

# SESSION 2.2

Why Power  
Imbalance Exists  
(2 hours)



# SASA! Awareness 2.2 – Why Power Imbalance Exists<sup>1</sup>

(2 hours)



## Objectives

- Explore social expectations of girls and women, boys and men and how they contribute to an imbalance of power.
- Experience men's power over women.
- Experience the consequences of community silence.
- (Optional) Explore the power dynamics in the community.

## Competencies

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify the biological and social differences between women and men, boys and girls, and how that leads to a power imbalance across the life span for girls and women. *(Note: This competency is also addressed by SASA! Start 1.2 – Power and Human Rights.)*
- Describe the cause of VAW and relate it to “power over”. *(Note: This competency is also addressed by SASA! Start 2.1 – Understanding Power Imbalances and Awareness 2.3 – Connecting Power, Violence and HIV/AIDS.)*



<sup>1</sup>These modules are found in *SASA! An Activist Kit for Preventing Violence against Women and HIV (2009)*. Kampala: Raising Voices. SASA! is downloadable at [www.raisingvoices.org](http://www.raisingvoices.org)

# A. Social Expectations

(60 minutes)

## Preparations

- Prepare three sheets of flipchart, each with one of the following titles, and hang them in three different locations in the room:

Boys/Men

Girls/Women

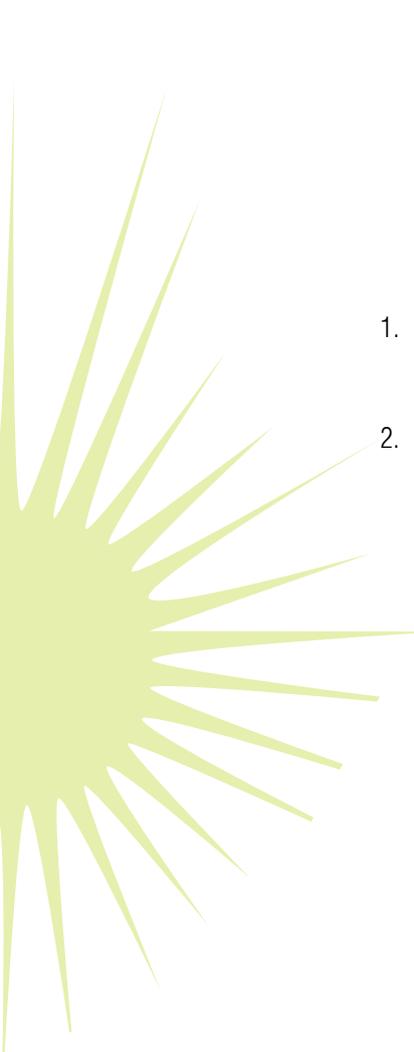
Both Sexes

## Steps

1. Introduce “Session 2.2 — Why Power Imbalance Exists”:

*“Welcome to the SASA! Training. In the last session we experienced power imbalance in the New Planet exercise. We also talked about how the power imbalance between women and men causes violence against women. This session will explore how that imbalance came to be and why it exists. Is it because men are bad people? Is it because women are weak? Does it have to be like this? We will explore these issues.”*

2. Explain: *“We will begin with a group exercise. Notice the three signs on the walls. I will read a series of statements. After hearing each statement, decide whether it is a statement related to ‘boys or men,’ ‘girls or women,’ or ‘both sexes’ and stand under the corresponding flipchart. Remember to think for yourselves. It is okay to have different opinions.”*
3. Start the exercise by reading the first of the statements found at the end of these instructions.
4. When there is a difference in opinion (for example, some participants standing under Boys/Men and others under Girls/Women ask the following questions:
  - a. *“Why do you think this statement is related to \_\_\_\_\_ (read the title of the paper where some are standing)?”*
  - b. *“And why do you think it is related to \_\_\_\_\_ (read the title of the paper where others are standing)?”*

