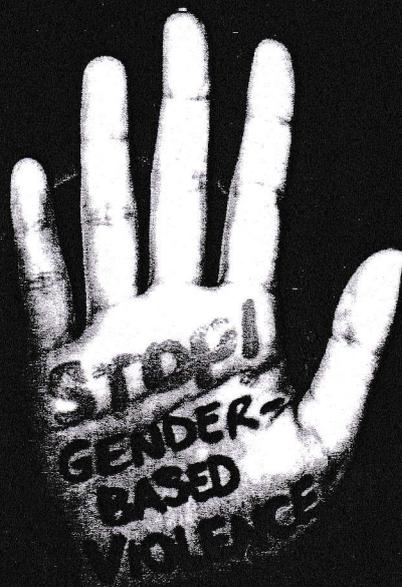


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Marching Beyond 25 Years Successfully

Strategies of Gender-Neutral Classroom of Adolescents

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Abstract

Gender rampage discrimination is a social evil of favouring the males over females. Though predominantly seen among traditional families, gender discrimination is a universal phenomenon being practiced both at home and in the society around. In India, gender discrimination favouring men is evident from ancient times as is seen in sex ratio, life expectancy, literacy rate, morbidity and mortality rate, school enrolment, school dropout, job opportunities and in the economic and political participation of the women. Females here continue to be at a disadvantage and face barriers that restrict their access to resources and inhibit their ability to make informed choices in various walks of life. Gender inequality damages the physical and mental health of millions of girls and women across the globe, and also of boys and men despite the many tangible benefits, it gives men through resources, power, authority, and control (WHO 2016). Different gender norms exist for adolescent boys and girls, (Marston C, King E 2006) especially in India. Evidence is increasing that gender norms – social expectations of appropriate roles and behavior for men (and boys) and women (and girls) – directly affect attitudes and health-related behavior. Gender discrimination is a lifelong process that starts from the womb and ends at the tomb. It threatens the growth and survival of female foetus, female infant, girl child, adolescent girl and the adult female (Suryakantha AH). This paper contributes meaningful knowledge and fills gaps in the evidence about gender equity and differences between adolescent males and females.

Keywords: Gender rampage, Discrimination, Gender Norms, Gender attitudes

Introduction

Adolescence is a time to explore and experiment with beliefs about roles in intimate relationships. It is necessary to reach adolescents to sensitize them with programs that address gender equity and prevention of gender-based violence before expectations, attitudes, and behaviors are well developed. (Barker G, Ricardo C, & Nascimento M. Geneva 2007). Gender Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female (UN WOMEN). Gender inequality in India refers to health, education, economic and political inequalities between men and women in India (The Global Gender Gap Report 2013). Gender disparity still exists in India. Being born as women in the Indian society one has to face gender discrimination at all levels. At the household level - females are confined to the bounds of their household chores, raising children and looking after families, irrespective of her education degrees or her job profile. At her workplace: women have limited access to job opportunities and are paid less for the same work. It is hypothesized that changing gender attitudes and perceptions of gender norms among adolescent boys and girls can improve the health and well-being of boys and girls in the short and long term.



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Gender Norms and Gender attitudes

Adolescence (defined as ages 10–19 years) is one of the most critical periods of human development, as health and well-being at this age impacts long-term outcomes (Blum, Mmuri, & Moreau, 2017). Further, construction of gender attitudes and perceptions of gender norms also occurs during this stage of human development. Many health behaviours acquired during early adolescence (ages 10–14 years) are influenced by gender norms and beliefs, and these gender norms have implications for both girls and boys. The consequences for girls include lack of education, child marriage, child pregnancy, poor health, violence and depression.¹⁶ Boys also have consequences such as engaging in higher rates of physical violence, higher risk of substance abuse and suicide, greater number of deaths from unintentional injuries, and as adults, shorter life expectancies than women (Blum et al., 2017).

During early adolescence, individual perceptions about gender norms begin to form and are still malleable (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2007). Adolescents become increasingly aware of the expectations they must fulfil as a man or a woman and face increasing pressure to conform to the appropriate gender roles of society (Yu et al., 2017). Young adolescents are actively engaged with changing gender norms as they support, resist, or alter them (Yu et al., 2017). However, this process is vulnerable to change. By fostering gender equitable approaches, adolescents have the potential to alter their gender attitudes and perceptions of gender norms.

