing the most dangerous 'dares' or risks they had taken – for instance, exhaling cigarette smoke in 50 different shapes. Or challenging each other on who could hold down his smoke the longest. Or speeding one's bike. Another dare they often spoke about was trying to re-enact a famous scene from a popular Hindi movie 'Rang De Basanti' which young

men all over India were attempting to copy – downing a bottle of beer in a single gulp while precariously perched on the edge of a great height like the movie's protagonists.

These incidents made it to a list the students were compiling of 'risks' that they took. While the 'Rang De Basanti' dare was high up on the list, the other risks in the list of 52 items included: smuggling vodka into class and drinking in the back benches while lectures were on, making prank calls to the college principal and anonymous calls to college authorities on the morning of an exam saying a bomb had been placed on campus, jumping into Lonavala's



Bushi Dam when it was in spate – a dare that claimed many lives and was widely reported in the media, deboarding from a bus in the direction opposite to its movement, and propositioning a girl in public and placing bets among themselves on it. Some of them were risks really taken while others were a wish-list of risks.

The youth who identified these risks – and identified with them – were mostly to be found hanging around on the periphery of their

colleges and regular college activities, tagged as 'badmaash' or bad characters on the fringes of society. SAMYAK, the Pune based non government organisation that was working with these youth on a programme, was keen to work with a group that would be outside the organisation's comfort zone, a group that it seemed no one else wanted to work with, those who were not easy to bring to hand and access for programmes. They were not

the youth who were organised into groups like NSS (National Social Service) that were already doing stellar work, and so SAMYAK coined the term: working with 'not so easy to access' groups.

The organisation was developing ideas on a model of male socialisation in which experiences of vulnerabilities resulted in the individuals starting to gather power. Wanting to test it out, over eight months in 2008-09 SAMYAK identified 18 young men aged 19-22, studying in Pune's Fergusson, Marathwada Mitra Mandal and Garware colleges and belonging to lower middle class socio economic backgrounds. They lived in neighbourhoods where abusive language was common and crime rate and violence high. The 18 youth were divided into three groups.

Pawar explains, "Excluded from mainstream college activities, literary fests and cultural events, these students stayed a lot in college canteens or parking lots. From an early age they knew what it was to be excluded, every one of them had been discriminated against in some way. They witnessed poverty and



abusive relationships at home, and were easy prey for getting into the clutches of local politicians largely because society seemed to have rejected them while here they seemed to be getting acceptance. Youngsters like these get into behaviours where they derive a sense of power through being part of such ghettos." In every college such boys seemed to come together organically into groups.

Interestingly, it was found that if one or two youth from a group could be convinced with an idea then the entire group could be influenced. They would then take forward the idea, as the group was emotionally cohesive. The

students became part of a communications project SAMYAK was implementing in collaboration with IGSSS (Indo-Global Social Service Society), titled 'Young Men, Masculinities and HIV/AIDS: Working with young men in the colleges of Pune City'

### **What Risk Taking Reveals About Men and Masculinities**

The project brief was limited to raising awareness about sexuality and risk taking behaviour among youth in the context of HIV/AIDS. SAMYAK was to develop a poster on the topic, targetted at youth. However, it was felt that if young

men were to limit the discussion to sexual risk taking behaviour then the core messaging would not work so powerfully. So SAMYAK pushed the boundaries, going deeper with the youth encouraging them to reflect on the meaning of 'mardangi' or masculinities, unpacking gendered roles and responsibilities in the context of gender discrimination, violence and abuse of women, concepts of power and the making of manhood itself. The process thereby became a natural progression from talking about masculinities to one of the integral expressions of masculinities which is risk-taking and then to HIV/AIDS.

At first, there was complete rejection of the objective of gender equality– "What is this equality and all?" the groups would say. But with sustained dialogue and establishing closeness with the groups through language in particular – using a dialect of rural Marathi not used by the upper middle class and upper caste segments – the groups started feeling culturally connected to the programme's implementers and began asking, "What can we do?"

