

SCHOOLS NOW CONFERENCE, COLOMBO
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INCULCATING GENDER PARITY IN AN ALL BOYS SCHOOL
KARACHI - PAKISTAN
WORKING TOWARDS AN EQUAL SOCIETY

I teach in an all-boys school in Karachi, the biggest city of Pakistan with a population of more than 24 million people according to the (2015) demographics. The male-female ratio is 51.37 MALES to 48.65 FEMALES according to the 2015 demographics. For every 100 men there are 90 women.

I was born into a community that has empowered its women for centuries and when I started growing up I realized I lived in a nation and society where gender inequality is a norm and patriarchy is the way of life and in fact the society is still very static and women are the forgotten sex. We are valued, if at all, on our looks and sweetness of nature. We are expected to keep a comfortable home and our husband's bed warm. Lovely, but it does not acknowledge the violence that billions of women endure or the potential that is being crushed. Nor does it allow for the desire of women to actually take part in the public arena and be treated equally. Women are still woefully underrepresented in public life. There is still horrendous violence against women, trafficking, honor killings, bonded labour, low pay, low expectations of women's achievements and gender stereotyping.

The Global Gender World Gap Report 2013, published by the World Economic Forum in collaboration with the faculty at Harvard University and the University of California, Berkeley, assesses 136 countries, representing more than 93 per cent of the world's population, on how well resources and opportunities are divided among male and female populations.

Pakistan ranks as the world's second-worst country in terms of gender equality and equitable division of resources and opportunities among men and women, says a report published in October 2016.

Pakistan comes down at 135, followed only by Yemen, and its score has fallen three spots since the study was conducted in the year (2015).

The comprehensive annual report measures the size of the gender inequality gap in four areas, including economic participation and opportunity (salaries, participation and highly skilled employment), educational attainment (access to basic and higher levels of education), political empowerment (representation in decision-making structures), health and survival (life expectancy and sex ratio).

According to the index, Pakistan ranks 2nd -worst in economic participation and opportunity, 8th -worst in terms of equal access to education, 13th from the bottom in terms of health and survival.

In some parts of Pakistan live stock is an important asset and given preference where looking after and, taking care is concerned as compared to the women folk of the household.

What's the root cause of violence against women? Some experts say in the South Asian sub-continent and in Muslim countries, women and girls are deemed inferior to men. That explains why families celebrate the birth of a boy and don't do anything when a girl is born. It is widely known that in Pakistan, as well as in the South Asian community, women in growing numbers are aborting female fetuses.

It is definitely a predominantly Patriarchal society.

As school heads, administrators, teachers the issues faced are complex at times.

Since the abuse and violence faced by women can be physical, emotional or sexual it impacts the children in the house.

Additionally, it happens to be a reality that men in most cases are stronger and where a dispute exists and cool discussion does not resolve the issue, brute force can impose an outcome in favour of the stronger partner. Sadly this method of settling issues is not confined to the past, but domestic violence is still very much part of everyday business within the legal system, and emotional and psychological bullying can be the less visible but equally manipulative form of controlling behavior. In most cases it is a biological fact that women in face of a threat will try to appease, while men in face of a threat will become aggressive.

One of the most dangerous and lasting consequences of violence children witness in their homes is the fact that they grow up learning the same violent behaviors because they feel like this is what normal life is like. Many times, children of women who have been abused grow up to be abusers themselves because abuse is familiar territory to them. Those children who do not turn into abusers themselves often unfortunately have to heal from painful emotional and at times physical traumas which can be a life long journey.

Even young children can suffer from depressed mood and anxiety if they live in abusive families. Many children, seeing that their parents are not focused on caring for them, grow up believing that they are not loved. This makes them feel like they are not important and hence they lose their selfconfidence. Sometimes the child feels that he /she is responsible. With a damaged self esteem, children face problems in performing well at school and the signs of trauma may manifest themselves in children's physical behaviors like hurting themselves on purpose, lying about things or throwing tantrums -all of which children do in order to gain the parent's attention / teacher's attention.

Children living in abusive households often feel intense fear as they are anxious about a fight breaking out any moment. Children also feel frustrated and angry because the focus is not on them. Young children need parental love, support and attention. But all this is lost when the parents' energy is spent largely on fights and abusive cycles.

At this time will share with you all only a very short documentary made across the border in India but pertinent to us in Pakistan.

(SHOW VIDEO ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE) 04:58

Such multi-media presentations spark great dialogue and young boys who are soon to become adults came up with relevant questions and even came up with answers.

The answer we feel lies in changing the mindset of male population of the country and what better way to start than in an ALL BOYS SCHOOL, so that the learning moves beyond school into everyday life.

The BVS Parsi High School's policies have over the last 150 years been to make a gentleman out of the young men who leave her portals, an upright citizen who can look after his family and be a good bread winner.

We soon realized that we needed to do more and inculcate GENDER PARITY, EMPATHY AND RE DEFINE WHAT THE PAKISTANI SOCIETY UNDERSTANDS AS MASCULANITY.

