Change agent Kalwa

Sex: Female

Focus group discussion

Duration: 38 mins

Researcher: Vinita

Transcriber:

(Researcher: R, Interviewee: I)

I: I told her that you told him no, yes she said she refused him. In the recess time he used to come and stand in the gallery. I showed Anjali that this boy stands. I told him that my friend told you ‘No’, so why are you still behind her. He told my why are you bothered. I told him that I am her friend; he said please be her friend only and don’t interfere in our matter. I told him that when she does not like you then why are you behind her, he said be out of this or else I will give you one…I told him you will beat me, he said Yes. Then tomorrow I told Anjali that even after you said ‘No’, he is doing this, did you tell your Mom. She said, No- if I tell Mom then she will not allow me to come to school or will come to leave me. Then next day I saw him, he was continuous staring her. Then I went and told him that why are you staring her, he said it is my eyes, I will do whatever I feel like doing. Then I told him that this is my hand I can also do what I feel like doing. He said if you beat me then I will complain to your principal. Later I saw my class teacher and I told him so Sir shouted at him. My Sir told him that if he continued this then he will bring it up with the Principal, so now when he comes in front of us also he quietly goes away.

R: Can anyone else want to share.

I: Our area, there is lot of dirt, the people who cleans from TMC, they also do not come in our area because there is more dirt and filth accumulated there. Then I and my friends told madam about it and it was our parents only who use to go there and throw all the garbage. We also tried to make our parents understand the problem but they did not understand. Then we told Madam and then TMC people started coming to our chawl and started collecting the garbage since then.

R: And?

I: We told Mam that there is over flow of water in our chawl and it pours from the tap. Them Mam told us that you have to close the tap daily whenever it is pouring. When aunty will see it daily, she will be apologetic and she will realize that these girls are closing the tap. Now when we pass by we see and we go and close the tap daily. Now when the aunty sees it she herself closes the tap. I even told my mom about our right to live in a clean surrounding, so recently the gutter was blocked in our area. So if the water doesn’t flow in the gutter it starts rising up. So the uncle who is responsible for cleaning the gutter was drinking tea near our building. So my mom went to him and told him that because he doesn’t clean the gutters, there is water logging in our area. So the next morning itself, he came and cleaned the gutter on the day of chhatt pooja itself.

R: But your mother asked him to do this.

I : But I told my mom about what all we do so my mother also felt that she has the right to say something so that’s why she did what she did.

R : Good! That’s very nice.

I : So I felt nice that my mom went and said something to the uncle. Otherwise she wouldn’t have said anything. This is the result of informing your parents at home.

I2 : Along with you, mothers change as well.

I3 : My parents didn’t allow me to go anywhere. Just from home to school and then back to home again. But now since joining Sneha, I can go not only here but anywhere and with anyone. They don’t stop me. Even at night, provided I come home by 8 or 9 o’clock they don’t stop me anymore. The first time they say no but when I insist they just say ok, go. This change has taken place at my home.

R : So you had to talk to them and make them understand right?

I : We talked to them and explained them that they should trust us and allow us to go. So they understood and let us go.

I : Ma’am listen, before in toilets people used to leave their sanitary napkins just like that. They used to put them anywhere even in open pipes and sometimes we even found them in playgrounds, here as well as there. So we had a meeting with the police at the station and we had a talk with sir.

R : Which Sir?

I : The Inspector. What was his name? Shimpi?

I2 : In exotica?

I : No in Thane. We all went there.

I2: To tmc office?

I : Yes the TMC sir was present there. What we did first was we placed a dustbin there, not of plastic but of cardboard. We kept them in all the toilets and labelled them. We went and told him what we had done and asked him to ensure they are emptied and cleaned and he told us it will happen from now on. Now we don’t see it that much.

R : So is it happening or not?

I : A little bit of change is happening.

R : So did you ever think of following up? If sometimes the cleaning took place and sometimes it didn’t, you should go and talk to sir again.

I : If something ever happens in our gali, all the women come together and lodge a complain.

R : So did this happen before or was it something you taught them to do?

I : It never happened before but it happens now. Someone used to say I’ve so much work so I can’t come. We explained to them that it is a problem for the entire gali and if they lived in the gali they should come as well.

R : So how did this unity come to be? Was it there since the beginning?

I : No.

R : So how did it happen?

I : Slowly. When the kids started growing up the NGO work began. So the people of the Ngo used to come to our galli and explain it to the people.

I2: Ma’am used to come herself and take a session with all the women.