They came up with the idea of using DTP (Desk Top Publishing) software; at the time DTP was linked to employability, and they said they wanted to learn DTP. There was lot of demand at the time for learning the skills of Corel Draw and designing. Campuses had many posters and advertisements touting 'Learn DTP/Designing' which must have influenced their decision.

SAMYAK negotiated with the groups, saying there were too many components to DTP but that they could be taught one part of it, Corel Draw, which would be used for making the poster related to HIV/AIDS that was the core aim of the project. An agreement was reached with the youth that the outcome of their coaching in Corel Draw would be a poster based on the concept of masculinities and risk taking.

Informal interactions were held with them and a few workshops organised to help the youth go through the process of what was gender and masculinities and to make them understand the issues and make the poster. This is when they were taken through the type of risks they took, listing the 52 items they perceived as

risks. Identifying and discussing the risks led to the learning among the groups that their risk taking behaviour did not emerge from nowhere but was in fact deeply influenced by what was happening around them at the time, the messages they were getting from popular films, news media and peers. Their perception of risk taking was not static but dynamic, always influenced by what was happening around them, like the popular movie 'Rang De Basanti'. SAMYAK was also able to relate this experience to a previous experience in 1999 when it had been conducting focussed group discussions with men at a time when the Kargil war was going

on. The men had said risk means going to Kargil and feeling scared. Thus, the understanding was reached that risk taking was adaptable, malleable and related to the perception of the world around one. It was not something that emerged biologically but was a learned behaviour by boys and men.

Says Pawar, "I started putting this together with the theories that I was reading of Adlers' principles on the significance of taking risks, and by combining what I was reading with what was happening around me I came to understand that risk taking is actually a 'performance' by which men try to prove something – that they are



different from others. So we theorised the following:

**Q. Why is a risk to be taken?**

A. Because it is a performance

**Q. What is to be**

shown/demonstrated/proved  
**through this performance?**

A. That I am better (different)

**Q. From whom are you better?**

A. I want to prove that I am different from others. And this difference is in a superior way, not inferior. Thus we understood that masculinities and risk taking is about creating superior men. "

After reaching this understanding, the groups discussed the theme of the poster. One of the young men said, "Even if we don't take risks, we are still men; that is, it's okay not to take risks." It was decided this profound understanding would be the poster's message. Although discussions were being held in Marathi, the groups knew the poster would be produced in English because that was the requirement of the project.

Three types of risk were selected for the poster – speed, smoking and unprotected sex. Men and



speed were equated with thrill, men and cigarettes with style and men and unprotected sex with fun. The poster asked: How do U see these equations (The youth wanted to use 'U' instead of 'you' as at the time this was the popular SMS language). Embossed behind the equations were the words 'accident' 'cancer' and 'HIV' respectively. The poster's message was that it was okay not to take these risks.

The poster was the outcome of a sustained process of reflection and learning with the young men even though it did not take place in a structured teaching-learning setting. The groups would meet here and there informally, discussing their personal

relationships among other things while discussing risks and gender; just a couple of times the interactions were in the form of formal workshops.

Group members worked on a rough draft of the poster in Corel Draw. The poster was pretested with different youth, finalised by a professional designer and 500 copies printed.

It was widely disseminated in Pune colleges and other parts of the city. Other special displays took place at the national meeting of the Forum to Engage Men (FEM) network held in Lucknow in March 2009 and the First Global Symposium on Working with Men and Boys on Gender Equality held in Brazil in March-April 2009. Everywhere, the poster was well received.

## Communication As Intervention

Apart from understanding risk taking as a learned male behaviour, the other 'principle' that emerged from this process was: communication itself can be the intervention, it need not be used only as a tool to support mainstream programmes. With SAMYAK being a communications



**Suraj Pawar doing a gender training**

organisation it was a significant progression for the organisation to understand the poster making as a process of transformation. During this process, the organisation also found that no interventions and communication materials were available to address issues of gender construction of men and masculinities and its interlinkages with other issues.

Besides, it had always been felt that other than meetings, workshops and trainings, all of which had been used many times, innovative means were

needed to reach out to people. Thus, it was found that the poster making process, though it started with a livelihood based demand, adapted into something else. The group got close to a form of art that seemed to have helped them become better men – there were discussions on colours and some of them said they had never thought of colours or played with them as they were doing now. Colours were a key entry into the discussions. It seemed men got few opportunities to use their creativity in positive ways.

