

## Case Study

# Yuva Maitri Engaging Young Men on Gender Issues

February 2011

**Governance Knowledge Centre**

Promoted by Department of Administrative Reforms  
and Public Grievances  
Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions,  
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Researched and Documented by

  
**oneworld.net**  
OneWorld Foundation India  
[www.oneworld.net.in](http://www.oneworld.net.in)  
[owsa@oneworld.net](mailto:owsa@oneworld.net)

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Case Study  
*Women Empowerment*  
Yuva Maitri  
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## Executive Summary

Efforts to tackle gender-based violence against women in India have concentrated on empowering women to assert themselves. Men have largely been insulated from the process of transformation. Addressing this deficit and recognising the need to alter the attitude and perceptions of men about themselves and towards women, Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA) was founded in 1993 in Maharashtra.

Since its outset, MAVA has been working to build a movement that explores the role of men as partners and stakeholders in addressing gender issues.

In 2006, MAVA launched a new initiative, 'Friendship among youth', or 'Yuva Maitri' in Marathi to engage young men in Pune and promote a healthy dialogue on gender, sexuality, masculinity and related issues. It began with 33 male students between the ages of 16 and 17, from six rural and semi-rural colleges in Pune district.

These students underwent training on gender issues under a 'Personal change' plan for a year with guidance from gender experts and sexologists. Youth-friendly and innovative tools like interactive workshops, awareness songs, posters, wall newspapers, film screenings, and street theatre were used to train the students.

In the second year of the initiative, 17 trained students decided to continue as 'communicators' and began discussing with their peers on topics of gender, healthy relationships, and masculinity. These trained communicators provide a safe, non-threatening platform for other young men to share their fears, thoughts, dilemmas and concerns in a comfortable environment. Also, they are exposed to new ideas of men and masculinity, including sexual health, male-female relationships and other gender matters.

The initiative has gradually spread to Mumbai, Satara, Kolhapur and Jalgaon as MAVA partnered with women's organisations, and local universities to conduct Yuva Maitri workshops and training sessions.

To date, Yuva Maitri reached more than 20,000 young men and 5,000 young women encouraging them to break gender stereotypes.

This document seeks to capture the working design, unique features and impact of Yuva Maitri on youth, aiming to assist in its replication elsewhere.

## Background

### ADDRESSING GENDER ISSUES

Gender based issues are addressed mostly as women's issues in India and are dealt with through one lens – that of creating awareness among women and empowering them to battle with gender inequality. More attempts have been made to change women than to change men; however, a foolproof process of change will only come by altering the mindsets of both men and women.

Men are subject to several stereotypes by virtue of being 'male' (like women are by virtue of being 'female'). They are socialised into becoming 'manly' and are expected to treat their female counterparts in a certain manner in order to live up to their image. Therefore, though gender debates should question established roles and images of women, it is equally important to rethink about established images of how a man should be and behave. Equally important is the need to bring in men as agents of change in the struggle against a male dominated society.

### MEN AGAINST VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Recognising the need to alter the attitude and perceptions of men about themselves and towards women, Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA) was founded in 1993 in Maharashtra. MAVA aims to transform men's patriarchal, chauvinistic and violent attitudes. The first men's organisation in India to intervene directly against gender-based violence on women, MAVA works to address these critical issues by creating a men's movement that deconstructs masculinity.



Figure 1 Briefing young men on gender issues,  
Source: Mava

Since 1993, MAVA has been working to build a movement that explores the role of men as partners and key stakeholders in addressing gender issues, including women's empowerment, through cultural advocacy, direct intervention and youth education initiatives.

### YUVA MAITRI- SENSITISING THE YOUTH

In 2006, MAVA launched the pilot programme, "Friendship Among Youths" also known as "Yuva Maitri" in Pune. Yuva Maitri seeks to engage young men in promoting a healthy dialogue on gender, sexuality, masculinity and related issues. It began with 33 male students from six rural and semi-rural colleges in Pune district, in the age group of 16 to 17 years. The

young men belong to different socio-economic backgrounds but are largely from the middle and lower middle classes.

