

Narotam Sekhsaria Foundation

Roundtable on Sexual and Reproductive Health Issues among Adolescents

13th April, 2009, YWCA, Mumbai

Organised by Narotam Sekhsaria Foundation

Narotam Sekhsaria Foundation Organized a roundtable on the issue of Sexual and Reproductive Health Issues among Adolescents. The discussion was organized in order to facilitate a discussion among civil society organizations about their interventions in the area of sexual and reproductive health. Around thirty five participants attended the roundtable.

The discussion began with Ms. Padmini Somani, Director of Narotam Sekhsaria Foundation welcoming the participants and giving the context for the roundtable. She mentioned that the foundation's concern about adolescent health and the desire to support meaningful interventions in this area prompted the foundation to organize the roundtable. She mentioned that the idea is not to have this roundtable as a one off event but to identify spaces for long term engagement. She said that along with sharing of interventions by individual organizations the roundtable will also throw up areas of common action, which the foundation will be happy to support.

NIRAMAYA Health Foundation: The first presentation was made by Dr. Janaki Desai from Niramaya Health Foundation. Dr. Desai spoke about Niramaya's Sensitization Program for Adolescents in Reproductive and Sexual Health (SPARSH) which was launched in the year 2005 with an initial support from HDFC. The SPARSH Program is being conducted in the schools, community, shelters and other NGOs for boys and girls of the age group of 12-19 years. Various target groups in slum communities, mainly school drop outs and school going, Zari workers; are the primary beneficiaries of this program. The main objective of the program is to educate the adolescents about the most vulnerable phase in their life through series of group sessions. This program focuses on suburban slum areas in Central and Western Mumbai. She also mentioned that the need for sexuality education is limited not only to the girls but to boys also who fall prey to wrong information and ill effects of uninformed adolescent issues. This made Niramaya feel the need for a tailor made program for the adolescent boys along with the girls. So through an interactive method of adolescent boys are oriented on issues related to Knowledge about one's own body, physical changes during adolescence in boys and girls, night Emissions, masturbation, related myths and misconceptions, pregnancy, family planning, addictions, relationships, love, infatuation,

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friendship, STI and HIV / AIDS, gender issues, behavioral Skills, values and decision making.

SNEHA: The next presentation was made by Anjali Gokarna from SNEHA on their initiative called Girls Gaining Ground. The project builds on the examples of successful adolescent girls' groups and focuses on the larger agenda of reducing child under-nutrition rates in Maharashtra by using a multi-sectoral approach that brings together the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, community leaders and the girls themselves. The project creates safe spaces, enhancing the girls' self-image and their role in society, and building their decision-making and leadership skills. The strategy is to form adolescent girls' groups of 25 members and to take the girls through a course focusing on sexual and reproductive health, life skills, health and nutrition; impart vocational skills; and involve the girls' groups in advocacy for issues related to health and nutrition. The strategy is implemented by trained facilitators drawn from the communities. These facilitators take each girls' group through a basic three-month course. The course is covered during 1-2 hour sessions, and 3-4 sessions will be covered per week. The broad contents of the course are: Knowledge on sexual and reproductive health; issues of gender; life cycle, Life skills - social skills (interpersonal relationships, effective communication); thinking skills (self-awareness, critical thinking and decision making); self-management and negotiation skills (saying 'no' to peer pressure, coping with stress), Health and nutrition; child and adolescent nutrition, Rights of children and of the girl child and management of common illness.

MASUM: Manisha Gupte from MASUM made the next presentation. She mentioned that MASUM's work with adolescents cuts across the overall themes of access to health care, health rights, gender sensitization, reinforcing democratic tradition and collective decision making. The specific programs carried out with adolescent are as follows: *Raanpaakhre*-groups where children learn the values and importance of democracy, gender-equality and living in diversity through games, stories and creative activities. *Bal-panchayats*- children work on the enjoyment of child rights, especially by those from migrant labourers' households and children with special needs. *Mulya shikshan*- Orientation programs on gender equality, democracy, secularism, peace, child rights, freedom and so on are imparted to the 9th standard children of 18 high schools. MASUM's married adolescent programs is along the following lines: vocational education- girls learn all kinds of skills from sewing to computer literacy and even self defense. *Bharari*: Health education inputs are provided to adolescent girls. Programs with older adolescents: Health- Self-examination with speculum, treatment of RTIs and minor illnesses at the village level, prevention of anaemia, negotiation around contraception, abortion and family planning, early detection of uterine prolapse, and cancers of the uterine cervix and breast, facilitated by the health workers. *Interventions in domestic violence- Anand Melawas* (gatherings of young couples) and early counseling are the preventive and promotive aspects of this programme; counseling services and legal assistance coupled with women's support groups (*adhar gats*) at the village level and suicide prevention programme are facilitated by the para-legal workers (*Saathis*). *Micro-credit*- Unmarried as well as married adolescent girls are part of the *Streedhan* programme, where women save and get low-interest loans. The monthly

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meetings provide a space for discussing issues on health, violence, political participation and collective leadership. *Citizenship rights:* Registration of marriage, holding women's *gram-sabha* and encouraging women's participation in the general *gram-sabha*, raising women's issues in village councils and putting checks and balances in place in village governance structures is facilitated by MASUM's rural staff. *Property rights:* Joint ownership of homes and women's right to stay in the marital home, as well as her right to exit the same after negotiating maintenance, one-time payments or land rights are facilitated by the para-legal workers and a lawyer.

