

Introductory Exercises

What do We Know About Gender and Sexuality?

These introductory exercises are designed to help staff and community members examine, understand and articulate their personal feelings about gender and sexuality. We developed these exercises based on lessons learned from previous CARE workshops on gender and sexuality.

ISOFI is based on the belief that in order for staff to interact with communities around issues of gender and sexuality, staff first need to examine their own feelings around gender and sexuality. In these introductory exercises, participants are asked to challenge their preconceived notions of gender and sexual norms, and to analyze the effect of social exclusion on certain members of society, such as female sex workers. In addition to increasing staff understanding of gender and sexuality, staff will also increase their capacity to integrate gender and sexuality into programs.

Objectives

- Staff will explore, understand and articulate their feelings, values and attitudes on gender and sexuality, and how personal perspectives of gender and sexuality affect their work with communities.
- Staff will develop an awareness of how best to integrate gender and sexuality into their organization's programming.

[Click to access the five introductory gender and sexuality exercises:](#)

1. Exploring Gender and Culture

This exercise explores what it means to be male or female in the participants' culture, and challenges participants to think of gender as something that is capable of evolution and change.

We have used this particular exercise in many countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. It can be used as orientation exercises for staff and/or project participants, including men, women, youth and adults.

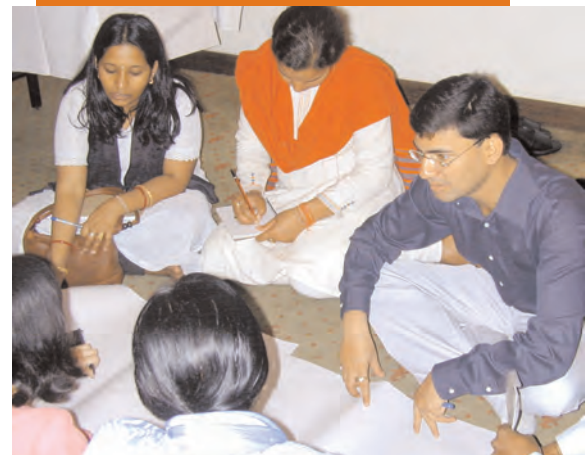
2. What is Sexuality?

This exercise increases participants' understanding of sexuality, sexual rights, and the connection between sexuality and gender.

This exercise was field-tested with women and men in India and Vietnam. People who participated in this exercise said that it helped them understand their own values, attitudes and biases, and also expectations by society, about sexuality. This helped them analyze their own programs and the programs' biases about sexuality. All of this is important if the project is aiming to help people live full, safe and positive sexual lives.

"We've realized that we needed to change 'us' before we [could] advocate for change in communities."

CARE staff member, India



Sarah Kambou/ICRW

“I have realized that my thinking about sexuality was very restricted. I knew very little about sexual health and I believed that I know a lot.”

CARE staff member



Sarah Kambou/ICRW

3. Rebuilding the World

This exercise explores notions of power and social status. By giving participants the ‘power’ to assign value to different members of society, this exercise is meant to cause some discomfort among participants.

4. Talking About Sex and Sexual Pleasure

This exercise gives participants an opportunity to become more comfortable speaking openly about sex and sexual pleasure.

Staff who participated in this training experienced an increased awareness of their own sexual needs and rights, and, seeing pleasure as fundamental, allowed them to reinterpret their roles as sexual partners.

5. Values Clarification

This exercise challenges participants to examine and articulate their values and attitudes toward certain issues related to gender and sexuality.

A central assumption of ISOFI is that self-reflection and personal change is necessary for our programs and our organization to improve. Almost all staff who participated in ISOFI activities reported that personal transformation helped them let go of old ideas, thereby influencing their behavior and having lasting effects. This exercise is useful to help people understand that there are a variety of opinions, and that it is possible to change one’s own ideas and attitudes about controversial topics.



CARE

Some Core Concepts Explored in the Introductory Exercises

Sex

Sex refers to the biological characteristics which define humans as female or male. These sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive as there are individuals who possess both, but these characteristics tend to differentiate humans as males and females. In general use in many languages, the term sex is often used to mean “sexual activity,” but for technical purposes in the context of sexuality and sexual health discussions, the above definition is preferred.

Source: WHO draft working definition, October 2002

Gender

Gender refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female in a particular point in time.

Source: Transforming health systems: gender and rights in reproductive health. WHO, 2001.

Sexuality

Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical and religious and spiritual factors.

Source: WHO draft working definition, October 2002

Sexual Rights

Sexual rights embrace human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus statements. They include the right of all persons, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, to:

- the highest attainable standard of sexual health, including access to sexual and reproductive health care services;
- seek, receive and impart information related to sexuality;
- sexuality education;
- respect for bodily integrity;
- choose their partner;
- decide to be sexually active or not;
- consensual sexual relations;
- consensual marriage;
- decide whether or not, and when, to have children; and
- pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life.

The responsible exercise of human rights requires that all persons respect the rights of others.

Source: WHO draft working definition, http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexual_health.html