Sexual Relationships
from stigma, shame and blame to healing and accountability
Establish class values

- We will be talking about sexuality, gender, pleasure, abuse and safety in these sessions. What will make this class a safe space for everyone to share, express their views and discuss freely?
- How do we want others to behave?
- How will we behave?
Group Activity

Looking at sexual relationships
Participants make groups of 4-6 persons

A. Each group is given one of the following topics. They write what they understand by the term and list the beliefs they have / they have heard other people express about it.
   1. Monogamy
   2. Polygamy
   3. Polyamory
   4. Casual sex
   5. Mixed orientation relationships
   6. Sex-less relationships
   7. Live-in relationships

40 minutes: Each group presents the definition they have written, and the beliefs they have noted and whether they agree with it or not.
Sexual Relationships

- Humans are social beings who regularly make connections with each other, including sexual relationships which are usually when one is attracted to another person.
- From an evolutionary perspective, sexual attraction is an important motivation for reproductive (sexual) activities to be pursued.
- Other reasons that sexual relationships are pursued are:
  - to conform to expectations of society and maintain societal structures (marriage/family)
  - to experience sexual pleasure
  - to express one’s sexuality
  - to enhance the bonding in an existing relationship
What sexually attracts us about people?

• Good health, fertility/ virility and resilient genes - indicated by secondary sexual characteristics like breadth of chest, width of hips, body hair; physical symmetry
• Physical characteristics we are drawn to are: the voice which indicates a sense of vigor, health, confidence; Smell; Feel of skin; Taste
• External factors like: physical familiarity, similarity in attitudes, social standing, academic and intellectual competence, professional success and achievements
Role of hormones, pheromones and neurotransmitters

- Infatuation - early stage of attraction where cortisol levels increase, levels of dopamine and noradrenaline increase, and serotonin decreases - analytical, evaluative mode that provides some sense of control gets set aside or deactivated
- Reward centre activated to make an individual want more of the experience
- State of infatuation can last 1.5 - 2 years before being replaced by more stable affectionate love
- The stress response system plays an important role in the formation of romantic attachments.
- **Activation** or **inhibition** of the stress response system regulates experiences of attraction, mate preference, and emotional connectedness.
Some types of living arrangements

- **Monogamy** - dyadic committed sexual relationship with just one other person during one’s lifetime or at a time/serially.

- **Polygamy** - one individual in committed relationships with multiple sexual partners. Common forms
  - Polyandry - one women in relationship with multiple male partners
  - Polygyny - one man in relationship with multiple women partners

- **Mixed orientation relationships** - couples in which one partner experiences same-sex attraction and the other does not

- **Sexless relationships** - relationship where one or all parties is/are not interested in sex but share an affectionate, maybe romantic bond
Non-monogamous relationships

- Sexual relationships between multiple sexual partners, with everyone’s consent. This can be within the bounds of committed relationships.

- Common forms
  - Polyamory – committed relationships between multiple partners.
  - Open relationships – committed partnerships where external sexual relationships can be casual.
What does the law say?

- Article 21 gives all adults the “right to union” i.e., the right to have any kind of relationship/companionship.
- Adoption – Only allowed for married couples.
Way forward

• Relationships are unique and each one of us is free to create what we wish in a relationship, for oneself and the other.
• As individuals we can be mindful of our own rights and the rights of others and choose to be in relationships/arrangements that best meet our needs of sexual pleasure, companionship, emotional connect and any other.
This PowerPoint is part of a project to prevent gender based violence. This project is supported by Ford Foundation.
CREATING SAFE SPACES

Thank You!

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