From the pilot in Pune, Yuva Maitri has now spread across four other districts of the state: Mumbai, Kolhapur, Satara and Jalgaon. It continues to alter the way young men view themselves and women.

## Objective

Yuva Maitri aims to:

- Bring about social change by sensitising young men and women on issues of gender, sexuality and violence
- Serve as an open platform for the youth (especially men) to comfortably express their fears, thoughts, dilemmas and concerns on these issues, help them break gender stereotypes, and expose to newer ideas on gender and male female equations
- Provide various innovative tools to young men to communicate and spread gender-awareness amongst their peers

## Working Design

### Starting Yuva Maitri

Yuva Maitri began as a pilot in Pune under the National Service Scheme (NSS). NSS is a Government of India programme aimed at inculcating a sense of service to society amongst students. Most Government and Government Aided Institutions schools and colleges in India have NSS units comprised of volunteers. These volunteers have to contribute 120 hours of social service in one academic year and can choose from a variety of social work like helping in old age homes, blind schools, traffic control, assisting street children, and conducting camps for awareness on different social issues.

In colleges in semi-rural and rural Pune in 2006, Yuva Maitri was made one of the options that students can opt for under the NSS.

### Programme In Pune

Thirty-three students from six rural and semi-rural colleges in Pune were trained under Yuva Maitri over the course of two years.

## TRAINING STUDENTS

During the first year, the programme focused on training students on various gender issues and chalking out a 'Personal Change Plan'. The first year stressed necessary changes in attitudes towards women, self-perceptions and notions of masculinity. The training began at the beginning of the academic year with a eight day residential workshop for select students, to inculcate their interest and help them understand gender issues in detail.

Classes are at morning colleges and hence classes end by 10:30 AM. From 10.30 to 11.30 AM periodic weekly interactive sessions are arranged in each of the six colleges.

## TRAINING TOOLS

Post-workshops, the students are intensively trained for a year through one hour weekly sessions using a wide range of youth-friendly, cost-effective communication mediums like focused group discussions (with guest faculty gender experts, sexologists etc. ), games, awareness songs, posters, film screenings, street plays, exposure visits to other gender organisations, debates and wall-newspapers (monthly, with each issue focusing on a particular gender theme). After six months, a refresher course is held to revise what was learnt and to get student feedback on improving training methods.

## TRAINING CONTENT



Figure 2 Communicator training the youth at satara,  
Source: Mava

The training content was based on modules developed by MASUM (Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal) and Tathapi which are local womens groups. MAVA used six modules - gender, sexuality, equality and equity, health, violence and rights - and covered issues under these broad headings in its training programme. Students were encouraged to voice anxieties, dilemmas and problems arising out of man-woman relationships, myths and misconceptions on issues like masturbation, menstruation and HIV/AIDS, dealing with emotions like anger, stress and

Researched and documented by

loneliness, coping with failures at the workplace or in studies, dealing with addictions like smoking, alcohol, sexual abuse through internet-surfing and mobile phones, and any other such behaviour that often manifests in violence against women.

## STUDENTS TRAINING THEIR PEERS

By the end of the first year, 17 students decided to continue as 'communicators' and began discussing with their peers on gender, masculinity and other related matters. They used the same tools that were used while training them. Weekly awareness sessions (one to one and a half hour each) were conducted by them in groups in their respective colleges.

A communicator training the youth in a rural college, Source: MAVA

Communicators conducted several

outreach programmes for students (including girl students) and villagers in the neighbourhoods. Wall newspapers were prepared and displayed on varied themes like male-female friendship, ban on sex education in schools, sex-selective abortions, women and anaemia etc. Students were encouraged to comment on these wall newspapers. An annual magazine published by MAVA called 'Purush Spandana' (meaning 'Men's Expressions') also provided an opportunity for the trained communicators to articulate their thoughts and concerns before a wider audience.

From time-to-time, the trained communicators also took specific stands on gender-based violence against women in their area through rallies and public protest demonstrations. Communicators established working partnerships with other NGOs and women's organizations in the area and gradually developed a strong network of resource persons.