After this experience, during 16 Days of Activism SAMYAK came up with activities based on colours, for example dipping hands and feet into large plates of colour and putting the imprint on cloth. Introducing them to colours helped men get closer to their emotional selves and it was found they really enjoyed these inner self activities.

The limitations of the poster-making project, however, included the fact that the ideas generated by it were not replicated on a larger scale, and



there was no systematic evidence building on it. It was not possible to follow through to find out if the initiative influenced group members' future risk taking behaviours as it was not documented nor were pre and post surveys conducted, with SAMYAK at its inception when such processes had not been put into place.

However, the initiative generated a lot of out-of-the-box ideas. Under the project three issues of a newsletter in Marathi were also brought out in partnership with the college youth.

An editorial committee with youth representatives oversaw the planning, production and dissemination of the newsletters which were titled U-We

(Yuvi=Youth) as the group felt this expression conveyed togetherness and also depicted its relevance with youth. The newsletters dealt with issues like risk perception of young men and its linkage with risk of HIV infection; what is gender; what is masculinity; the need to work with young boys on these issues; gender-based violence and men's role in preventing it; and issues of sexual health in a question-answer format. It was found that the involvement of youth in all stages of development of the material helped increase the effectiveness of the material and acceptance of its messages by the youngsters. Through the process of development of material the young men involved in it also went through a process of perspective development.

### **Integrating Youth Programme with Work on Masculinities**

This short term experiment on working with men turned out to be crucial in crystallising the ideas by which SAMYAK's youth programme developed subsequently, integrating seamlessly into its work on masculinities.

Following this, SAMYAK started an initiative in city colleges called Youth for Equality or YES! a non-funded campaign led by students which ran for 3-4 years and was aimed at male and female students working together to make campuses safer for women students. Groups of students mapped safe and unsafe areas and what could be done to make



them safe. This included looking at whether Vishakha Committees to deal with sexual harassment complaints had been set up by the colleges, examining campus violence and following up with college managements through meetings, letters etc on issues related to campus safety. The students would organise poster-making activities, photography exhibitions, workshops, discussions on sexual harassment, gender related film festivals etc, with the male students taking active responsibility for ensuring the safety of the female students. In this way the campaign engaged a new group of YES! students every year into a process of learning and then action.

In one instance, in a project examining safety of women in public transport, students took photos, asked questions how public transport could be made safer for women and hosted the photo exhibition on campuses, generating a lot of interest. In this way ideas started flowing on doing other interesting YES! campaigns. One of the innovative ideas was putting up mirrors in public places which

people could look at and be confronted with this question for self reflection – Does this person oppose violence against women?

In one of the YES! events a young man named Suraj Pawar joined the activities, and he went from being a representative of a right-wing organisation on his campus promoting a very polarising ideology to doing women-centred social work in Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai. He is now associated with the organisation MAVA (Men Against Violence and Abuse) and conducts 'masculinities trainings' in TISS and other organisations.

### **The Journey of Working with Men and on Masculinities**

Tracing the journey of SAMYAK, Pawar says that he set it up following a growing realisation that men needed to learn the language of equality when he was working on the government's RCH (Reproductive and Child Health) programme from 1997 onwards, developing behaviour change communication material on male

involvement in sexual and reproductive health (SRH). "My first job was developing communications material for men. From 1997-2003 I systematically researched male involvement in SRH and I was also developing communication material on it, and from these two things my ideas developed. "I found that in the Family Sample Survey while men were reporting themselves as high on the scale of gender equality, in the same families the women reported high levels of domestic violence. This led me to realise that men needed to learn what is meant by gender equality – that is, learn the language of gender equality, if you will, and I started developing flyers, posters etc on male involvement." He decided to join a women's organisation to learn what should be the approach to working with men, and implemented a qualitative research project on rural masculinities in 16 villages in Maharashtra, adamant that the project would be based on working with men to lead them to examine their role in the context of gender based violence rather than on condom-use or reproductive health which, till then, were the only areas of

men's involvement.

