

INTERROGATING THE NORM: INNOVATIVE INTERVENTIONS TO PROMOTE GENDER JUSTICE AND SAFETY IN INDIA



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Preface

Thanks to the generosity and support of the Tata Trusts, the Harvard South Asia Institute, in collaboration with the Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, had the opportunity of convening some of India's most impressive and creative civil society organizations working in the field of gender justice. The convening took the form of a short but intensive workshop outside Mumbai at the end of January 2016. During the course of this meeting, formal presentations on aspects of law, policy and practice concerning gender norms in contemporary India in general and norm change and violence prevention strategies in particular combined with opportunities for group discussion, networking and case presentation. The result was a rich exchange of views, a learning opportunity for participants and a decision to highlight for more general dissemination and benefit some of the most trenchant interventions. While some contributions focus on enhancing women's access to legal or material resources (including land), others probe elusive questions about the social factors that impinge on notions of masculinity and femininity. This publication's modest goal, and the hope that the following pages will provide interesting and instructive reading for a range of audiences, are part of a broader set of projects distributed nationwide and across public and private sectors aimed at radically improving access to gender justice across Indian society, both rural and urban, an aspiration still a long way in the making.

We welcome feedback from readers and hope to develop further work with our dedicated researcher and practitioner colleagues over coming months and years.

Jacqueline Bhabha
Professor of the Practice of Human Rights
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Introduction

Despite a progressive constitution and proliferation of laws supporting gender equality and prohibiting customary practices that perpetuate discrimination such as dowry, child marriage, sex selection, domestic violence, etc. pervasive gender discrimination and gender based violence in India have attracted anxious scrutiny. It is in this context, over an eighteen-month period, the Harvard South Asia Institute explored issues, challenges and solutions connected with gender based violence and social empowerment of women in India. Geographic spread, diverse theories of change and working methods, working with multi-stakeholders, focusing on legal entitlements, building new gender norms through mentorship – these are examples of very creative work being undertaken in some of India's most challenging and deprived communities. Hence, this compilation has documented a rich body of work, through insightful essays and action-oriented case studies, some going back decades, that address the complex issue of the social empowerment of women in India through a range of strategies.

The reflection pieces by Suparna Gupta and Bhanumathi Kalluri explore innovative and creative strategies for enhancing respect for human rights in the context of potentially oppressive or rights-violating gender norms. They target harm prevention and a holistic set of theoretical and practical approaches. The goal is to increase the capacity of community members to collaborate, in building safe and mutually respectful societies. In one case, a key technique described involves bringing community activists into close and trusting contact with state and law enforcement agencies, with a view to building trust and ensuring cooperation. In the second case, the community organization relies on a mentorship model to build skills and change gender-related norms. Both essays set the context for the case studies that follow.

During the eighteen-month period of this project, the Harvard SAI Team undertook field research, capacity strengthening, and knowledge dissemination. Professor Jacqueline Bhabha, the Faculty Chair of this track engaged with and mentored six of the 30 organizations that were identified for a grant to document their work, projects and impact. Three of these six organizations that focus on social empowerment of women, have been included in this book as case studies. These include Dhaatri: Resource centre for women and children's rights,

Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA), and Ahmedabad Women's Action Group (AWAG). Each of them describe a diverse set of contexts and activities geared, in their different ways, towards improving access to empowerment, rights and protection for several vulnerable communities.

The case on Dhaatri specifically focuses on rural populations and access to forest land ownership by women. The case on MAVA examines their initiative on sensitizing and engaging young boys and men using out-of-the-box methods to deconstruct and redefine masculinity and prevent gender-based violence. The final case on AWAG explores a range of strategies to strengthen the access to protection for marginalized women, subject to violence, exclusion and stigma. In different ways they outline the challenges that exist, despite welcome legal reform, in protecting and ensuring women's rights to land ownership.

The findings of this publication are very insightful and relevant to the contemporary efforts of the central and state government in India for women's empowerment. We wish to acknowledge the efforts of our team that made this publication possible. The guidance from Professor Tarun Khanna, Director, and Meena Hewett, Executive Director, Harvard SAI was valuable. We are very grateful to Professor Jacqueline Bhabha, Faculty Chair of the women's track of the project, for compiling this publication and providing very valuable inputs and insights throughout the course of the project. She was ably assisted by Anisha Gopi who coordinated the field efforts with all grantees, knowledge partners and subject experts. The creative team led by Usha Gawde and Aashika Cunha spared no effort in presenting the content with fine aesthetics. Clare, our copy editor, has done a brilliant job despite tight deadlines. Kundan, Nora, Meghan and Diana from the Harvard SAI Team helped us at every stage of this project. We are obliged to R. Venkataramanan, Executive Trustee, Tata Trusts, and his team for the grant and their consistent cooperation.

We hope that researchers, practitioners, civil society leaders, gender activists and policy makers will draw valuable insights from this compilation.

- Dr. Shashank Shah

Project Director, *Livelihood Creation in India*

Harvard University South Asia Institute



Youth Mentors discussing in their group during a Body-Mapping Exercise.

Photo by Leading Lines.

Men Against Violence And Abuse

**Documenting Impact Of Mava's Innovative Work
Among Young Men On Gender**

**Research Conducted And Compiled
By Roopashri Sinha**



The Challenge Of Exposing Men To A Gender Lens : The Backdrop

Changing attitudes is easier said than done as it involves changing beliefs and behaviors that are formed, nurtured and perpetuated by society. In the case of gender inequality, changing attitudes means changing the way men and women relate to each other within the home and in society. It also means changing attitudes towards what is right or wrong about beliefs and behaviors they have been taught as children.

Attitudes towards women in a society are reflected in what the society has attained in terms of development indicators like education, health, nutrition, economics, decision-making at home, right to public life and human settlements of women. In India, these indicators highlight the fact that men and women function in different worlds.

India's Constitution, progressive legislation, affirmative action by the government and ongoing efforts made by the Indian women's movement have

contributed to some perceptible changes in the socioeconomic and political conditions of women. However, equality for women in India is still a far-fetched dream. Most of the energies of agencies, NGOs and activists have been concentrated on providing counseling, caring and legal aid to victims of discrimination and abuse, and empowering women to assert themselves. Activists and citizens concerned with the unrelenting issue of violence against women realized that the fight for women's rights had to go beyond women's campaigns and get support from the masses.

The group of 205 men who responded to a creative appeal in September 1991 in a daily newspaper, 'Wanted men who believe wives are not for beating...'²², was one such group. They expressed their wish to change the social environment so that men could be 'part of the solution' in addressing gender violence. The group's formation of a non-profit organization, Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA), put forth for the first time in India the need to look at 'gender issues' as 'also men's issues' and engage them through a gradual process of humanization and cultural transformation.

MAVA has been working in a resolute manner with men in changing their perceptions, attitudes and behaviors in support of gender equality by engaging youth in group meetings and training sessions through varied media forms and campaigning strategies.