Figure 3: A communicator training the youth in a rural college, Source: Mava

## Moving Beyond Pune

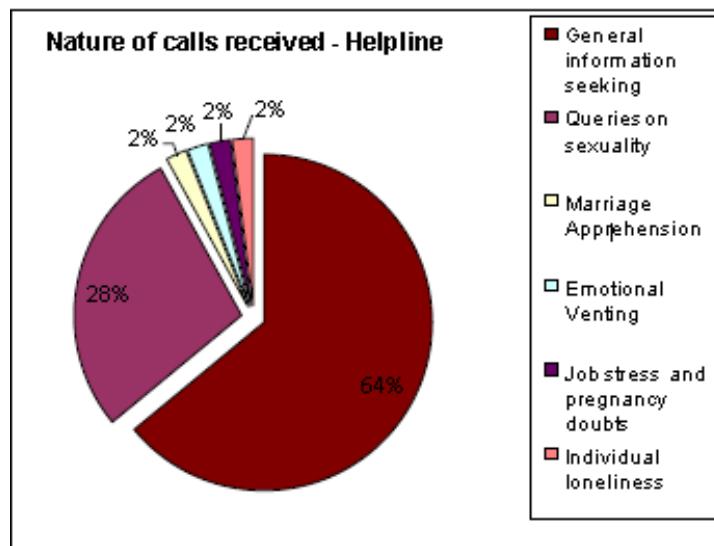
The core team of trained and experienced communicators in Pune has been exploring ways and a means to reaching out to youth across the state. They are being invited by women's groups, health providers and youth bodies in Pune and other parts of Maharashtra to periodically conduct gender-awareness sessions for young men and women, and also to share strategies on how to reach out to men.

Yuva Maitri communicators have been pro-actively planning and participating in public meetings, seminars, protest- demonstrations, performing street-plays on HIV /AIDS and running campaigns on domestic violence in the districts of Aurangabad and Nashik.

## MUMBAI

In August 2008 MAVA upscaled the initiative to five colleges in Mumbai. Select students from the colleges are being sensitised and trained to engage peers and other young men on a wide range of gender and sexuality issues in a similar manner as done in Pune.

A telephonic helpline (022 - 26826062) has been started for the youth in Mumbai. The helpline answers phone calls between 10 AM and 6PM everyday (including holidays) from teenagers, young men and women on anxieties, dilemmas and confusions faced on matters of relationships, violence and sexuality. The helpline is currently being manned by around eight to 10 young volunteers mostly within the age group of 21 to 30 years, hailing from diverse professions. Selected volunteers are periodically being trained by MAVA's team and experts like psychiatrists on answering phone calls.



## SATARA

In June 2009, MAVA collaborated with a grassroots community development organisation in Satara and is currently developing a pool of male communicators, hailing from 20 villages to promote gender awareness in Satara.

## KOLHAPUR

MAVA began collaborating with D.K.Shinde School of Social Work in Kolhapur in July 2009. Since then, three student social workers and a voluntary trained social worker from the college have been working actively to reach out to students in their college and people from villages of Panhala taluka in Kolhapur, which is said to have the highest sex ratio in Maharashtra.

## JALGAON

Since December 2009, MAVA has been working with the North Maharashtra University in Jalgaon to train a batch of select lecturers and plan a long-term programme for reaching out to many college students in and around Jalgaon on issues of women's empowerment.

### Monitoring

Representatives from MAVA make frequent visits to the colleges to inspect the work being done and the impact being created. Women's organizations in the areas have also conducted impact analyses through interviews with trained communicators and student participants to access the change in their mindsets.

### The Financial Side

Yuva Maitri began in Pune with a Population Council fellowship. The finances are met with the assistance of College NSS Units, progressive funding agencies like SwissAid India, women's groups, health providers and human rights organizations that invite Yuva Maitri communicators to conduct training sessions and interactive workshops on their behalf.

