

## **Rainbow Circles for Safe Inclusive and Diverse Campuses 2022-23**

Red Dot Foundation (RDF) Global partnered with Sophia College to create a safe, diverse and inclusive campus culture and to reduce the risk of gender based violence on campuses. Five students from the college were nominated by the institution, and trained in a leadership course by RDF.

Preksha Maheshwari  
Fizaa Wani  
Ritisha Sarkar  
Shlokaa Singh  
Bhaviska Mendonca

Following the leadership program, the students were encouraged to conduct a series of activities on their college campuses, including awareness programs and audits of locations on and off campus for increased safety. Additionally the students were sensitized through workshops, particularly on gender and sex, challenging gender norms, the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

## **‘Stand Up Against Street Harassment’ - Workshops on ByStander Intervention**

Red Dot Foundation conducted Workshops on ByStander Intervention for the First, Second and Third year students of Sophia College. These workshops were conducted between June - October, through which we reached out to close to 500 students. They were equipped with simple and easy to use tools to respond when they witness street harassment happening to others around them or to them while staying safe themselves.

## **‘Toxic Masculinity and Harmful Gender Stereotypes’ Event**

The Consulate General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Mumbai and Red Dot Foundation hosted an event on ‘Toxic Masculinity and Harmful Gender Stereotypes’ at Sophia College to conclude the international campaign “16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence” with college students in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

The term toxic masculinity is frequently used to describe the unfavourable effects of exaggerated masculine characteristics. Conflict could arise between the man and his environment due to the characteristics and behaviour expected from a man. It restricts his ability to grow and identify in his own way.

A google form was circulated to various colleges so interested students could sign up to attend the event. 65 students registered for the event from various colleges in Mumbai specifically St. Xaviers College, Sophia College, SIES College and Pillai College.

The event took place on 19th December 2022, and was held on the campus of Sophia College, Mumbai. It was attended by the Deputy Consul General of the Kingdom of Netherlands - Mr. Thierry Van Helden, who spoke briefly to the students about Street Harassment, Gender Stereotypes and Toxic Masculinity. He emphasized that these are problems faced not only in India but that it is equally prevalent in the Netherlands as well. He also impressed on them the importance of being able to challenge such stereotypes and keep oneself safe from harassment.

After a brief introduction on the work done by Red Dot Foundation, a session was conducted on ByStander Intervention in Street Harassment. The students participated enthusiastically in this interactive session. They were happy to participate in the polls and share their experiences as well.

Mr. Harish Sadani, founder of MAVA - Men Against Violence and Abuse spoke to the students about the pressure that men feel about acting 'masculine' enough and about the importance of male allyship. This was followed by a play on Toxic Masculinity by MAVA. The play was very interesting and used humour to drive home the seriousness of the issue.

The students were then split up into 6 groups, for an animated discussion on toxic masculinity using the below prompts:

1. What gender stereotypes have you experienced ? Have you overcome them ?
2. Have you heard of Toxic Masculinity ? Does it matter to you?
3. What traits do you associate with masculinity?
4. For those identifying as male - Do you feel pressured to 'fit in' with these masculine traits even if they are toxic?
5. For those identifying as female - How does toxic masculinity affect you?

They were asked to come up with 5 recommendations as a group to break gender stereotypes and challenge toxic masculinity.

Some of the recommendations were:

1. Boys and men should be allowed to dress and behave in whatever way they choose, and not be labeled as "effeminate, gay" etc. As this forces them to conform to socially dictated masculine norms.
2. Boys, if they choose to wear make-up, should not be ridiculed for this.
3. Girls are often ridiculed for the way they dress. Their parents pressure them to dress conservatively and their friends ridicule them when they do. Youth should be more open minded and accepting of their peers.
4. Boys should be encouraged to express their feelings and vulnerabilities without being teased about it.
5. Often students both male & female feel the need to use bad language to fit in and seem 'cool'.
6. Youth should feel that they can call out Toxic Masculine traits when they see them
7. Children should be encouraged to play with more gender neutral toys right from the time they are very young which will help to break harmful gender stereotypes



