

Addressing Sexuality and Reproductive Rights at the Community Level: Experiences from West Bengal

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The practice of CBR

- Starts with building rapport within the community with families and others
- At the same time there need to understand and analyse the basis of ingrained socio-cultural beliefs, attitudes and practices
- This helps to actually change attitudes by challenging and questioning the ideologies
- Communities exert control over sexuality by influencing the ways in which common sexual beliefs and practices are adopted and adapted by people to construct their own realities

Addressing Sexuality in the Community

- Within CBR, home based programmes target developing of body awareness for all disabled people as part of the personal care component
- At adolescence, care is taken to ensure that same sex CBR workers are assigned to disabled people with whom HBP are implemented – this helps both to feel at ease with one another and share information about the burgeoning sexuality of the disabled person

Working with Families

- As CBR works within home/family set up, the awareness passed on the disabled person is also shared with other family members and extended community members.
- CBRWs provide information not only about body awareness but also about bodily care and protection
- Families and immediate neighbours are alerted to need for keeping an eye on disabled girls especially because they are more vulnerable

Malina

- 14 years; moderate intellectual disability
- CBRW started working with her when she was 12 years old
- After a few months CBRW came to know she was being regularly abused by her father's friend and their neighbour
- Family was unaware and once apprised, they decided to keep it quiet while privately warning off the perpetrator
- Here CBR team had to respect the family's wishes while ensuring the protection for the girl

Learning

- Made us realise the identifying abuse has to be addressed at individual, family and community level.
 - Series of trainings on sexuality and reproductive rights for girls with disabilities and their families held at community level
 - Sensitization programmes held for local government and protection service providers.
- Respecting family's demands for confidentiality and protection needs to be balanced with the need to secure the disabled girl from further abuse

Training on Sexuality

- Module developed included
 - Body awareness and cleanliness
 - Practical training on managing menstrual cycles
 - Pre marital support through counseling on aspects of a healthy marriage: contraception, sexual needs, care of children etc
 - Defining and recognizing abuse
 - Dealing with abuse
 - Redressal through laws: DV Act etc

Training on Sexuality

- In the process we realised that other women in the community were also victims of abuse with no ways for vocalising it
- Non disabled women also benefitted from our training
- In 1 village, after the training one woman spoke up against abuse by her in – laws
- This led to the Gram Panchayat Committee passing a resolution about their role in cases of violence against women

Training on Sexuality

- In one block we were able to convince a proactive CDPO to allow us to run the trainings for Kishori Shakti Yojana with special focus on sexuality education
- We were also able to design and induct an module on disability for ICDS workers, which included needs of mothers with disabilities
- Every training had focus on government and non government facilities and how to access these.

Community Level Awareness

- Families and Neighbours
- Community leaders: political, religious, opinion makers
- Local government authorities
- Key persons like teachers, doctors
- Local clubs
- Other community level associations: women's groups, youth groups etc

Fatema and Joydeep

- CBR programme brought these two teenagers together in a livelihood production unit
- After about 10 years of working together they decided to get married
- Opposition from both families not just because of their impairment but also because of religious differences
- CBR team negotiated with both families to protect their right to choose their own partners
- CBR team also advocated with community leaders and neighbours to ensure acceptability of the relationship in the community

Anowara

- Disabled girl married at very young age
- In laws and husband abused her and sent her back to live with her mother
- Mother on advice of CBR team asked local Panchayat to intervene and they settled the issue
- However as the groom's family was not complying with the directives of the Panchayat, CBR team helped disabled woman to lodge a Complaint against husband and in laws to Women's Commission

Yousuf and Salema

- Yousuf's first wife left him so he decided to marry a disabled girl the second time
- Salema married him and now they have 3 children
- Yousuf used to regularly abuse Salema
- CBR team intervened first with his family and then with local Panchayat to resolve the issue amicably
- CBR team still keeps contact to ensure there is no repeat of the violence

Learning

- For solutions to be acceptable and yet do justice to aggrieved party, all stakeholders need to be consulted
- Solutions to be found within the community with the help of the key persons
- Only when justice cannot be done at the community level can the matter be taken to extra-community agencies
- CBR team can expose to different options and offer linkages but final decisions have to be taken by the concerned people.

Other Actions

- Linking to other rights based forums and groups/associations for help/ assistance/ mediation – Support Networks for Women, Women’s Commission, Human Rights Commission
- Influencing these networks to take up the concerns of persons with disabilities and acting as catalysts/mediators in their dealings with the persons with different disabilities.
- Range of strategies adopted can vary from awareness generation to protest and rallies

Other Actions

- Organization to have policy documents - sexual harassment, abuse etc - These documents should deal with procedures and practices to be followed not only within the organization but also in the CBR field area