Eventually, SAMYAK was set up in 2007 at a time when a lot of activity was taking place in the field of working with men through the networks MASVAW (Men's Action to Stop Violence Against Women), MenEngage Alliance and Forum to Engage Men (FEM), with all of whom Pawar was involved. Says Pawar, "Through a trajectory of critiquing the RCH programme to understanding the politics of men, masculinities and gender from the women's movement to meeting likeminded critical minds in the

field of masculinities and gender, I gained clarity on what should be SAMYAK's ideology. I understood that it was very important to politicise the work with men and this led to the kind of work that the organisation now does."

After the Nirbhaya rape case a series of posters on gender violence and related issues were developed with students. Brainstorming with them led to the creation of posters like, 'Do women's clothes lead to rape?' Another interesting poster was developed as an outcome of a political event held in Mumbai in

which women were given knives and chili powder to defend themselves against molesters. The poster developed by the students said, "Does this chili powder and knives mean that the state and men have no responsibility anymore?" Says Pawar, "This reflected quite a political understanding of the issue and I think SAMYAK has played a role in developing communications material that has helped such reflections."

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# ABOUT THE CASE STUDIES

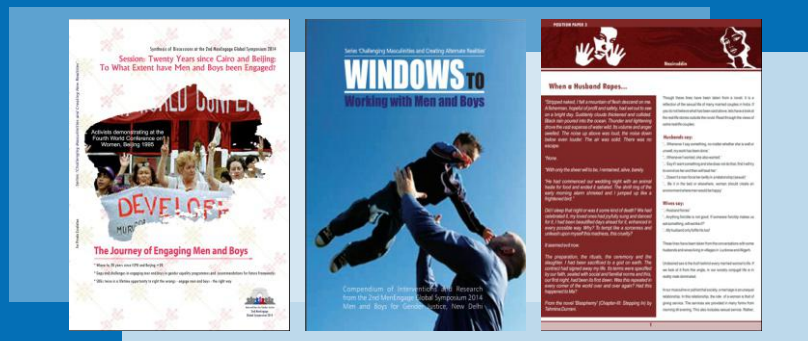
Five case studies have been put together by the Centre for Health and Social Justice (CHSJ) in *the series Best Practices in South Asia of Engaging Men and Boys To Transform Gender Discriminatory Practices.*

These are practices developed by MenEngage South Asia network's member organisations in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh and India. The purpose of developing these case studies is to provide increased visibility to organisations and issues related to work with men on masculinity, gender based violence, sexual and reproductive health rights and gender equality. The five case studies are:

- 1 Engaging Men and Boys Against the Practice of Chhaupadi in Nepal
- 2 'Awaaz Do' (Speak Up)- Engaging Youth to Address Violence Against Women in Odisha, India
- 3 Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality in Sri Lanka - Resisting 'Karumaya' (The Fate Of Women)
- 4 Using Communications For Exploring Masculinities - Work With Young Men In Urban India
- 5 Engaging Boys And Men To Stop Acid Violence In Bangladesh

## About CHSJ

CHSJ (chsj.org) is an Indian civil society resource organisation working on issues of masculinities and gender justice. It focuses on networking, capacity building, research and implementing strategies it has developed on working with men and boys for gender justice through field based interventions. Its work is grounded in 10 states. Some of the material brought out by its Resource Centre on gender and masculinities can be seen here:



- <http://www.menengagedilli2014.net/knowledge-products-link-page.html>
- <http://www.chsj.org/positions-papers.html>
- <http://www.chsj.org/resource-centre-on-masculinity.html>
- <http://www.femindia.net/>

## About MenEngage South Asia

The global MenEngage Alliance (menengage.org) has a strong presence in South Asia since 2007, where it is known as MenEngage South Asia (MESA). Through country-level and regional alliances, MESA seeks to provide a collective voice on the need to engage men and boys in gender equality and addressing masculinities, to build and improve the field of practice around engaging men and boys in gender justice, and advocating before policymakers at the local, national and regional levels.