Keeping the vision of a gender-just society, the MAVA team (generally a 3-4-member working team), tried out different activities in its formative years. It provided counseling services and utilized cultural events, community groups and media to conduct mass awareness programs. It also networked and garnered support from women's organizations and citizens as it raised issues with men on brutal, horrifying gender violence situations all across India, and upheld the rights of the distressed women to live with dignity and in safety. MAVA also continues to bring out an annual Marathi publication (*Purush Spandan*)²³ that has given a voice to the men who are and want to be different. It has given visibility to the oppressive nature of patriarchy from men's point of view. The MAVA Helpline provided an anonymous space for distressed young men and women to communicate their problems, thoughts and insecurities related to gender.

One of the important activities undertaken in the pre-2006 phase that laid the

²² Men Against Violence and Abuse. (2016). <http://www.mavaindia.org/Genesis.html>

²³ Purush Spandan (Marathi, which means male vibrations).

foundation of the MAVA model of mentoring was the guidance and counseling program for youth. Pre-marital guidance workshops for young boys and girls, who were desirous of marriage and needed basic inputs on various aspects of marriage and sexuality, were organized regularly for five years. Moreover, MAVA's experiments with different forums, especially youth-friendly events also indicated that there was a section of the youth that needed a platform to express its questions and views and who did not wish to be perpetrators of violence, abuse and discrimination against women. MAVA's pioneering initiative with men in the early '90s has motivated and given impetus to many new initiatives in India that are now moving towards developing a gendered lens among men in India.

MAVA has thus far worked with young men in nine districts of Maharashtra State: Pune, Kolhapur, Satara, Mumbai, Nagpur, Bhandara, Buldhana, Dhule and Jalgaon.

Documenting MAVA

Throughout MAVA's programs, 'mentoring' seems to be a key concept. MAVA has shaped mentors in the first four districts mentioned above. In three districts, Nagpur, Bhandara and Buldhana, the mentoring program was cut short, and in the last two districts the mentoring program was newly initiated in 2015.

Much of MAVA's work is qualitative rather than quantitative. Although a significant number of people are reached during mass awareness campaigns and events, the deeper and sustainable impact lies mainly with the male youth who associate with MAVA, namely the peer communicators/ mentees, who gradually become mentors.

The working definitions of the terms used in this document are:

1. Mentor: A male youth or peer communicator who has had the opportunity to be trained on gender perspective at MAVA (through training camps, workshops, internships, volunteering or field placements) for a substantial period of time, has evolved as a gender-sensitive person, and has the capacity to engage and communicate with youth peers/other young men and women on gender issues, to influence their thought-processes and to facilitate changes in their behavior.



*Mentees discussing their thoughts after viewing a picture during a workshop exercise.
Photo by Leading Lines.*

2. Mentee: A male youth peer communicator who is undergoing training on gender perspective and is in the process of being influenced primarily by a MAVA mentor. Through self-reflection, there is a change in his perspective, attitudes and behaviors towards women.

3. Girl Mentee: Young women are involved during orientation programs, street plays and cultural events held for youth, encouraging peer communicators to share and discuss with them as equals. Women get the opportunity to meet and communicate with young men who are learning the importance of gender-sensitive language, attitudes and behaviors.

This document has captured the process of transforming the male youth in the 16-21-year-age group into peer communicators/mentees and later as mentors. MAVA conducted qualitative data collection, including Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with mentors from three districts, Pune, Satara and Mumbai, and in-depth interviews of 10 youth mentors. It also interviewed 10 mentees from Pune, Mumbai, Dhule and Jalgaon as it is important to see the movement from a mentee to a mentor as an ongoing process. Among the mentees interviewed, there were a few girl mentees.

Building Seminal Work With Youth (2006-2016)

In 2006, MAVA's chief functionary, Harish Sadani, received the Population Council's 'Health and Population Innovation Fellowship' for working with rural youth in Pune on gender issues. The two-year pilot project called *Yuva Maitri* (Friendship among youth) provided a road map for keeping the youth closely and consistently linked to gender issues over a period of one to two years.

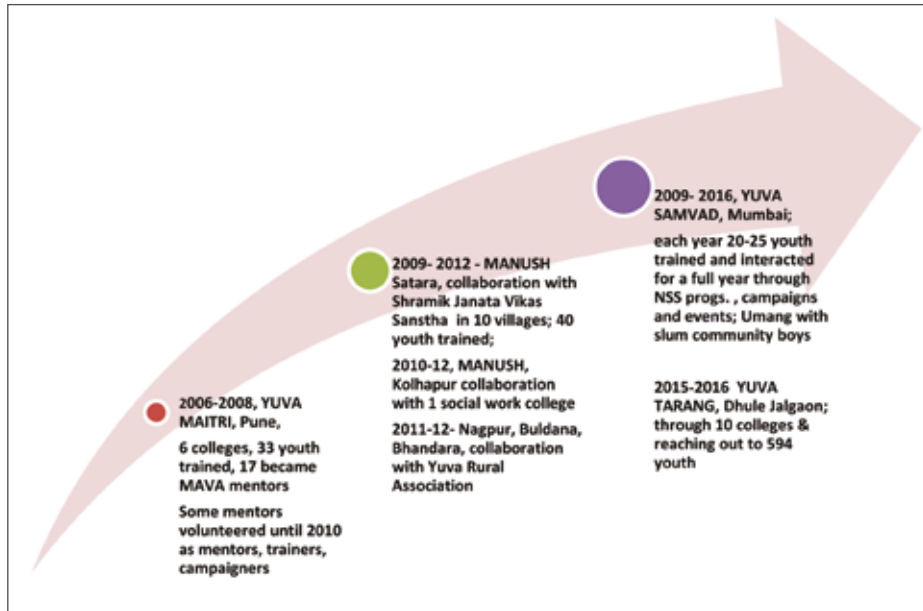
Strategic aspects of the pilot model were:

- To orient college youth (men and women) about MAVA's vision.
- Engage selected young men from participating colleges (short-duration residential training camps) and develop their gender perspective. They become MAVA's peer communicators / mentees.
- Use innovative and appropriate media to reach out to a wider section of youth; for example, workshops, group discussions, debates, reading materials (Purush Spandan, Frequently Asked Questions, (FAQ)²⁴ booklet), films, games, songs, street-theatre, posters, flipcharts and competitions. Many initiatives and strategies are evolved and developed by the youth mentees for reaching out to other young men and women.
- Provide exposure visits, weekly sessions, refresher workshops as facilitators and street-play activism to selected youth who have undergone the residential gender training.
- Encourage the peer communicators/mentees to reflect on 'personal change plans' in order to transform their own behaviors and attitudes.
- Persuade and support the peer communicators/mentees to reach out to other youth (men and women) and share what they have learnt from MAVA trainings.
- Take collective action on contemporary gender events and involve more youth (men and women) in those programs.

The pilot program encouraged MAVA to expand to other districts: Mumbai, Satara, Kolhapur, Nagpur, Bhandara, Buldhana, Dhule and Jalgaon. While the main features from the pilot program were continued, each district evolved its own action plan to get in touch with youth in the region. It is therefore important to note the key features of each district project undertaken by MAVA from 2006-2016.

²⁴ The MAVA FAQs were first compiled by the peer communicators from Pune and were later edited and published by MAVA.

Diagram 1: MAVA growth



Peer Communicators / Mentees

The approach to contacting youth is generally based on the need and the environment. So far, four routes have proved their utility: (1) The National Service Scheme (NSS)²⁵ units in colleges, institutions of higher education; (2) NGOs who were working or aiming to work with youth; (3) Contacting community youth directly; (4) Reaching out to trainee social workers.