We introduced from 2013 a subject we call PERSONAL AND SOCIAL EDUCATION which supports and promotes the personal and social development of its young people. It comprises learning opportunities within and beyond the classroom. As we integrated this into our curriculum we started providing opportunities to our young boys to explore and communicate their values and beliefs to a broad range of topics whilst also respecting the views of others. Topics include self-awareness, prejudice, relationships, peer-pressure, drug education, adolescence, safety on the journey to and from school and elsewhere, socially acceptable behavior and much more. As we started off, a documentary called SAVING FACE by a Pakistani short film maker, Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy won an Oscar in the short Documentary Category in 2012. Ofcourse we had to see it. And when we did we realized we would use this as a teaching tool for the senior boys(only due to the graphic nature of the film). And when we did, it opened up a Pandora 's Box for us. The questions and answers were intense but the most effective was a great political change that came about during the documentary in Pakistan's Laws for "violence against women"

(DISTRIBUTED CD'S OF DOCUMENTARY: SAVING FACE) 40:00

Senator Marvi Memon was successful in having a bill passed in the (NATIONAL ASSEMBLY—ACID AND BURN CRIME BILL 2014), (the perpetrators are punished with two life sentence).

Then came the 2015 Oscar winning short documentary A GIRL IN THE RIVER----PRICE OF FORGIVENESS also by Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy on honor killing. Naturally we were going to see and share and discuss.

(DISTRIBUTED CD'S OF DOCUMENTARY:A GIRL IN THE RIVER) 40:00

Honor killings are common throughout Pakistan, claiming the lives of hundreds of victims every year. According to Aurat Foundation's statistics 432 women were reportedly killed in the name of honor in Pakistan in 2012, 705 in 2011, 557 in 2010, 604 in 2009 and 475 in 2008.

These figures do not include unreported cases or indeed, the number of men who are often killed alongside women in the name of honor. Addressing the loopholes and lacunae in the existing laws is essential in order to prevent these crimes from being repeatedly committed.

The documentary galvanized the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Navaz Shareef to state “there is no honor in honor killing” The Anti Honor killing Act 2014 is there but has not been officially passed in the senate and the National Assembly.

We have seen what men in Pakistan perceive as GOOD or NOT GOOD for the women in their own families and when asked to apply the same criteria for all other women that the mind set changes fast.

This mind set where different rules of respect, honor and empowerment are used for the women-folk of one’s own home but changes for others is the MIND SET that is needed to be altered and developed, and hopefully transformed into a progressive attitude.

An attitude that will be instilled and then is applied beyond the school life into adulthood.

We are looking at equipping the young boys with a mind set that will allow them to reduce the gender gap in health and survival, educational attainment, marriage choices, economic opportunities and over all empowering the women around them especially their sisters, wives and daughters.

We encourage the young boys for service leadership by encouraging them to volunteer in NGOs that work for Women and children.

We have started encouraging them to volunteer in the Women’s Rights NGOs and Women’s Welfare NGO. For this we are getting the parents on board.

We had a workshop for Parents recently that discussed “Violence Against Women” at home and we were pleased with the response, the Question and Answers sessions. We feel that messages need to be passed at home too.

By doing this we are sure to be a part of the positive change where our boys will EMPOWER WOMEN and be instrumental in changing the social fabric to create an equal society.

We impress upon them the fact that the world is changed by courageous people.

All is not that bleak, however

POSITIVE STEPS: - have been taken by the Government of Pakistan.

- 1) The protection against harassment of women at workplace act 2010 (Passed in senate in Islamabad on 11th March 2010).
- 2) To enforce it and to make sure all know about it, OMBUDSMAN, of provinces in November 2016 launched a message to all workplaces requiring to notify all.
- 3) Acid and burn crime bill 2014 was passed in the national assembly – perpetrators are punished with two life sentences.
- 4) Anti-honor killings act 2014:
The bill is designed to achieve the said objective.
- 5) Domestic violence (prohibition and protection Act 2013)
- 6) Sindh child marriage restraint Act 2013.
- 7) Women development department, Government of Sindh ---
International day for elimination of violence against women 25th November each year.

Special complaint cells in Karachi, Larkana, Hyderabad, Benazirabad, Sukkur, Jacobabad.

- 8) Cyber harassment helpline effective December 2nd 2016
- 9) Women's safety app. launched on Wednesday 04th January 2017 in Punjab.

(SHOW VIDEO: BOY'S DON'T CRY) 02:00

In Concluding:

- 1) Change our world by challenging outdated assumptions of how things should be.
- 2) Try out new things in small ways, for instance in the home or places of work where we practice community and sustainable living.
- 3) Infiltrate the system, which is often sadly corrupt, and try to introduce new understandings, meaningful change and certainly more kindness without getting contaminated ourselves in the process.

I state these things because I feel that it is important to know where you are making conscious change and that each way has a value in the whole. I think women have a head start in change making, simply because we have recently entered the power system without too much past baggage. We can more easily make a fresh start and embrace the much longed for values of creativity and compassion. We also have an innate understanding of community and an obvious stake in the future through our families and what better way then to start with the boys.

Ladies and Gentlemen: when the going gets tough, the tough get going.

THANK YOU