

Titli: Curbing the ills of child sexual abuse through participatory design

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ABSTRACT

The project consisted of intensive primary research in parts of western Uttar Pradesh. Participatory design helped to engage and co-create with the communities to address the prevalence of the issue. The outcome of this research pointed towards a severe lack of communication between the parent and the child. Identifying a dire need to bridge this gap, various workshops were conducted with children, adolescents and parents. In a country where talking about sexual abuse is considered taboo, encouraging people to discuss and thus develop solutions, became a salient feature of the design process. Coming from an Urban background, co-creation helped in empathizing with and understanding the rural community better by overcoming my own biases. This participatory approach helped better understand the community by recognizing them as stakeholders. Adopting this method, an exhibition was set up to encourage the much-needed conversations on this sensitive and pressing issue. The solution was shaped by different stages which primarily consisted of giving the stakeholders a voice and consequently building relationships. Workshops, interviews and collaborations with the stakeholders directed me towards a stakeholder lead solution to this wicked problem.

Author Keywords

Social Design; Design for behavior change; Play and Learn

INTRODUCTION

For a country with the fastest-growing population, it comes as a surprise that sex is still considered a taboo

in India. This taboo leads to some heinous crimes like child sexual abuse and rape. The project “Titli” aimed to curb the ills of child sexual abuse by raising awareness, especially in rural India.

The Indian government backed a survey of 1,25,000 children in 13 states which says that 57% of boys and 73% of girls are victims of child sexual abuse [1]. It is important to talk about

such a topic because it creates a robust foundation for lifelong sexual health which is regarded as a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being concerning sexuality and not just the lack of disease.

Target group and stakeholders

To define my target group, a survey was conducted in my college with 25 students, out of which 19 were the victims of child sexual abuse. Out of these 19 students, 14 were abused at the age of 10 to 12 years and most of the perpetrators were known to them. This survey gave me the direction to move forward and define my target group. It was defined as both girls and boys of the age-group 10-12yrs who belong to the lower-income status. After studying their ecosystem, I realized that parents, teachers and adolescents were the stakeholders that affected the child’s growth the most.



Figure 1. Participants defining their definition of safe and danger

DESIGN PROCESS

The project started with primary research. The state of Uttar Pradesh has one of the highest rates of child abuse in India. I started the journey by understanding the curiosity questions that children had regarding sexual health and the “what’s and whys and whose” of abuse cases. To find these answers an educational workshop was created for children. A set of Interactive activities were designed for the workshop. The data collected from these workshops revealed a lot of findings and insights that laid the foundation for this project.

According to the data collected, a child is most connected to their parents or siblings (adolescents).

For the next phase of the project, another participatory workshop was designed for adolescents. The aim of the workshop was to collect information through personal incidents and to understand the demographic system of rural parts. A session with adolescent girls helped me understand the challenges faced by them while growing up. They were then encouraged to come up with solutions to these challenges. After conducting multiple such sessions, ‘Victim Blaming’ was a recurring problem that many pointed out through their stories. Participatory design helped in collecting a lot of qualitative data. For example, due to social judgments, these incidents of abuse were kept under wraps even when the victims shared the incidents with their parents. While approaching schools and institutions about conducting workshops with adolescent boys, I faced a lot of societal problems. It was looked down upon for me to interact with boys to discuss their sexual health and safety as I was of the opposite gender. It also became apparent that girls were opening and sharing their personal abuse experiences for the first time. Though they felt vulnerable, they bravely spoke up; one of the reasons for this could be that this was the first time they got a platform where they could talk about their sexual safety. Talking about sexual experiences is looked down upon which worsened the chances to start the discussion about sexual abuse. Having lived through the horrors of abuse, the adolescents were the best participants to suggest solutions in co-creation workshops to fight against the evils of child sexual abuse.

Some interviews were also conducted with the parents to understand how they educate their children about sexual safety. After approximately 68 interviews

with parents, I realized there was a need for an open conversation about sexual health and safety in every home. To bridge the gap between parents and children, a space was created where people could come together and acknowledge such a sensitive issue.



Figure 2. Adolescent participation in design solution for the ills of child sexual abuse

OUTCOME AND CONCLUSION

Being on the field helped me understand the complexity of this subject. I realized that constant interaction with the stakeholders and engaging them to find a solution was the only way to solve this wicked problem.

At the end of this project, an event was organized for parents by collaborating with the children and adolescents. The event was advertised by performing a Nukkad Natak (street play) through the streets of Meerut. An experiential exhibition was set up within a span of 15 days in a government school in Meerut. The idea behind the participants-led exhibition was to give the participants a platform where they can share their stories with parents. This exhibition later got converted into an educational trip for girls. It helped in opening up this topic to the masses and break the taboo about child sexual abuse in Meerut.



Figure 3. Participants volunteering on the making of experiential exhibition

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