Some college youth were selected by their teachers, some were selected by MAVA after a brief orientation session and some joined on their own. Some were initially reluctant and skeptical about participating in a residential camp.

²⁵ National Service Scheme is aimed at involving college students pursuing university degrees across India. The focus is on the development of the personality of youth through community service.

Key Features Of Districts: Mentees And Processes

(i) Pune district, *Yuva Maitri* (2006-08)

Profile of Mentees

The majority of the peer communicators/mentees were NSS volunteers who were studying in colleges located in hinterlands like Jejuri, Saswad, Hadapsar, Narayangaon and Manchar. Except for one college, Hari Desai College in Pune city, the rest were all located in towns close to villages. Most students came from farming communities, and worked either in agriculture or some caste/family trade, while studying.

Key Processes

- NSS students were given an orientation session on gender issues.
- 33 youth were selected for an eight-day residential camp on gender sensitization.
- The residential camp training was followed by periodic weekly interactive sessions.
- Peer communicators were expected to share information with friends in the college and in their neighborhood.
- The group compiled a set of 100 questions that were generally asked by youth.
- The students prepared wall-papers; this was a novel way of reaching the youth who were outside their own circle or college.
- They prepared and performed street-plays on topical issues.
- Though the project formally ended in 2008, the mentors were encouraged to continue their association with MAVA by conducting and participating in workshops, sessions and campaigns.
- In 2009 and 2010, the mentors and some female mentees conducted two awareness-generation camps for girls and women in two villages.
- The mentees conducted training workshops for the youth groups in Satara district, thus becoming the first group of 'MAVA mentors'.

Pune mentor, Sunil Chachar, associated with MAVA since 2006

As a college youth, Sunil had not decided what to do. His goal was to complete his graduation. Belonging to a single-parent family that had four acres of agricultural land in drought-prone Purandar taluka, Sunil was used to hard work. His mother was the sole family member as his father had passed away when he was in 4th standard.

While studying in college, Sunil was an active NSS volunteer. He was asked by his teacher to give a brief speech on a social problem. Out of the 50 students called to speak, six were selected and Sunil was one of them. Feeling proud of this achievement, Sunil went readily for the *Yuva Maitri* residential camp in Pune. He was one of the 17 peer communicators who worked quite actively with MAVA until 2010. He believes that MAVA gave him his passion for training.

Sunil fondly recalls some memories from college. One of them is when a group of boys from his college were to be rusticated for teasing girls. He, along with other MAVA peer communicators, requested the principal to allow them to work with the eve teasers. Sunil was actively involved in this behavior change experiment which he felt was also a 'big test' for them. Within two months, the team had succeeded in convincing all the defaulting youth that they had made a mistake. The success of these efforts was seen when the boys did not misbehave again and one of them became the top NSS cadet for the year.

Pune girl mentee, Prajakta, started her association with MAVA in 2007

In her second year of college, Prajakta saw some of her seniors, who were peer communicators from her college, talking about gender issues with other boys and giving brief talks in the classrooms. Their ideas matched with what Prajakta had learnt from her parents.

This was the beginning of her 'good friendship' with Yuva Maitri mentors. For the first time, she realized that she could have close friends who are male. In the second year, she participated in a poetry-writing workshop organized through MAVA and got to meet renowned poets and learn from them. Prajakta was encouraged by the MAVA mentors to conduct a training program for adolescent girls and women in her village in Pune. 'The MAVA mentors helped me but I was asked to take all the decisions. For the first time, I realized that I had the capacity to conduct sessions on gender issues and could also do all the organizing,' she said.

Later on, when asked if she would join the street plays, she agreed. It was then that she realized she had so many skills which she had never explored. Those skills got exposure during a street play entitled *Dhokyachi Ghantaa* (Wake-up Call). Another campaign, The Bell Bajao Campaign on Stopping Domestic Violence, was a great experience for her as she was the only female to join, and she got to learn about varied communities in Aurangabad and Nashik.

(ii) Satara district, *Manush* project (2009-10 and 2010-11)

Profile of Mentees

They hailed from 10 villages of Javli taluka, Satara. Most of them worked on farms while studying in college and were also the first generation of students aiming to become graduates. The boys were associated as youth members with the local organization Shramik Janata Vikas Sanstha. Two staff members appointed on the project who had completed their MSW (Masters in Social Work) were trained by MAVA to become mentors.

Key Processes

MAVA and Shramik Janata Vikas Sanstha decided to create a pool of male youth communicators. The initiative was called Manush (Humane).

- A seven-day training program was conducted for 25 youth. In the second year, another batch of 25 youth was trained.
- The project added a new focus in the second and third year, namely HIV/AIDS.
- The residential gender training linked discussions of HIV with sexuality, reproductive and sexual health, ignorance, stigma, discrimination and violence against women.
- The group was also trained in communication skills and the storytelling method.
- A street-play addressing violence against women was performed by the youth on the first day of the seminar.
- Even after the project ended, the mentees stayed in touch with MAVA and continued the peer-to-peer communication on gender issues.



Youth Mentors have fun while sharing their experiences at a get-together. Photo by Leading Lines.

Dhananjay Sanas, staff mentor, *Manush*, Satara, 2009

With a Masters degree in social work, and a few years of work experience to his credit, Dhananjay was selected as the coordinator for the *Manush* project in 2009.

He received many training sessions on gender through MAVA that had built strong networks with women's organizations like *Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal* (MASUM), Stree Mukti Sanghatna and Tathapi Trust. He was guided by senior MAVA mentors who had been part of the Pune project. MAVA also had a good collection of reading materials on gender, which added to Dhananjay's perspective-building. The intense training sessions on developing communication skills and street plays were huge additions to his learning and growth as a mentor.

Dhananjay facilitated the close bonding between 32-35 youth during the project. He recalled how the village youth were brought together to discuss the high rate of deaths due to alcoholism in the village. The discussions that followed led to the group members taking an oath that they would shun alcohol, not use bad language, and utilize their well-earned money for good causes rather than on religious festivals and rituals. He further recalls how the group had coordinated a question-and-answer session with the local police, organized a candlelight protest march, and put up posters in colleges, shops and police stations regarding violence against women as and when an issue cropped up.

(iii) Kolhapur district, *Manush* project (2010-12)

Profile of Mentees

The peer communicators were studying for a Masters in Social Work from D.K. Shinde College of Social Work run by Chhatrapati Shahu Institute of Business Education and Research (CSIBER), Kolhapur.

Key Processes

- In February 2010, the ex-collector of Kolhapur organized a special meeting of principals from leading colleges in Kolhapur to garner support for MAVA's *Manush* Project in Kolhapur.
- In the academic year 2010-2011, students were provided one-day gender-sensitization training and reading material to add to their training.
- Six students of the M.A. in social work from the two colleges were placed for fieldwork at MAVA's *Manush* Project. Skills training to communicate

effectively with youth was provided.