R : So somethings were explained by your ma’am to your mothers and somethings were explained by you?

I : Yes.

R : And the changes that come within you, do your mothers notice that?

I ; Yes.

R : What do they think about you now? How do they look at you?

I : They believe that if there is a problem we can handle it ourselves. If we take a decision ourselves our mothers say “ok. If you think this way, it will be all right”. They say our thinking is different but since we are from this generation we must know what is wright.

I2: First mom used to think that she is a girl and moving forward girls could be a burden. But now after attending the sessions, they believe that we can handle ourselves and if something happens going forward we can handle ourselves.

R : So now they believe in you more?

I : Yes.

R They have more faith in your abilities now.

I : So it there is a problem now, they don’t immediately tell us the solution. They allow me to think and come up with the solution ourselves. They believe that I should be able to live independently.

I2: Now even dad doesn’t shout so much if we stay out till late.

R : What all changes do you see in yourself?

I : In confidence.

I2 : Earlier I didn’t talk at all.

R : Now you don’t stop!

I2 : I used to be very afraid before. What would others think, if I say something wrong? Sound wouldn’t come from my mouth and now I don’t stop talking and I am always shouting ma’am ma’am ma’am.

I3 : She didn’t talk at all. We felt that if we put a mic under her only then we would hear her voice. Now at camp she was the one who was having the most fun.

I: There was a big issue with the boys. They said something like only men handle the house. So if they work and make any money, they would party with their friends, keep enough money for their needs and if there is some little money left, give it to their mom. So we told them that they don’t understand now, they will understand when they become fathers.

R : So you got the courage to talk so much?

I : Yes.

I2:If we ever go out at night and somebody touches us, we wouldn’t have said anything before but now if someone does that and we fell that it is not safe we turn around and tell that uncle that he should walk properly and shouldn’t touch us. Or we even hit out at him from behind.

R : Tell me now, after becoming change agents were you given some extra inputs? Were you taught something else?

I : Yes. They taught us about studies. They taught us about concentration.

R : but was it taught to everyone or just the change agents?

I : everyone.

R : Do you think that change agents were taught something extra about a particular subject compared to others.

I : Yes.

R : What was that?

I : We recently had a session on love. It was about attraction, infatuation and love. What are the difference between these three things? So attraction is like how all girls are attracted to someone like Varun Dhawan. His face, his body, his wealth, seeing these things they are attracted to him. And what is love? These things combined, results in love. Love like what you have for your parents and the relationships you have with others. Love requires things like faith and respect. Respect like, when it comes to sex, if the girl is not ready don’t or pressure her. We saw a video where it was shown that the girl was not ready to have tea.

R : But was this for the change agents or was it for every one?

I1: It was for the change agents.

I2: No everyone saw it.

R : So even you are a change agent right?

I2 : yes.

R : So the girls who aren’t change agents…

I : They weren’t shouwn it.

R : So they taught you about sexuality. What else did they teach you?

I : About power.

I1 : Power in the sense that whatever the rules we have at our homes are dominated by the males. They make all the decisions and don’t listen to us. So the power is in their hands and we think that we have given them the power.

L2: If they go to work, the power is in their hands so if we go to work, the power will be in our hands as well.

L3: At the beginning, it is us who has given them the power and if we stop the power will come back to us.

L2 : And they taught us about law as well. Law is the most important thing for change because for any action we have to consider the law. What is right and wrong according to law and what will be the legal consequences of my actions. So these all important things were taught to the change agents.

R : So here you learnt a few things with the other girls and a few things with the change agents. You are saying you became more confident, you got to know the proper way to speak, you got the courage to speak, you got the courage to talk to boys, etc. Do you think there have been any other changes within you?

I : Yes leadership. At beginning I was a follower. If there was an issue I was like I’ll see to it but as problems started coming to me. Because I am the leader in my area. So when people through word of mouth got to know about it. They believed that if they got their problems to me, I would take them forward so they started coming to me with their problems. So a case came to me about a girl whose house was used as a stash for liquor. Everyone used to come to her house and she couldn’t say anything. They used to go her house, sit there with snacks and look at her inappropriately. They didn’t touch her but made her uncomfortable. So she came to me and told me about her problem and asked for my help. I heard all she had to say. I had the confidence to help but I was taking it too lightly. I wasn’t focused on the problem and didn’t have any concentration. I was thinking that I will do it, this is nothing and nothing will happen. So I took her to the Ngo and talked with ma’am where she told me where I made the mistake. If I wanted to do something, I could have done it on the spot but I didn’t. So she explained to me all my mistakes and action was taken at the girl’s house as well. Because she is feeling safe now but not so much that she can confidently say that she is safe. But there have been a few changes. We talked to her family but the problem was that their family is what we call Banjari, and they don’t listen to anyone and do what they want. So the issue we were facing was that they have an entire community and if there is any problem the entire community gets involved. But slowly we got some power, I alone went to her building and talked to her mother. Her mother shouted at me but after some time her mother came around. Even today if we go to their house her father doesn’t let us come in and sit. We talk to them outside and leave.

