Sexual Violence against adults
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?
Types of Abuse

- Physical
- Neglect
- Emotional
- Sexual
What is Sexual Violence?

• At homes, public spaces, professional spaces, digital spaces
• Includes marital rape, intimate partner violence, sexual violence by non-partners, violence used as a weapon of war, forced or early marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced sex trafficking etc.
• Many cases still go unreported.
• But no clarity on any formal definition of Sexual Violence due to its complexity – legal, medical, forensic, social, concept of consent
Causes of Sexual Violence

- Association with moral ideas like honor, virtue, character and purity, the loss or violation of which would be ‘dehumanizing’.
  - For example, in case of Dalit women, sexual humiliation is used as a tool by upper caste perpetrators to affirm dominance and control.

- Institutionalized power (privilege, marginalization) and patriarchy

- Lack of awareness around the concept of consent.

- Enforced culture of silence due to feelings of stigma and shame, justifying a ‘compromising’ approach.

- Crippled justice system: Under-reportage of cases; Revictimization by socio-medico-legal systems;
Consent

- There exists many misconceptions and a lack of awareness around the idea of consent.
- Consent is a voluntary agreement by the person to participate in a specific sexual act.
- Consent once given can be taken back at any time if the person feels uncomfortable.
- It has been portrayed wrongly in movies and films, where a woman’s ‘no’ is perceived as her being coy and actually meaning yes.
Impact on Victims

- Social ostracization
- Loss of employment
- Mental health issues (trauma, depression, self-hatred, perpetual fear)
- At times, death
After violence

- **Journey to Justice**: Much more than effective redressal mechanisms. Focus on survivors’ voices to replace narratives – shame-based with ameliorative; ‘harm to survivor’ with ‘crime by perpetrator’

- **Rehabilitative services**: Accessible care, counselling, holistic therapy, support group initiatives, community involvement
Supporting Survivors

• Demonstrate empathetic communication
  • Believe and support the survivor’s description of the assault and ask questions at an appropriate time without appearing to doubt narrative
  • Establish trust and rapport over time and multiple interactions
  • Make eye contact in a non-judgmental caring manner
  • Use active, empathetic and reflective listening without rushing through conversations
  • Express concern and not curiosity

• WHO’s ’Guidelines for medico-legal care for victims of sexual violence’ contain responses by counsellors to specific ‘feelings’ expressed by survivors.
Supporting Survivors (Contd)

• Maintenance of protocol and ethical practices
  • Maintain confidentiality, dignity and privacy
  • Ensure the survivor does not have to re-narrate and hence re-experience the trauma unless absolutely required, such as in legal processes
  • Refer the survivor to a sensitive mental health professional
Eradicating Sexual Violence

- Focus on cultivating culture of responsibility and accountability
  - Learning the necessary skills to respond to violence
  - Community’s recognition of its role in perpetuating a culture of violence
- Restorative and Transformative Justice over Punitive and Retributive Justice
  - Provides perpetrators the opportunity to recognize impact of their actions and harm caused rather than go through punishment with grudge and vengeance
- Structural changes in the legal system
  - Setting up effective survivor and witness protection programs
  - Increasing police accountability
This PowerPoint is part of a project to prevent gender based violence. This project is supported by Ford Foundation.
CREATING SAFE SPACES

Thank You!

ENFOLD PROACTIVE HEALTH TRUST
+91 802552 0489 | +91 99000 94251 | enfoldindia.org

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