- The six trained peer communicators conducted sessions in colleges, awareness-generation camps for girls and women in some villages, distributed the FAQ booklets and put up posters in their own and neighboring colleges. They also visited villages to study the situation of a skewed sex ratio in some talukas.
- Some students started a forum called the Youth Dialogue Center in the college, where needy students were given psychosocial counseling and guidance on gender, relationship and sexuality issues.

(iv) Nagpur, Bhandara & Buldhana (2011-12)

Profile of Mentees

No peer communicator could be trained as a mentor as the collaboration between the two organizations was stopped midway. MAVA therefore interviewed one mentee from Bhandara district who had undergone MAVA training and was deeply influenced on several gender issues.

Key Processes

- MAVA decided to network with Yuva Rural Association (YRA). The two organizations decided to work in Buldhana, Bhandara and Nagpur for two years.
- It was planned that MAVA youth mentors would be invited to facilitate trainings and capacity-building workshops so that the young men in the YRA network could undertake a healthy dialogue on gender matters and prevent violence against women and girls.
- Unfortunately, MAVA's team was invited to conduct only 40% of the planned sessions as the YRA team decided to discontinue its association.

(v) Mumbai, *Yuva Samwad*, (from 2009 to date)

Profile of Mentees

The peer communicators from Mumbai are selected from 8-10 colleges that undertake MAVA activities for their NSS program. The colleges are situated in varied parts of Mumbai. One of them is a night college which has students who are working and studying. Most students are from the arts, commerce and mass media field, and belong to different religions, castes and class groups.

Key Processes

- MAVA's work with college youth in Mumbai started in 2009, and has gained momentum in the last four years. The initiative is called *Yuva Samvad* (Dialogue with Youth).
- Each year, 20-25 NSS college volunteers are trained and encouraged to interact with MAVA for a full year through training programs, campaigns and events on gender issues.
- *Yuva Abhivryakti* (Youth Expressions) is a cultural forum which has intercollegiate competitions in different fields like debates, elocution, poster-making, slogan-writing, street-plays, and short film-making.
- A four-day intensive street-theatre workshop facilitates the writing and organizing of street-plays on contemporary gender themes.
- The peer communicators participate in the '16 Days of Activism', which is observed internationally as Violence against Women Global Awareness Fort-night.
- MAVA started a pilot project called *Umang* (Aspiration) in July 2014 to work with adolescent boys of 13-17 years of age from two disadvantaged communities of Mumbai in collaboration with two NGOs. The community groups came together with the help of football and cultural activities initiated by MAVA mentors.
- For the past three years, a two-day film festival *Samabhav* (Equanimity) is being organized in auditoria of leading colleges, where national and international short, feature films and documentaries are screened.

Mumbai mentor, Ganesh Jadhav, associated with MAVA in 2011

During the camp and various other interactive sessions with MAVA, Ganesh found answers to several questions that had rumbled silently in his mind for some years. Questions like how class, caste and religious systems have promoted discrimination and divisions in society, why physical attraction towards girls becomes so overwhelming for teenagers, why sexual issues are not discussed in families and why no one opposes the gender inequality practiced in everyday life? Questions such as these were being answered by MAVA mentors and trainers in a free and casual environment.

For some time, Ganesh was employed as a part-time staff member of MAVA and conducted sessions in coordination with NGOs working with slum and street children and children of commercial sex workers. The young boys were brought together to play football and sometimes 'just chat' under a tree. He managed to guide quite a few young boys who look up to him today and can now aspire to come out of the shackles of family deprivation like him.



Group Discussion among mentors on planning a youth event. Photo by Leading Lines.

Mumbai mentee, Vedprakash Jaiswal, associated with MAVA since 2014

17-year-old Ved had started interacting with two to three mentors from MAVA two years back. The group of about 10-12 boys from his slum and Ganesh and Aspar (staff from MAVA) would play football on the playground closeby and sit under the trees discussing gender violence, gender inequality and men's behaviors and attitudes. After a few months, they were taken to Lonavla for a three-day residential workshop. Here, Ved, along with his community friends, learnt many new things which made him stand out in his community. Later on, Ved was given training in communication and street plays. He recalls how he performed in many street plays. He says, 'I am more confident, I think properly, I advise some of my friends, I don't shout at my mother and sister.' He helps them and his neighbors with filling water and carrying heavy loads. He does not want to go the same way as the other boys in his area. They are all either gambling, loitering or passing comments on girls. 'I don't want to be like them...'

Mumbai mentee, Bhavin, associated with MAVA since 2015

Bhavin, who is studying in a college in a distant western suburb said, 'I belong to a "not-so-well-to-do" family. My dream as a child was to earn a lot of money and live a happy life. I thought of getting into software engineering as that would give me a good job and good income.' In college during NSS, they were

given an orientation on gender by Ravi Jaiswal, from MAVA. Bhavin recalls, 'I was so impressed with that one lecture, that I started rethinking about my childhood goal. Later, when I attended the residential camp and the street-play training sessions, I learnt a lot.' The main message that he took home was, 'We are unaware of so many facts about our own bodies and unconscious about our behavior.'

(vi) Dhule & Jalgaon Districts, *Yuva Tarang* (2015-17)

Profile of Mentees

These two districts have started functioning from January 2015 and there are only peer communicators, i.e. mentees. Out of the 21 students selected, 13 are studying social work (seven at postgraduate level), while the rest are arts and commerce students. Most come from farming communities and a few are from tribal communities.

Key Processes

- Since January 2015, MAVA started a long-term project with college-age men in two districts, Dhule and Jalgaon, called *Yuva Tarang* (Ripples by Youths).
- Amol Kale, a mentor from *Yuva Maitri*, Pune, who had volunteered with MAVA since 2009, is working as a full-time coordinator of the project.
- So far *Yuva Tarang* has reached out to students from 10 colleges (some are social work colleges). They have received two days of orientation, four days of residential training on gender perspectives, four days of communication skills training, and four days of training on street theatre.

Jalgaon mentee, Umesh Jamuna Kaniram Rathod, associated with MAVA since 2016

When responding to the questionnaire about training, Umesh had written, 'I had never received information on gender equality in such an interesting manner, through games and entertaining activities... I also got to know about health issues that can prove to be very useful. I learnt about male-female equality, to treat women with respect and as equal.' They also received a booklet '*Hey sare mala maahit have*' (All that I should know) which provides information and can be used for revising.

Umesh, who is staying in a hostel for his studies, says, 'I am now able to communicate with some close friends at the hostel about what I learnt at MAVA. I shared whatever I had learnt. I am sure I will be able to do more later on. Since

our teachers are also involved in the MAVA program, it is easy to take this ahead in our college now.'

Difference Between Mentees In Different Districts

The mentees from rural areas are more exposed to gender violence as it is more rampant in these areas.²⁶

Observing the first day at a residential camp in August 2016 for newly selected Mumbai youth, the researcher found that while most agreed with the mentor who was discussing gender discrimination, there were one or two youth who said that noticeable gender inequality existed only in the villages.

The coordinator of the Dhule-Jalgaon process also commented that he finds a difference between urban and rural youth as the former get information through the Internet and school sex education programs. According to him, 'In this area, there is no major difference between youth who studied social work and those who did not. The level of information on gender and sexuality is almost the same.'

The MAVA Journey For Mentors And Mentees

Are the Youth Peer Communicators Different from Other Youth?

