

# ***SPORT AGAINST GENDER INEQUALITY***

## ***Background Reading Material for Activity Workbook 4***

### ***Socially Constructed Gender-Norms***

This background reading material is a component of Activity Workbook 4 part of the Sport Against Gender Inequality (SAGI) online resource pack. Instructors must ensure that they read this document in detail before planning and delivering the session.

**Gender norms** are internalized from a very early stage of life, and are reinforced time and again by social acceptance. Factors such as proverbs, idioms, folklore, symbols and cultural practices record and carry forward gendered roles and reinforce them. They are treated as touchstones to test and determine the specified gender identity of an individual.

We neither question nor digress from these roles because society demonstrates reservations so strongly that we accept these norms as something natural and inherent. In adult life, gender takes up different forms rooted in the context and relationship that exists between men and women. Even career choices are directed by set gender stereotypes. Gender pervades different aspects of our lives and affects differential access to resources.



It also affects and impacts division of labour inside and outside home. Division of labour is socially assigned, and it differs according to the context to which one belongs. Detrimental factors such as the socio-political and economic factors play a crucial role in determining the roles played by men and women in a social set-up. Moreover, gender roles can change over time.

**Gender stereotypes** are generalizations about the roles of each gender. Gender roles are generally neither positive nor negative; they are simply compartmentalized generalizations of male and female attributes. Since each person has individual desires, thoughts, and feelings, regardless of their gender, these stereotypes are incredibly simplistic and do not describe at all the attributes of every person of each gender.

The following is a list of some of the most common gender stereotypes as they pertain to men or women. Remember, these are stereotypes because they claim to apply to all men or all women.

### *Stereotypes regarding Women*

Have you ever watched a little girl playing house? Even as young as five or six years, she is well aware that she is supposed to stay home with the baby while the husband goes to work, and she has dinner ready when he gets home. Here the stereotype is: women stay at home while men go to work.



Some other stereotypes include:

- Women are not as strong as men
- Women are supposed to make less money than men
- The best women are stay-at-home moms
- Women don't need to go to college
- Women don't play sports
- Women are not politicians
- Women are quieter than men and are not meant to speak out
- Women are supposed to be submissive and do as they are told
- Women are supposed to cook and do housework
- Women are responsible for raising children
- Women do not have technical skills and are not good at "hands-on" projects such as car repair
- Women are meant to be the damsel in distress; never the hero
- Women are supposed to look pretty and be looked at
- Women love to sing and dance
- Women do not play video games
- Women are flirts
- Women are never in charge

### *Stereotypes regarding Men*

Men are supposed to do the tough jobs and anything that requires muscle; they are also supposed to go to work and provide for the family. Children see this and the stereotype continues, with boys emulating the men and girls believing this to be true.



Other gender-based stereotypes that inaccurately try to describe all men include:

- All men enjoy working on cars
- Men are not nurses, they are doctors
- Men do "tough jobs" such as construction and mechanics; they are not secretaries, teachers, or beauticians
- Men do not do housework and they are not responsible for taking care of children
- Men play video games
- Men play sports
- Men enjoy outdoor activities such as camping, fishing, and hiking
- Men are in charge; they are always at the top
- As husbands, men tell their wives what to do
- Men are lazy and/or messy
- Men are good at math
- It is always men who work in science, engineering, and other technical fields
- Men do not cook, sew or do crafts

Can you see how many of these actually are true of many men or women that you know? They may even be true for you personally, but they do not apply to every single man or woman. That is what makes them stereotypes; the fact that these things are considered "the norm" and form the expected behaviour of every male or female.

Each person is an individual and it is perfectly normal for a woman to run her own business while a man stays home to take care of children. On the other hand, it is also perfectly acceptable for a man to be a nurse or hate sports, or enjoy cooking.

Men and women are individuals; they are more than just male or female. Our gender is only part of who we are; it does not define us as people.

Please refer to the below table to understand how to de-brief the session activity with the participants.

### ***Statement***

Girls like playing with dolls.

Boys like playing with toy trucks.

### ***Explanation***

Toys are selected along gender lines by both parents and relatives. In his paper titled “Girls Play with Dolls and Boys Play with Soldiers” Christopher Carlyle Clarke refers to a study by Leo Rhynie which was conducted across a sample of toy purchasers and children from all social classes. It was found that toys were bought to enhance the gender of the children for home they were intended. At home, boys’ leisure activities engage them with older boys and young



adult males in sports, street corner games and chats, bike riding and other such physical activities, often outside of the immediate home environment. Girls, on the other hand, are restricted to more circumscribed activities such as playing with dolls at home or playing at school and before dark. At home also, boys are punished more severely to “toughen” them and enable them to survive in the outside world. These are compartmentalized generalizations of male and female attributes, and are not indicative of every person of any gender.

Men are responsible for finances of the family.

An ideal woman stays at home and takes care of her children.

Spaces in the world have been divided into public and private realms, and women have been relegated to the private realm, under the garb of ‘tradition’. This has meant that wage-earning



jobs, which are typically conducted in the public sphere, have been taken on by men, hence earning them the status of the primary financial provider of the family. However, with the rapidly changing modern economy and with women demanding more rights for themselves to access the public sphere, notions of traditional gender roles, including masculinity, fatherhood and men being the primary providers, are being transformed. As more women assume the role of providers, dependence of families and children on both parents is subsequently increasing.

Men are good at doing jobs that require strength.

Women are good at jobs such as secretaries, teachers and beauticians.

While this might be true in some instances, it does not imply that it is the norm for all, and is certainly not a gender-based trait. If this were so, think about those women who walk miles to fetch water while carrying their



children on their backs and large pots of water on their heads. Think of a construction site where women are the ones carrying the heavy cement. Thus, we cannot say that women cannot do physical labour or jobs that require muscular strength. It is the socialisation process that has taught us that men are strong and women are weak. The same thinking also restricts girls from taking part in sports. Women have also been relegated to more feminine jobs because they are not seen as being physically strong or challenging the authority of men. However, believing in such things severely restricts the growth of an individual.

Men cannot cook, sew or take care of children.

This stereotype comes from the assumption that women are more nurturing individuals than men.





However, that is not true. Cooking and cleaning are personal skills and behaviour that everyone should learn, in order to be able to take care of themselves, regardless of their gender. Also, if you look at the famous chefs in the world, many of them are men, which goes to show that cooking is not gendered. It is assumed that since women get pregnant and carry the baby that they are better equipped to taking care of children. However, it should be realized that men are also involved in the child-making process, and they are equal parents to a child, and hence must also be responsible for taking care of the child that they have brought into the world. If caring for children and the home were natural for women, what would happen to a home where there are only men, or a home



Girls are quieter than boys, and are meant to be soft spoken.

with a single father? This is a gendered notion, and believing in this creates pressures and expectations for both men and women.

Shyness is not a gendered trait, but it has been stereotyped as one to prevent women from challenging men and the patriarchal society. By framing women as submissive and soft-spoken, patriarchal societies have prevented women from speaking up to demand their rights, and have forced them to accept things the way they are. But, think about this - what will happen to a boy who is quiet? Will he become a girl if he is quiet? And will a girl who is loud become a boy, just because she is loud? These are stereotypes that once again create pressures for individuals, which limit their full potential to grow



and learn. It also becomes an excuse to inflict harm on an individual through bullying and harassment.

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*Martha Farrell*  
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