R – Even that is a big change.

I – It a big change. But the thing I learnt there was that I should be over confident.

R – So do you think that there are any skills which you have learnt more like you learnt to do theatre really well? So do you think you have attained any new special skills here?

I – We have been provided with free vocational courses like jewelry making, computer programming.

I2- But it is finished now. I had done a course in computers which gave me confidence to go ahead and do more in that. I got a good percentage in that so I went ahead and did XLGST. I thanked ma’am for it so she put me in MHCIT and through that I did a lot of other courses.

R : So you got computer skills. There must be other people like you who got trained in computers? Is there any other skill set you can tell me about?

I – There is one skill which I will never forget even if I try to. That is to think and understand and then take a decision and when you take that decision, you have to stick to it.

R – So it’s about planning. So before taking any action you should plan for it and know what will be the consequence if you take a particular action and not get into something without thinking and understanding it completely.

I – Kanchan ma’am had taken a session on this as well where we learned about the three signals. Green, Yellow and Red. Red mean stop, red is when you become really angry so stop. Yellow means think about what you are doing , whether it is right or wrong.

R – Managing your anger is one thing. But without getting angry taking a decision. For example, even for studying you have to plan what to do today, tomorrow and the day after. If you have to take an action regarding any problem, for example if the issue is garbage collection, you have to plan that you have to meet someone from TMC for which some letters and paperwork is required. Planning all of this. Pooja is saying she has learnt this skill of planning.

I – We were taught about money saving as well. If we get 20 rupees a day, after paying our rent we can save the remaining and use it at our homes. And if our friend is having a birthday then instead of asking our families for money we can use our savings.

I2 – Ma’am I’ve done a lot of savings. I teach tuitions a saved some money.

R – Accha.

I – So after saving money, if there is a problem at home like a financial problem, if can help there we feel very nice that the money we saved has come to some good use. We feel proud of the fact that we are not dependent on our parents anymore and if our parents have a problem they aren’t that worried.

I2 – And if we have a problem with our finances and we ask our fathers for money they say ok because they know that we save money.

R – This is also a very important skill which you learnt. How to talk to people or how to work with them, do you think you learnt this here?

I – Yes.

R – Can you give me an example?

I – So we had a water problem. I shouldn’t shout at them to close the tap. Ma’am told me to be polite and explain to them gently that we are getting water so we shouldn’t do this. We should try and make them understand and if they don’t it doesn’t matter. If you see the tap open the next day close it yourself. You keep doing it for two or three days so they will feel the same and start doing it themselves. So we should do that in a friendly way and not be too hyper.

R – Would anyone from the last row want to share? What changes in have occurred in them? What have they learnt since coming here through the change agent courses that have been conducted? Have some changes occurred in the way you see yourselves? What was your image according to you and what do you think of yourself now? Has there been any change in that?

I – First, even while walking, I used to have my head down and be sad thinking about things like what other people were thinking about me. Not so much now. Now I walk in a bold manner. First I didn’t like to go anywhere alone now I don’t care so much.

I2 – Before even if we were in a group if there were a bunch of boys in our way, we used to change our route. Now even if we are alone and there a bunch of boys, we don’t feel scared anymore. “Brother move aside, coming through!”

R – So the fear you had is gone?

I – before I used to be afraid of walking in my area but now I feel that if someone has the gall to harass me, I’ll tell them off.

I2 – Everyone knows that if they mess with her they’ll be in trouble.

I – Now they don’t say anything.

I3 – One day I was coming through a park. School was over. There is a place there where all the boys sit. Everyone was like let us not go from there. That made me want to go from there even more to dare them to do anything. I forced my friend to go with me saying we’ll see what happens. The boys were standing there and I was like “Move aside! Let us through. How can you block a road”. Afterwards my friend said that she’ll always stick close to me. I don’t her that it’s not like that and if she continues to be afraid of then they will continue to try scare her even more.