During the two FGDs, quite a few of the mentors from Mumbai, Pune and Satara said that they had participated in the residential training camp out of curiosity, 'to get an exposure to new places, new friends and experiences'. Some had joined thinking they would get some field exposure while some had come hoping to get academic training. This is not unlike the thinking of a youth in the 18-21-years age group. However, each one had something that was kindled during the initial residential training.

For Yogesh, MAVA training hit a chord...He had seen his mother slog as a door-to-door sales woman for eight hours every day, returning home and continuing to do household chores. His mother was forced to take up this job

²⁶ National Family Health Survey 3 - Domestic Violence. (2006).[http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-3%20Data/VOL-1/Chapter%2015%20-%20Domestic%20Violence%20\(468K\).pdf](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-3%20Data/VOL-1/Chapter%2015%20-%20Domestic%20Violence%20(468K).pdf)

due to their 'not so good' family condition. His father owned a small *Kirana* (multi-item) shop and income from that was insufficient for a family with three growing boys. He had seen how his mother had to face the taunts of people and deal with harassment by customers due to the pressure of earning an additional income to supplement her husband's income.

Dhananjay said he has always had questions about traditional norms.

Sarath, from Mumbai said that although he was called different names by classmates, he did not care as he performed well at school and he was brought up in a family where everyone did housework.

Sunil had seen his mother struggling to manage her land and the family income in an unsupportive village environment. He was keen to understand gender issues and what could be done to change the situation.

VV from Pune said that MAVA training had shown him a way out of his family trade.



Group Discussion among new mentees at a workshop. Photo by Leading Lines.

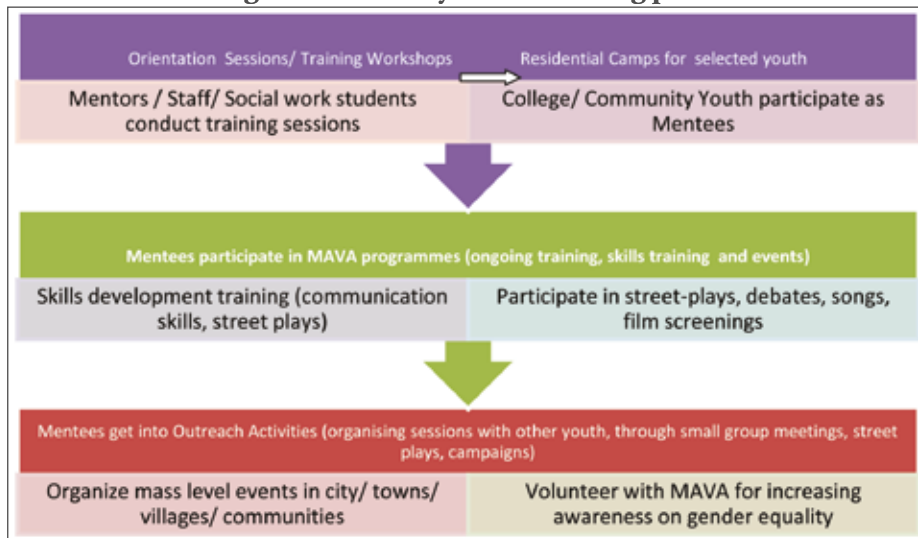
The Youth Mentoring Process

Broadly speaking, the MAVA youth mentoring process is as follows:

1. Youth (preferably who are studying in the first/second year in a degree course and are NSS volunteers) are introduced to MAVA.
2. Some of them are then invited to participate in a residential camp where the complete training module is imparted.
3. After the camp, the youth continue to receive a number of interactive sessions on gender, either by MAVA or other organizations.
4. Mentees also receive training in communication, facilitation skills and street-theatre.
5. This package of mentoring enables a mentee to start organizing sessions for other youth, conduct small group meetings and street plays, and participate in mass awareness events and campaigns.
6. In the last phase, the mentee youth are given exposure to campaigns, events and protest marches against gender discrimination.

Opportunities for displaying and trying out skills were abundant for mentees; some with the MAVA initiative, some with the support of women's groups and some with their own initiative. This intense interface with friends, peers and citizens increased their confidence. They were also encouraged to conduct formal outreach programs for students (including girl students) in their own way.

Diagram 2: MAVA youth mentoring process



Appointment of Mentors and Their Learning Process

Apart from the mentee to mentor pathway, MAVA has employed two other processes for shaping mentors.

(1) College students studying social work come to MAVA for a one-year field placement.

Suraj Ashokrao Savitabai Pawar, student social worker (2012-13)

Suraj, hailing from a small town in Washim district, had joined Tata Institute of Social Sciences and was placed at MAVA as a student social worker for his fieldwork. He recalls his first impression, 'It was an orientation program for us. Detailed information about MAVA's work at different levels was given by Harish Sir... The message which I took after the orientation was that I need to be a part of this social movement which takes men to fight against gender discrimination and inequality... What I liked the most was the way MAVA works with college youth, mostly men, on the issue of gender, masculinity, sexuality, violence against women and relationships.'

After the brief orientation, Suraj had the opportunity to attend the residential training program and got a feel of the entire scope of training for newly associated youth and the training process. After a few more sessions of learning from observation and reading materials from MAVA, he was made a co-trainer working with MAVA trainers. He could learn different methods and strategies to communicate ideas on gender issues with youth.

(2) Trained social workers are appointed to projects.

Mayur Lad, staff mentor Manush, Satara (2010)

Mayur was 25, had completed his M.A. in social work and was looking for a job. Coming from a family of agriculturists, there was an unstated pressure on Mayur to find a job as soon as possible. In 2010, Shramik Janata Vikas Sanstha offered him the post of project coordinator. As a student social worker, Mayur had not given much thought and importance to gender issues. Moreover, he felt that he was not a person who could talk about sensitive issues like sexuality. He took up the job with a feeling that if he could not handle it, he would quit and look for another job.

Soon his views changed. He participated in the orientations, training sessions

with college youth and a residential camp, where the self-reflective and discursive training process helped him understand the key issues in gender equality. He realized that the project name, Manush, symbolized the primary goal of shifting the focus from being a 'male' to being a 'human'. 'When we treat everyone, male, female and transgender on an equal footing, we evolve as better human beings.' He started discussing with MAVA team members to understand the multiple nuances of being a gender-sensitive person. He could see his growth in his first job and was enjoying it.

Gender Training of Peer Communicators

Content

The gender-sensitization training offered by MAVA has content that is based on modules developed by MASUM and Tathapi Trust and further evolved by the MAVA team. MAVA uses five main modules:

1. Sex and Gender
2. Sexuality – Reproduction, Healthy Sexual Relationships, Consent
3. Equality and Equity
4. Health, Violence and Rights
5. Media

In Satara district, the module had an additional component of HIV/AIDS.

Given these broad headings, the trainings generally dealt with issues like the difference between sex and gender, masturbation, menstruation, masculinity, women's lower status, discrimination, patriarchy, socialization of boys, anger, stress, loneliness, tobacco and alcohol use among men, sexual abuse and HIV/AIDS. What has changed in the MAVA training program since the Pune residential camp in 2006? It was earlier held for seven days while the recent ones are held for four days. Two trainers interviewed said they have added their own style, their own stories and a few new activities. They adapt the content and methodology to suit the participants. However, the focus on core concepts has remained unchanged.

