

Executive Summary

Gender-based violence and discrimination is a society-wide problem, which requires a society-wide solution. In 2011, India ranked the worst G20 country to be a woman. National statistics show an 873% increase in rape cases from 1971 to 2011. To tackle rife inequalities, men and women have to be involved in preventive and curative efforts.

Men must be given an opportunity to reflect on and reconstruct attitudes around gender. It is now universally acknowledged both in theory and practise that this can help reduce incidences of discrimination and violence.

However, efforts in India and worldwide have generally been small scale. Initiatives in India are largely targeted at schools and low income communities. These have been resource intensive, using professionally trained staff to deliver specially designed programs. Involvement of state agencies in these efforts has been minimal.

This report considers how to scale efforts in India. The question asked by the research was “How can every young man and boy in India be given the opportunity to reflect on and practise gender equitable behaviour?” Answers to this question were derived from interviews with 14 professionals in this field. There was consensus that boys need to be raised to develop and adopt gender sensitive attitudes and behaviours from a young age. The report highlights the following three actors central to facilitating this process at a large scale.

“How can every young man and boy in India be given the opportunity to reflect on and practise gender equitable behaviour?”

Parents, teachers and media professionals are the three actors central to facilitating the process of engaging men at a large scale.

Parents

Parents are key influencers of their child's attitudes and behaviour. Children learn by watching and participating in interactions with their parents and other family members. There are difficulties in engaging with parents as a group primarily due to the lack of access. The interface between schools and parents could be a solution in some cases, providing an opportunity to reach out with messages about gender.

Teachers

Schools are crucial sites where children learn, develop and spend most of their time, making teachers key agents of intervention. Our research recommends that gender be made part of school education, through the main school curriculum. However, this approach is not free from obstacles including a lack of state support, hostile attitudes of parents and resistance from actors across the education system. Teachers need proper training and continued support in delivery of issues on gender. The entire school system needs to reflect these values, so that they are continually reinforced by school staff and management.

Media professionals

The media can support or contradict families and schools in shaping attitudes and behaviours among children. Mainstream media content often promotes insensitive and stereotypical attitudes. Media professionals need to take efforts to ensure content is non-discriminatory and promotes examples of equitable behaviour. Organisations working in this field must collaborate with media professionals in order to create positive content.

These recommendations are an idealised vision of the future. There are significant disparities between them and the state of current initiatives. Leaders are needed to champion the cause and promote meaningful, sustainable change. This is a long term process and state support is crucial to achieving scale. Without focussed, resourced, nation-wide, preventative measures, India's women face a long struggle ahead.