TATHAPI: Audrey Fernandez made the presentation on behalf of Tathapi. She said that idea for Body Literacy work originated from a survey of 32 adolescence education programs in pune. Which showed that most of the programs did not adequately address concerns around gender, power, targeted children after the age of 13years and in the name of sexuality education, taught only menstruation. Through the Body Literacy Program the Children will be oriented towards body and mind, gender differences, unequal power relations, puberty and growing and will develop personal and social skills to deal with it. The entire exercise is very experiential in nature wherein children have the opportunity to access correct information on body and mind through role plays, discussions, activities and other interactive methods. Children also develop personal skills about body and health for eg. how to check body temperature with the help of a thermometer, reading the pulse, using a stethoscope, ways to combat anemia and healthy eating habits. They also learn social skills about friendships, relationships, skills to tackle physical and sexual abuse. The Body Literacy Program also involves other stakeholders like parents and teachers and efforts are made to address their concerns regarding certain stereotypes, myths and misconceptions about sexuality issues.

VACHA: The next presentation was made by Medha Namjoshi from Vacha. She gave a detailed account of VACHA's work and located their work with adolescents within that. The three major areas of VACHA's work are: girls' empowerment, gender health and education and youth leadership in communities. The work areas are operationalised through the following activities- resource centre in bastis and BMC Schools, visits for learning and exposure, education, health and gender sessions and fairs, workshops in life skills, production of posters and newsletters by youth, networking with NGOs ,CBOs, Schools and colleges, research and paper presentation- (BalKishori is a report that has emerged from research conducted by Vacha, recently presented a paper titled 'Pollution and piety: Menstruation myths and Gender perceptions of girls' in 9th world congress on Adolescent health in Malaysia). VACHA has also compiled and developed several resources in their work areas: a small diary for girls with easy to cook healthy recipes, songs, slogans and space for personal information and thoughts, health and rights booklet, a cassette of songs of girlhood, a song book, a book on traditional games of girls and women in Maharashtra, portable body charts on cloth that students can handle and use, games and charts. Some of VACHA's accomplishments are as follows: Vacha resource ,material is regularly purchased and disseminated by UNICEF, involvement of Vacha team members in syllabus construction and imparting Health and gender training to trainers from primary education department of

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Maharashtra government, Resources are used directly by Vacha group in its own activities and also for programmes organised by other groups.

Institute of Health Management Pachode (IHMP): Ms. Manisha Khale made the next presentation on behalf of IHMP. She presented their life skills program which has been successful in raising the age at marriage among adolescent girls. She mentioned that the program was designed in the light of alarmingly low age at marriage among girls in Maharashtra and lack of accessible educational opportunities for them. The program aims to Improve the social status of adolescent girls by developing skills related to gender, legal literacy, and team-building; improve adolescent girls' health status by increasing their cognitive and practical skills in health and nutrition, promote self development and increase self-confidence and self-esteem through involvement in a community project, as well as arts and craft, to delay age at marriage for adolescent girls by achieving all the above. It's a one-year course, 1 hour each weekday evening, taught by a trained village woman with at least a 7th grade education. A total of 225 one-hour sessions, divided into 5 sections: Social Issues and Institutions; Local Bodies; Life Skills; Child Health and Nutrition; Health. The target group is- unmarried adolescent girls ages 12-18 years, with a focus on out-of-school and working adolescents. As of now 4500 rural girls from 72 villages and 30 slums in Pune city have participated in the course.

ARPAN- Puja Taparia from Arpan made the presentation of the organisation's involvement in the area of child sexual abuse. She mentioned that the organization aims to prevent child sexual abuse by empowering adults & children with skills to protect children from sexual abuse and heal the victims by enabling them and live beyond the trauma of their abuse. The Core Strategies used are- Spreading awareness amongst various stakeholders of children, teaching personal safety to children, healing child victims and adult survivors, build practitioner capability to deal with Child Sexual Abuse cases.

SAATHI- Jogeshwari and Shalaka presented about SAATHI's involved with adolescents girls in shelter homes. After giving a brief introduction about the organization, Shalaka spoke about their program with the adolescent girls. She mentioned that the program with adolescent comprises of interactive sessions on culture and gender, personal worth and self esteem. Lot of efforts are made to clear myths and misconceptions about relations, sexuality and sexual orientation, guilt, shame, self blaming etc.

It was indeed a great experience for so many the organization working on adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues to come to one platform and share about their work. As a way forward it was decided that there is a need to synergize all the work happening on the diverse issues related to adolescent sexual and reproductive health. NSF has offered to facilitate this interaction between different organizations working on this issue so that instead of duplicating work people can complement each other's work.