When mentors were asked what was easiest and most difficult for them to understand during their training, most of the mentors said it was easy for them to comprehend the difference between sex (natural/biological characteristics) and gender (referring to the social characteristics like norms, ideas and images

about being a man or a woman). Most attendees found the nexus between patriarchy, religion and caste very complex to understand. Amol Kale, a youth mentor, said, 'I am still unraveling the many layers and depths of their linkages.'

SPK and TP, who were working and studying in a night college in Mumbai, acknowledged that they had heard the words, *laingik samabhav* (gender equality) for the first time.

Rathod, a young mentee who is studying for a Masters in Social Work in Jalgaon said, 'I learnt about the physical changes occurring in boys and girls as we grow up and the way in which the male body functions. I also learnt about health issues that can prove to be very useful to me later on.'

The topic of sexuality was found interesting by most youth.

D - a senior Mumbai mentor who attended a training in 2013 said, 'In sexuality workshop, I have learnt the body map, where and how each organ has an assigned job as per nature...'

Sunil's strongest memories are those of the trainers at the residential camp. He says, 'I can still recall Dr. Mohan Deshpande explaining *swapna awastha* (nightfall) in simple words, Milind Chavan did a magical facilitation of the "power-walk game" to explain the concept of gender inequality, Dr. Anant Sathe and Mrs. Sathe explained sexuality issues with so much patience.' Sunil, along with 32 other participants from Pune, was also trained in writing simple songs. They learnt to sing many motivational songs developed by activists. He also recalled the 'Tree of Patriarchy'. This was one of the most important lessons he had learnt and 'it is successful even today, because not much has changed in the villages'.

Ved recalled what he had learnt at Lonavla during a three-day residential workshop. '...how the girls' and boys' body is, how we feel attracted to girls, how we can be abused if we are unaware about laws that protect children.' They asked us to think about many things, like why there are so many bad words for women, why girls cannot be equal to boys in playing cricket, in studying, working in big companies, how would it feel to be teased like boys tease girls, why boys cannot grow their hair like girls or wear earrings or necklaces, why we tease people for

doing what they like doing, why films show only some body parts.' They learnt about *mardangi* (masculinity) and how 'this makes boys behave badly'.

The residential camp training generally surprised even the reluctant participants like Yogesh from the Pune batch. He agreed during the interview that he was awed by the resource persons, their new ideas and viewpoints on gender equality, legal aspects of violence and abuse of women, and the need for social change. He was excited by the ease with which the speakers and resource persons spoke and the language and style they used for presentation at the MAVA sessions. Over the two years, he found himself learning new skills of communication, debating, writing street-play scripts and singing radical songs taught by cultural activist Sambhaji Bhagat; all building his confidence in presenting sessions for college students and reaching out to new people.



Raju Inamdar, MAVA trainer explaining Sexual and Reproductive Health through simple charts at a residential Camp for youth leaders. Photo by MAVA.

Other mentors who were associated with MAVA in 2011 and 2015 had similar things to say:

Ganesh (2011) found that everyone was treated equally, irrespective of the college they belonged to or the background they came from. The trainers were young people like him and they talked just like him. The difference was that they had so much to share about the human body (male and female) and sexuality and gendered inequality in society. They chatted and discussed freely on so many sensitive topics.

Sarath from the 2014 batch, said, 'The training was in Hindi and Marathi, but I and my friends asked lot of questions.' Everyone shared and discussed so easily and freely that 'we did not realize when our opinions started having new depths. We learnt that gender-based discrimination is not just limited to big issues like rapes and acid attacks but it is also ingrained far more into our system of living.'

SJ (Mumbai) was introduced to MAVA when he was placed for field-work while doing his training in social work. As a volunteer, he got an opportunity to attend some of the training programs for college youth. He said his takeaway was 'a better understanding of self, on what it means to be a male in our society, the privileges he enjoys and to be rational enough to say "no" to them.'

RJ, one of the mentors training to be a social worker in Mumbai, said that his association with MAVA has 'helped me to locate myself in society and understand my thinking towards the other genders.'

Methodology

The boys, when given a free and safe peer forum, are ready to air their innermost thoughts. They can talk freely about their experiences of growing up as a boy, and share their dilemmas and inner turmoil without any hesitation or inhibitions. The interactive sessions and participatory exercises with youth not only help create awareness on existing gender inequality but also to think about deeper and more complex issues like masculinity and patriarchy, consider

gender roles and break away from stereotyping and discrimination.

The trainers use youth-friendly language and tone and interesting exercises like body-mapping exercises, power-walks, and 'agree /disagree' statements. Story-telling, awareness songs and films are also used to send out gender messages in different formats. The screening of gender-sensitive films and those questioning masculinity and patriarchy were followed by group discussions, which added to knowledge and perspective-building.

Amit said, 'What I cherished most was the close bond I had formed with all the other boys at the training camps and events and there were so many new thoughts churning in my head.'

Suraj, now a volunteer trainer for MAVA, said, 'I also learnt the way in which a trainer should take the sessions with participants. I learnt about different strategies for interacting with youth on gender and masculinity issues. The gender training module was quite unique... simple and easy to understand.'

Participants' Response

Sarath said, 'The MAVA trainings did not preach, they gave facts and a fresh perspective.' He was aware of some of those facts but after MAVA training, 'the dots and blanks got connected and I can now see the bigger picture... I was enlightened on how society works.'

The 'power-walk' game was mentioned by two of the mentors in their questionnaire responses. 'Through the power-walk game I have learnt that the dominance of one gender is different in different settings and it depends on culture, education and how that keeps control on the means of production or controls the production,' D - mentor, Mumbai.

'...After playing this game, I understood how economic, political and cultural power function in society and how a few people get privileges based on gender and caste,' said NZ.

In a role-play exercise to make youth sensitive to women's (especially mother's) household work, the trainer keeps adding one bag at a time representing a task, to the participant's hand, shoulder, head and back, based on participants' responses. This addition of 'bags' is theatrical and impactful as it catches the

trainees' attention and motivates them to start thinking about how to reduce the burden by taking away one 'bag of responsibility' at a time. At the end, it proves that if all family members decide to share the work, it can be distributed evenly. This provokes the youth to think about what household chores he can do to share his mother's or his sister's burden of work and take a positive step towards gender equality.

During gender training, a common question raised to prod youth to think differently is, 'Why do we include only father's name and not mother's name while introducing ourselves?' This urges many youth to think and some change their names and write their first name, followed by their mother's name and then their father's name. It is important to note that in the new group of 21 mentees from Dhule-Jalgaon, there were six mentees who had added their mother's name on the questionnaires given to them.

Suraj, a mentor trainer, identifies himself as 'Suraj Ashokrao Savitabai Pawar', during the training program as a preamble to the subject.

Yogesh Kanthale said, 'I think it will make a lot of difference in our children's life by including mother's and father's names. I feel proud that I am the son of my mother Sunanda Kanthale and my father Sadashiv Kanthale.'

After his MAVA training, Dhananjay had changed his name to include his mother's name, but he realized that everywhere he was facing problems. For example, when he wanted to make changes in his ration card, 'the village government functionaries created lot of hassles'. Even when he wanted to get a passport, old rules and loads of paperwork stopped him and his wife from making this change.