### **Methodology**

Working with the objective of identifying best practices in governance in India for further replication, the OneWorld team conducts extensive research to locate initiatives that contribute towards the betterment of public service delivery. Yuva Maitri, with its focus on involving men in the process of transforming gender relationships and questioning gender stereotypes, is a unique effort. It is economically and socially sustainable and has been impacting the lives of an increasing number of youth in the state of Maharashtra.

Having established the initiative as a best practice, the team then conducted thorough secondary research using web sources to gather a detailed understanding of how it works. The next step was to identify the key stakeholders and schedule interviews with them to gain deeper insight into the operations and impact of the initiative.

## Key Stakeholders

**Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA):** MAVA is India's first men's organisation fighting directly against gender-based violence on women. It conceptualised and is now operating Yuva Maitri.

**Women's groups** like MASUM, Tathapi Stree Mukti Sanghatana, Nari Samata Manch in Pune, Yuva, Anubhav Shiksha, Bharatiya Stree Shakti in Nagpur, **health providers** in Aurangabad and Nashik, **human rights organisations** like Delhi-based Breakthrough TV etc. collaborate with MAVA to conduct gender-sensitisation sessions for the youth.

**Educational Institutions** from Pune, Mumbai (University of Mumbai), Satara, Kolhapur (D.K. Shinde School of Social Work) and Jalgaon (North Maharashtra University) collaborate with MAVA to run Yuva Maitri as a part of the National Service Scheme (NSS) and conduct gender-awareness sessions and outreach programmes.

The target population of Yuva Maitri- **students and youth of Maharashtra**

## Lessons Learned

### FOCUSING ON THE YOUTH

With its focus on male students (often females also participate) in the age-group of 18 to 20, Yuva Maitri is ushering in a deep process of change as Students in this age-group are in the process of shaping their thoughts and are open to new ideas. Once exposed to issues of gender awareness at this age, their attitudes can be moulded for life and in the long run, positively impact the society at large.

### USE OF CONTEXTUALISED TOOLS

Yuva Maitri operates through a wide variety of communication tools. These youth friendly and innovative mediums are adapted to local conditions. For example, in the rural and semi rural colleges of Pune methods like awareness songs, street theatre, wall-newspapers have been more effective. While in Mumbai, along with these tools, a gender helpline provides guidance to college youth.

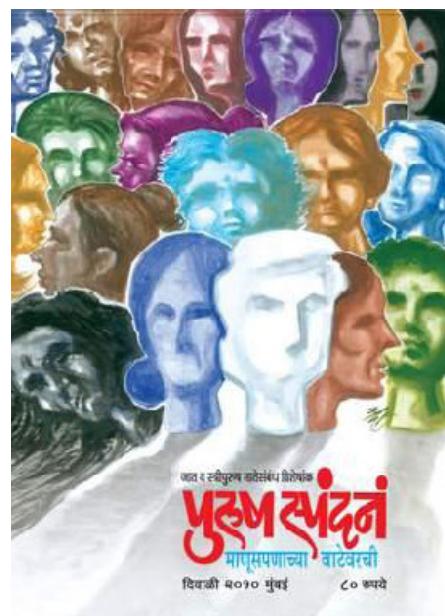
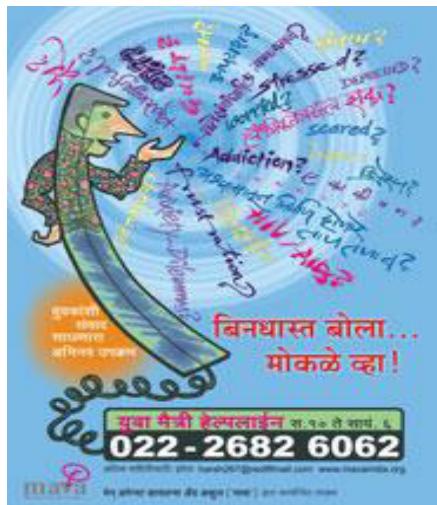


Figure 4: Cover of Yuva Maitri magazine 'purushspandana'/  
Source: Mava

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS



**Figure 5: Yuva Maitri helpline in Mumbai/  
Source: Maya**

that continues to increase. .