I – And ma’am near the pipeline there was a hub of liquor. We had done all the mapping and sir had also come. We used to see them all the time but don’t see them around that much anymore.

R – This change also happened because of you right in your community? We used your mapping to bring change.

I – We brought about some changes which is good but our thinking is that moving forward when more and more people join and new youth comes in that they shouldn’t just move us aside.

R – So what do you fell? Moving forward how would you like to be involved in Sneha?

I – One way could be providing training to kids, teaching them drama and if ever there is any problem in the area we can come here and talk. Some sort of a connection should be maintained and we should not break it. In our group many different people are there who were brought together by sneha.

R – So this is one place where you can meet your friends.

I – I didn’t even jnow that these people were from my area before I joined Sneha. I used to see them since school but we never asked each other’s name. Since joining here we have bonded really well and we regularly visit each other’s houses. The girls who live in our area, if we come across each other on our way we greet each other. Before this didn’t used to happen. Before we were so afraid that even though we took the same bus we didn’t know them. Me and my sister travelled together and only once did I ask her name. We just used to call her di. I asked her once “didi didi whats your name?” and she just replied “Pihoo” and I was surprised.

I2 – She old us a fake name.

I – And when she asked her our name we said that her name is Pooja.

I2 – Even we didn’t know who she was so even we gave her fake names. I told her that my name was Priya and her name was Payal.

R – But why did you use fake names?

I – We were afraid that if we give out our real name that she would become very clingy like a bodyguard.

R – You were afraid of girls your own age as well?

I – Ma’am when we were kids we were pumped with such silly ideas. Mom and dad told us such things so that we would be afraid of going out. Even our environment was like that and along with the environment our parents used to tell us not to reveal our names to strangers. Don’t tell them this don’t tell them that.

I2 – Don’t talk to them at all.

R – So there were a lot of constraints from the beginning because of which you used to live in fear?

I – But the situation was such at that time. A lot of girls had been kidnapped in our area and there were children who had been murdered. There is this thing called “Giving Supari”. For that they just used to give money and a name. Go there and ask about this girl, you’ll come to know of her soon and you have to do her in. So we were afraid and because of which we used to give out fake names.

R – So the situation must not have changed much?

I – No! A lot has changed. It has been & years since those days. I was in 7th back then, she was in 9th and she was in 6th. So we were very little when these things were going on.

I2 – I’ll tell you about it properly. Back when I was going to school in this Kalwa area, there was a pipeline where a gangster called Vinay used to operate and there was always trouble over there.

I3 – Ma’am look at the time please.

R – Oh do you need to go? That’s alright. So anybody who wants to leave or is in a hurry can leave. For the others, I just have a few more questions. Does everyone have to go together?

I – No just the two of us.

I2 – If she goes alone then her mother will shout at her.

R – It is alright. No problem.

I – As I was saying, a gangster named Vinay used to stay there. Everyone was very afraid of him. Anyone could be murdered there in broad daylight. When Sneha came his terror started reducing little by little and no it’s almost completely gone. Once we got to know about our rights, everyone started raising voice against him now it’s completely finished.

R – So you think it is because of you that the crime rate has gone down in this area?

I – Yes. Once we got to know about these things.

R – You got to know about, your community got to know about it. So because of this the crime rate has gone down.

I – The thinking here before was that everyone here is uneducated that even if something happened, no one would be able to take any action. Once the kids started getting educated they got knowledge about a lot of things and since they started coming to Sneha they got knowledge of even more things. So since we got to know so much and became much more aware his operation has gone down.

R – So when you got empowered and the community got empowered, his power started declining?

I – Yes. Families thought that these things are happening because our kids are learning so families became more supportive.

R – So now in what way does your family look at you?

I – Like independent girls. She can do whatever she wants.

R – So do they see you as a resource? So you can lend them money from your savings or if they don’t know something you could tell it to them.

I – So if our mom ever asks her for anything we just give it to her. I just gave her today. 100rs.

R – And the aunties in your community who used to say things like you made a mistake sending her once and don’t make a mistake like that again. So what is their opinion about you now?

I – If someone says something like that to my mother, I’ll go to her and make her understand. I’ll try and convince her to send her daughter to Sneha because they teach us good things. Things that she probably can’t teach her daughter. And if she can’t teach her daughter, her daughter should get that information from someplace else.

I2 – There are some boys even today that whenever I come back they ask me to give them some things I got from them. Somethings like biscuits and other snacks. So there are some people who look at it this way. So aunties used to ask us questions like whether men come there, etc. I used to tell them that we had all the knowledge about periods before getting them. Normally we wouldn’t be prepared before but now we had all the knowledge beforehand. If our stomach hurts we immediately understand what is going to happen.