A girl mentee from Pune, Prajakta said during her interview that she had heard of senior mentors adding their mother's name instead of a surname, which impressed her a lot. 'The traditional way of using surname only makes us feel unnecessary pride in one's family of birth,' she said. Further, she said, 'I have not changed my name officially as Prajakta Vanita Dhananjay because I don't have the mental stamina to start this long government process.'

In one of the group exercises, entitled 'Acceptable and Non-Acceptable in Sexuality', the participants form small groups and discuss five statements. They are asked whether they agree or disagree and why.

The statements are:

1. Masturbation leads to weakness.
2. A girl should not have sex before marriage.
3. When a girl says 'no', she actually means 'yes'.
4. Women who wear revealing/short dresses invite violence/rape.
5. The behavior of men having sex with men/women having sex with women is unnatural and abnormal.

The participants are asked to talk freely without being judgmental. After jotting down summarized responses and viewpoints on a chart, they present their points to the larger group. The myths and misconceptions about male and female sexuality are thus discussed through this exercise. Participants are encouraged to reflect and express their thoughts on a healthy sexual relationship. At the end, the facilitator sums up key messages on healthy sexuality, stereotyping, discrimination and gender justice.

Another activity, a 'Personal Change Plan', is conducted as it helps the youth to self-reflect, change their perceptions and notions of masculinity, and change their attitudes and behaviors towards women. The mentees are encouraged to think of their specific action-plans to examine their gender biases and how they are or will be working to empower women in their personal lives by questioning male stereotypes and restrictions on women.

A quick analysis of personal change plans of a group of 21 mentees shows: Out of the 21 mentees, 12 wrote about sharing the household chores, cleaning utensils after food and washing their own clothes. For two of them, it was their sister, and in one case it was the grandmother who was managing these chores. Three mentees had said that they would provide support to their mothers in major decisions that are taken in the family. One response was, 'I will provide my mother and sisters opportunities for recreation.' Four others wrote about their sisters who faced restrictions about staying out for long, and promised to ensure that there would be no restrictions on their mobility and decision-making. They promised they would help them take their own decisions like choosing marriage partner. Two mentees said that they would intervene strongly in case someone took away the rights of women in their lives. One of them hoped to change the traditional outlook of parents of his female friends.

'I will share my innermost feelings and emotions with my close friend,' was one of the most common statements in the personal change plans. Some said that they would stop the use of swear words, and a few others said that they would challenge the pressures to perform as a 'man' to always be an achiever, a winner and succeed at all costs.

The personal change plans indicate that most mentees from 2006 to 2016 are more or less similar in their socialization as boys. Some new forms of discrimination were challenged through personal change goals as one of the new mentees wrote, 'I will not mistreat /disrespect transgender persons when I meet them.'

SPK, a Mumbai mentor said, 'After that MAVA camp, I started washing my own food plate and inner clothes and I continue doing it even today.'

SG, like many other mentors, practiced what he had promised in his personal change plans. He encouraged his cousin sister to marry the boy of her choice. Vijay, a mentee from Jalgaon, had opposed the early marriage of his sister, but could only delay it for a year. 'My aunt, to whose son my sister was to be married to, insisted for an early marriage. She convinced my parents that my sister will not be able to pursue college education as she would have to travel to town. So it is better that she gets married and settles down and lessens the burden of her parents.'

Skills Development for Peer Communicators

Since mere knowledge about gender issues is not sufficient for young people to undertake outreach activities, they are given skills training so that they can communicate easily with others on sensitive topics. Thus trainings are conducted for communication and facilitation of group discussions.

The youth are also given four-day street-play training that encourages the participants to write scripts collectively based on their knowledge and perspective. The basics of sending out the message clearly and performing are taught to the youth. One of MAVA's favorite trainers is Raju Inamdar, who uses street plays, folk songs and puppets to communicate with the masses.

In the skills development and community outreach programs, quite a few girls from the same participating colleges are also involved.



Talking about Rape Culture at the Roots of Gender-Based Violence, youth mentor Tanaji Patil appeals through street-play by MAVA. Photo by MAVA.

Sarath, a mass media student, said that he learnt the method of writing a street play. He recalled how the presence of girls during the street-play training made the actors feel awkward in the beginning. Gradually, they realized that it broadened their perspective on gender issues. They could understand how the girls view boys' behavior. They realized that the girls' feelings and responses had to be incorporated in the script. He learnt the skill of dialoguing and understanding an issue from different angles.

Prashik, who could only attend the street-play training camp, said he got the opportunity to have general discussions and chats with the MAVA group in college which helped him to understand one aspect more clearly. 'The LGBTQs and our misconceptions about them were again a revelation to me and my other friends. I am now more informed and I can communicate with girls more sensitively and sensibly. I also accept transgender people without any bias now.'

He also found the girls who were attending the street-play workshop to be quite vocal about how they felt when they were teased, followed and taken for

granted. This was an eye-opener for Prashik. 'My thinking about girls changed during this short program. My attitude towards girlfriends and women also changed as I actually saw how girls view boys. The street plays in Mumbai were great as I saw how people were responding to our ideas.'

Amit, from the Satara project, realized the power of media to question traditional norms and present new thoughts. His attraction to street plays was shared by a group of 15-16 youth from the neighboring villages who continued to organize street plays during Ganpati and Durga puja festivals. Amit also realized that there are many youth groups who want to do something in their neighborhoods. He started helping these youth groups to organize street plays on gender issues by sharing the MAVA perspective with them.

Sarath recalls, 'It was the greatest experience I ever had and it was a new media for me to explore.' The play kept evolving as they moved from place to place and received people's feedback. On one occasion, when they were performing at SNDT Women's University, a student from Rajasthan shared how one rickshaw driver had abused her in her home town and, when she asked the police to help, they refused. She wanted to know what could have been done. The street-play group directed her to an NGO where she could file a complaint against the rickshaw driver and the police.

One of the Mumbai female mentees said, 'The street-play event with MAVA made me imbibe independent views about gender equality. Street-play performances in almost 50 venues helped me interact with different groups of people,' something she had never done before.

Mentors from Mumbai shared the most common responses during mass events:

'When we perform street plays, some people ask, "Why are you doing this? Are you going to change the world?" And some say, "Good work, continue."'

'Some friends and classmates laugh at us in the beginning, but gradually they accept what we are doing. The girls in college are more open to what we are doing. The teachers and NSS coordinators are encouraging us all the time.'

Mentors and mentees found that the women and college girls respond more

positively to the street plays and campaigns on gender equality than male audiences. For example, in one of the Ganesha festival pandals, where a street play on domestic violence was being conducted, one of the men started objecting saying, 'Why should this be shown at a religious festival?' However, his wife stopped him from creating a ruckus and asked the mentees to continue.

What Changed for the Youth?

Almost all of the mentors and mentees believe that they are different from other youth as they had received some more information about their physiology and understood some things more clearly about gender inequality in Indian society. They also said that they now wished to contribute to changing the society.

During FGDs, responses were:

- We are open to different opinions and discussions on sensitive issues.
- We understand different types of sexuality.
- We give equal respect to all three genders.
- We see every person as an individual with equal rights.