An impact analysis conducted by MASUM ,a women's organization in Pune, at the end of the second year on 'communicators' shows the kind of transformation that they have undergone since their association with Yuva Maitri began. They now display favourable attitudes towards gender issues and matters of sexuality. The outlook of trainers 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.

Yuva Maitri over the years has built a strong network of relationships with a range of women's organisations, health providers, educational institutions and the local populace in the rural areas. This networking is helping Yuva Maitri to increase its reach and impact an increasing number of youth. It is now being invited from organisations in various districts of Maharashtra to conduct gender-sensitisation workshops and training sessions.

## CHANGING MINDSETS

Yuva Maitri, with its core team of about 100 dedicated communicators, has reached more than 20,000 young men and 5,000 young women. The Yuva Maitri helpline in Mumbai in a period of six months (from September 2009 to February 2010) answered more than 400 calls, a number



**Figure 6: Communicator co-ordinating a protest on violence against women/ Source: Maya**

The young men and women that Yuva Maitri has reached out to are more open about discussing matters that they would have earlier been shy about. Today they do not hesitate in talking about issues like male and female sexuality, masturbation myths, menstruation, HIV, family planning, and/or gender roles. Yuva Maitri has broadened their mindsets, thus addressing the issue of violence against women at a curative level - changing mind sets of men who think violence against women is acceptable, as well as at the preventive level - preventing acts of violence from occurring.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The biggest challenge for Yuva Maitri was to convince young men to be a part of the effort. Sometimes students would make mock the initiative, but gradually through sustained persuasion, they started appreciating its importance. With support of college authorities, Yuva Maitri has succeeded in reaching students and is now spreading across the state of Maharashtra. It has initiated a thought process amongst men and women to go to the root cause of gender-based violence and consider men as a 'part of the solution' and not merely 'a part of the problem'. Its ultimate aim is to make gender education a part of school curriculum across India and MAVA is working sincerely to achieve this end.

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*Research was carried out by OneWorld Foundation India (OWFI), Governance Knowledge Centre (GKC) team.*

*Documentation was created by Research Associate, Sapna Kedia*

*For further information, please contact Naimur Rahman, Director, OWFI, at [owsa@oneworld.net](mailto:owsa@oneworld.net)*

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

1. Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA) is India's first men's organization to intervene directly against gender-based violence on women. What was the inspiration behind setting up MAVA?
2. MAVA believes in involving men as partners in gender debates. Yuva Maitri began as a 2-year programme in Pune to sensitise young men in gender issues.
3. Why was the youth targeted?
4. Does the programme still run in Pune or was it a campaign that ended after 2 years?
5. The key stakeholders in Yuva Maitri are MAVA, educational institutions in Maharashtra (ask for names) and other civil society organizations (names). What are their respective roles?
6. Yuva Maitri began with 33 male students from colleges in Pune. How are colleges approached and students convinced about the need to undertake a training course on gender, violence and sexuality? Is there a unique/innovative method used to overcome male resistance to this education process?
7. The students are trained as 'communicators' for a year.
8. Who conducts their training?
9. Interactive tools like posters, film screenings group discussions etc. are used for training the students and spreading awareness through them. What are the key components of the training content/curriculum?
10. What places do trained communicators target, other than educational institutions, to spread awareness and sensitize the youth?
11. What are the major achievements of Yuva Maitri? Has impact been analysed? Is there evidence to suggest that attitudes and behavior have changed?
12. What were some of major challenges faced in due course of the programme? How were they overcome?
13. Yuva Maitri is now spreading to Mumbai, Satara, Jalgaon and Kolhapur. How has the initiative transformed over the years? Are different techniques of training used in these places from the ones used in Pune?
14. Are there any enhancements planned for the future?
15. Can you share the following data with us:

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- Number of youth approached (male/female breakup, monthly and total)
- Number of colleges where the programme was conducted
- Number of communicators trained

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