I3 – When there was a function in our area, I had taken my mom but had told the aunties in my building. When I came back they teased me about how I secretively went and didn’t tell them since they too wanted to come. I told them that the next time I will inform them all and the aunties now know that I go to an NGO and learn there so they ask me to tell them what I learnt. Their kids are very small, so they can’t join just yet so I tell them that when they grow older they should join as well.

R – So now they are interested to send their daughters as well.

I – Now even some of the boys want to join as well.

I2 – What brother told me that he wants to join aswell.

R – So now it is allowed for boys.

I – Yes it is allowed but he is working so he doesn’t get much time.

R – He is older as well.

I – Yes very old.

I2 – So we are afraid that we might have to leave it behind when we get older.

I – But my little brother, if ma’am allows it, I’ll enroll him as well.

R – No but later on you can still work here as a volunteer. Would you like to work here as a volunteer?

I – Yes. Ma’am told us that if she ever leaves, we as change agents are responsible for spreading the knowledge that we have attained and moving forward. The new generation that is coming up, we have to teach them, turn them into a community and give them the required information. Volunteering is alright but we feel that our learning shouldn’t stop and even after groeing older the sessions continue and we continue to get knowledge.

I2 – Even if somebody is getting married but we get a call asking us to come for a camp, we’ll still go.

R – Wherever you go you can start similar activities there on your own, can’t you?

I – We can do it but our thinking right now is such that if we are doing something we need ma’am as well. Whatever it may be we need ma’am.

I2 – I feel that moving forward, no matter what happens I still would want Sneha to be a part of my life.

R – Moving forward what are your own plans? Who wants to work? Who is under pressure to get married?

I – There is no pressure. I don’t wish to get married at all.

I2 – The best thing about joining Sneha is that our family didn’t force us to get married. They have confidence in us so they say study as much as you want and then when you want to get married, do it then.

R – What about you guys?

I – Same in my house as well. There is no pressure of marriage.

I2 – My mom said that if I don’t get married at all, it’s allright.

R – So will they allow you to do a job or not?

I – They will allow.

R – And what do you yourself want to do? Do you want to do a jab or not?

I – We want to.

I – My mom used to say that education till 12th is enough. My brother used to say the same thing. In our culture education is not that important. We are educated for a few years and then married off. They used to say that my brother will learn and work but since I got belief in myself I told them I will study as much as my brother studies. They said ok we’ll see what happens. I told them that that isn’t acceptable and I will get an education as well.

R – So you are saving money for your education right?

I – No they get spent. My mom has said that study how much ever you want and once you are done join an NGO. Join Sneha and get a job there. My knowledge will also keep on growing. I wont stop at one place and I’ll get an opportunity to teach kids as well.

R – So if you do a job, how will you remain associated with Sneha? Have you given it any thought?

I – Yes. We have their contact number and if this office remains here we’ll continue to visit when we are passing by. And if anything happens we are kept informed of it by ma’am on call.

R – But to attend a meeting or to participate in an event, where will you get the time?

I – On weekends.

I2 – It depends on the nature of our job. We’ll give them time accordingly.

I – If we can’t come, we’ll ask them to video call us so that we can see it as well.

R – But it is important for you to stay in contact with Sneha?

I – Yes. No matter what happens, I am going to.

R – What suggestions do you have for this program? Moving forward, what changes should there be?

I – Actually, I have had only one suggestion since the beginning that our learning shouldn’t stop. The sessions going forward shouldn’t stop and if that is not possible we should at least get an opportunity to teach the children. We should be able to teach the children and if they have any problems, they should come to us. Once every 15 days we should take a meeting here will all the kids. Do some activity or paly some game with the kids. There are a lot of things to do here.

I – Same for me. Like recently they took us for camping. So every 4 or 5 months they should take us camping. The camp shouldn’t stop.

R – Is the camp a lot of fun?

I – It is.

I2- We have friends with whom we are having a night out for the first time. And ma’am is involved as well so it is very nice.

I – there are 3 beds and we join them and everyone sleeps on that. We were playing antakshari and w heard ma’am from the other room shout “Let me sleep”.

R – Where was the camp?

I – Karjat.

R – It happened very recently? Day before yesterday?

I – Ours was in Kharghar.

R – So for that I had come for a day.

I – Yes you had.

I – There was a game of chocolate and there were a teams.