Gender norms are often defined as culturally shared expectations about the characteristics that men and women should possess and how they should behave (Yu et al., 2017). This includes socially acceptable rules about roles, traits, behaviour status, and power associated with masculinity and femininity in a culture (Kågesten et al., 2016). These gender norms are the strongest factors influencing an adolescent's gender-related attitudes.

Gender attitudes are defined as an individual's perceptions, beliefs, or support of gender norms (Kågesten et al., 2016). Gender attitudes can be equitable or inequitable depending on the gender norm. Endorsing stereotypical gender norms that encourage male dominance are associated with inequitable gender attitudes such as substance use, violence and delinquency, lower male engagement in care giving and household chores, unsafe sexual behaviours, and perpetration of intimate partner violence (Das et al., 2014; Kågesten et al., 2016). On the other hand, young women and girls that prescribe to gender norms are forced to restrict their opportunities, voice, and agency. During adolescence, boys and girls engage with and construct their own gender-based understanding of what it means to be a boy or a girl.

Strategies of Gender-Neutral Classroom

No gender is 'better' than the other or more 'powerful'. Every person has the right to meet their full potential. By setting up a more 'gender-neutral' classroom we are at the forefront of breaking down social norms that promote gender inequality and gender-based violence (<https://e2epublishing.info/blog/2016/9/11/tips-to-promote-gender-equality-in-your-classroom>).

1. **Use gender-neutral language** when referring to children, e.g. instead of saying, 'Choose a boy to go with you'; say, 'Choose a friend to go with you'. Similarly, avoid organizing children according to gender, e.g. 'Boys line up here and girls here.' This only reinforces gender segregation.

2. **Avoid stereotyping children**, e.g. boys are noisy and loud, girls are calm and sweet; boys show less emotion and girls cry more readily. Note that these often-subconscious assumptions will affect your behavior and expectations towards the children.
3. **Self-regulate your own** interaction with the children. We tend to comfort girls more and send boys on their way earlier. Encourage all children to share feelings and emotions equally.
4. **Jumble together** all the dress-ups, toys, games, blocks, etc. so all genders have an equal opportunity to use the equipment rather than the girls traditionally drifting towards the dress-ups and the boys towards the blocks.
5. **Provide a wide range** of diverse stories about the genders in non-stereotyped roles. If such books are limited, change 'he' to 'she' in some books so the girls have a leadership role.
6. **When reading books** where typically the tiger or bear is a 'him' and the butterfly or bird is a 'she', change the gender around. Alternatively, use the gender-neutral term, 'shim' or 'hen'.
7. **Try not to assign classroom tasks** that traditionally relate to a specific gender, e.g. boys moving desks or taking out the bins, while girls are asked to tidy up the dress-up corner.
8. **Some children** will come to school with preconceived ideas about gender. If a child does say, for example, 'Marnie can't play because it's a boy's game.' Use that as a 'teachable moment' and unpack how the comment made Marnie feel, and why you don't have any gender-specific tasks in the classroom.
9. **Ask children to draw** their idea of a fire-fighter, police officer and nurse. Then invite a female fire-fighter and police officer, and a male nurse into the classroom. Invite them to talk about their jobs and unpack the children's drawings and expectations about the visitors. Always use non-gender specific terms when referring to occupations, e.g. chairperson, flight attendant.
10. **Encourage the school staff** to devise a gender-equality policy that promotes gender-neutral language and encourages non-traditional gender roles and activities.
11. **Hold a parent night** to unpack your classroom/school's policy on gender equality and the use of gender-neutral language. Many parents will find this challenging so it is best to explain the reason behind the decision, i.e. all genders have the right to equal opportunities.
12. **Be inclusive of child/children** who identifies as another gender to the one they were assigned at birth. Refer to the child in the gender they prefer. Your modeling of how this child is included and referred to will be paramount to the attitudes of the other children and their families.

Conclusion

"This is a man's world. But it wouldn't, it. Nothing without a woman's and a man's". As a society, to make a huge difference in the future, change starts now. Groups from all over the world need to come together to show how beautiful, strong, and successful women are.

Ladies should be ha
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Girls should be handled with care, treated as queens, and loved like a sister. This is the only way today's society will gain respect for women's around the world. This may be "a man's world" but women are a part of it, and people need to realize that women are just as important as men.

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