Expectations as Mentors

When questioned about what is expected from them as a MAVA mentor, during FGDs the responses were:

- Better one-to-one communication with friends, family members, peers.
- Facilitating participatory sessions for youth on gender issues.
- Organize events (films, campaigns).
- Communicate and network with women's groups.
- Use our own and other youth talents for events (music, drama, posters, films).
- Make personal changes.
- Apply gender perspective in family, change own attitude and behavior.
- Keep raising sensitive questions for self-reflection.
- Keep evolving as a gender-sensitive person.
- Take action and find a solution when gender issues are seen.

Community Outreach

The most common first responses of elders and parents to community outreach programs were, 'Why are you wasting time? Think about yourself and your future, waste of time, useless, all this will not change anything.'

The peer communicators/mentees in the FGDs mentioned a few strategies used for reaching out to other youth:

- We use local words that youth generally use while speaking with each other.
- Use of *katta*²⁷ to meet people we want to share with.
- Use humor to get them to understand a point.
- Start by questioning small regular actions, ask them to change them and give them reasons to do so.
- We take a cue from the topics that they are discussing and they become our starting point for further discussion.

Sunil shared one of the significant outcomes of MAVA's outreach program. He shared how, after the change seen in misbehaving youth due to MAVA peer communicators' interventions, the college principal also made a path-breaking change in the college system. 'She gave permission for boys and girls to mingle during lunchtime (most of the co-ed colleges in India still have girls and boys sitting separately). After that we, all friends, boys and girls, could sit together to eat our *dabba* (lunch box) and chat on various topics freely.'

Yogesh Kamble, who was known to be a quiet person to his teachers, said, 'We were expected to organize sessions in our own and different colleges. In the beginning, I felt shy and unsure whether we were doing well in the tasks assigned. Then the girls and other boys came up to us and told us that they liked what we were doing.'

VV from Pune, who had to continue running his father's barber shop during his free time, said he started by keeping books and other materials given by MAVA at his shop. He found a lot of people, some older than his father, had questions on sexual and reproductive health. The salon had become a place for information sharing.

SG from Pune had seen a negative turn to his outreach work. His uncle and aunt do not speak with him as he helped their daughter to marry a man of her choice. He is not invited to make family decisions because he always speaks on behalf of his cousin sisters and nieces. He is now an aspiring politician who is advocating girls' continued education in his village. He has built toilets for girls in schools. He has also established a library in his village.

²⁷ A common meeting place in the community, generally used by young boys.

Prajakta recalled how she was encouraged by the MAVA mentors to conduct a training program for girls and women in her village. 'The MAVA mentors helped me but I was asked to take all the decisions. For the first time, I realized that I had the capacity to conduct sessions on gender issues and could also do all the organizing.'

AL, a lawyer from Satara said, 'I conducted a session on gender issues at a reformatory home for boys, with juveniles and under-trials (all under 18 years of age) as well as counseling them on sexuality.' He also recalled how, when a sex worker wanted to fight a case, no lawyer was ready to take it up. He helped her to fight that case.

ML from Satara said that when he was working with 27 women with HIV and their families, he went beyond the defined role, 'I took on dealing with their issues from a gender perspective... I understood their fears and tensions and helped their families to understand as well and create a positive, enabling environment.'

Amit, who is studying gender at M.A. level, said, 'I have been conducting street



Amol Kale, youth mentor sensitizing on issue of Domestic Violence to lay public as part of an community outreach event. Photo by MAVA.

plays, writing songs and helping other youth groups to write street-play scripts on gender issues.’ He has organized 25 shows of his street play on gender.

Yogesh, a teacher in a village school, says that he never misses an opportunity to discuss gender equality in his regular classes. He conducts a friendly debate on gender equality, and discusses popular advertisements exploiting women’s bodies, using film stories (like *Sairat*)²⁸ to question gender stereotypes and advocate women’s right to decision-making. Most of his colleagues and the principal appreciate his background with MAVA and send rebellious and dissenting children to him for counseling and guidance.

Impact of Youth Mentoring Program

An impact analysis conducted by MASUM, a women’s organization in Pune, in 2008 on the peer communicators showed a good amount of transformation. It said, ‘They now display favorable attitudes towards gender issues and matters of sexuality. The outlook of trainees towards girls has changed; they have stopped teasing and harassing girls in college campuses. They have started participating in household chores and now advocate greater freedom and mobility for the women of their households. The young men and women that Yuva Maitri has reached out to are more open about discussing matters that they would have been shy about earlier.’

Most mentors and mentees in their response sheets have mentioned how most mothers, sisters and friends have appreciated the changes in them; the way they behave (more sensitively), are more attentive, communicate more freely and speak and argue in a more knowledgeable and mature way. Their attitudinal and behavior changes are noticeable.

SJ (Mumbai) said his takeaway from the MAVA training programs was ‘a better understanding of self, on what it means to be a male in our society.’ He recalled how, earlier, he was like other boys who would look at a girl and pass comments, focus only on some body parts and call them ‘Item’ or ‘Cheez’ (thing)... Now he tells them, in ‘a cool tone’, that he would prefer to understand the real person rather than just look at her body.

TP, from Mumbai said, ‘What I learnt is that I need not get into fights and do

²⁸ Marathi film, *Sairat*, in which issues of caste and gender discrimination are raised by the young protagonists in the film.

exercises to be a “male”. I can help people and contribute to social change and that also shows one’s mental strength.’ He had learnt from MAVA that girls have the same rights as boys and can say ‘No’. ‘So when my friend rejected my proposal for marriage, I accepted it. I was sad, but I accepted. Later on, when I met her again, I asked if we could continue to be friends and she accepted it.’ NZ, a mentor from Mumbai shared, ‘My wife says I have become a little bit more aware and understanding towards her feelings.’

20-year-old Sarath said, ‘All my writings reflect what I have learnt from MAVA. Even when I am reviewing films or scripts, I look at how women are portrayed. There are hundreds of small and big prejudices which we hold and perpetuate. It needs rigorous attention and conscious effort to keep them at bay.’

VV and Sunil, who belong to the same village and were part of Pune’s Yuva Maitri in 2006, recounted their work post- MAVA. They have set up an NGO in their own village. ‘We conduct gender training sessions for adolescents every year. We have formed SHGs for men and women in the communities from 2011-2016 and conducted several training sessions on health and gender equality with women’s groups since then.’

Dhananjay, looking after the corporate social responsibility function of a company, said, ‘I have been conducting gender sessions for staff, gender sensitization and domestic violence sessions for adolescents, youth and men at community level, in schools in the neighborhood.’ He said that he tries to circumvent any divide between his personal and professional perspective. He has a joint bank account with his wife, his property is equally divided and decisions are taken jointly.

During the documentation process, the researcher realized that most mentees and mentors had in their own unique ways said that they had found ‘a friend, a mentor’ in MAVA.

Relevant portions from the interviews are added here while the complete case studies are available on the MAVA website. A full video presentation on the same is also available here: <http://www.mavaindia.org/videos.html>



Amol Kale, youth mentor explaining to the student mentees on how Gender and Patriarchy operates as a System in Society. Photo by MAVA.