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- a. Ask the majority group: *“Who can try to persuade those standing in the other place to join you?”*
  - b. Ask the minority group: *“Who can try to persuade those standing in the other place to join you?”*
  1. Continue playing the game until you have read all the statements. Ask participants to return to the large circle when finished.
  2. Debrief by asking:
    - a. *“What did you learn from this exercise?”*
    - b. *“Do you think it is true that women and men can only be and do certain things as society expects?”*
    - c. *“Why do you think society gives certain roles and qualities to women and men?”*
    - d. *“Do you think some women feel limited by these roles? Some men?”*
    - e. *“Can these roles change?”*
    - f. *“Can you think of some examples of things girls/women could not do in the past but that are now acceptable for them to do? (Answers could be: wear trousers, go to university, vote, etc.) What about for boys/men?”*
    - g. *“What if you were born the opposite sex—would you like the expectations society has for you? Why or why not?”*
    - h. *“How do these expectations limit our potential as human beings?”*
  3. Explain: *“Sex is determined biologically but gender is determined socially. It is what society expects of us as women and men.”*
  4. Summarize:
    - a. *“When girls and boys are born, the community has expectations of them based on their sex. They will experience the world according to this and be taught (formally and informally) what is acceptable for their sex. This process is called socialization.”*
    - b. *“From birth girls are taught to behave in a different way than boys. These roles arbitrarily assign girls and women a lower status compared to boys and men.”*
    - c. *“As communities and cultures change, so can our expectations about how we should behave simply because of our sex.”*
    - d. *“In SASA! we will create awareness in our community of how these expectations lead to a power imbalance between women and men—thereby leading to violence against women and HIV/AIDS. And that this can change!”*

## For advanced groups:

5. Wrap Up: *“The qualities and roles our community expects of women and men are called gender roles. Originally the term ‘gender’ was used in development to help people remember that when thinking about women and men, we have to think about society’s expectations of women and men—not just their sex. It was meant to highlight the imbalance of power between women and men. This has largely been lost, and now gender is commonly misunderstood to only mean female or male. Because of this, in SASA! we will rarely use the term gender. Instead we will use language of power imbalance between women and men, to ensure clear communication about the issues.”*

## Social Expectations Statements

1. We fetch water.
2. We are responsible for raising children.
3. We walk and herd the cows.
4. We wear dresses.
5. We cannot cry.
6. We have to look beautiful.
7. We are doctors.
8. We are emotional.
9. We are carpenters.
10. We have to stay up until our partners come home at night.
11. We are head of the household.
12. We can get angry and this is generally accepted.
13. We are considered more intelligent.
14. We are nurturing.
15. We get the biggest piece of meat.
16. We have to prepare bath water for our partners.
17. We breastfeed.
18. We buy the household food.
19. We can move without fear after dark.
20. We sweep the house.
21. We are not supposed to express our opinions.
22. We are head of the house.
23. We give birth.
24. We should be sexually available.
25. We are celebrated when we are born.
26. We are strong.
27. We are the ones to look after the sick.
28. We can initiate sex.
29. We can drink with friends in the evening.
30. We prepare the meals.
31. We expect our partners to obey us.
32. We fix things when they are broken.
33. We get to rest more often.
34. We are allowed to play more as children.
35. We grow beards.

RESOURCE

Staff Skill Building Library 



## B. Experiencing a Power Imbalance

(60 minutes)



### Preparations

- Bring 15 pieces of paper and 15 pens/pencils.
- Prepare a flipchart with the following statement: “**In our society everybody is equal; no one has the right to use violence against another person.**” Set aside and turn upside down, so that no one can read it.



### Steps

1. Explain to participants: “*In this next exercise, participants will be able to experience power imbalances.*”
2. Ask for 10 female volunteers and 10 male volunteers. The rest of the participants will be community members.
3. Put the three groups into their positions:
  - a. Ask the men to line up their chairs in the middle of the room and take a seat. Ask the women to please come and stand in front of a man, so that there are two lines facing each other and ten female/male pairs.
  - b. Ask the men to please stand on their chairs facing their partners. Ask the women to please put their hands behind their backs. Explain that they must stay in this position.
  - c. Ask the community members to please surround the pairs in a circle, and to hold hands.
4. Put a piece of paper and a pen/pencil in between each female/male pair, on the floor in front of the chairs.
5. Ask the participants:
  - a. To the participants on the chairs: “*How do you feel standing on the chair?*”
  - b. To the participants in front of the chairs: “*How do you feel standing before the person on the chair?*”



6. Explain the exercise:



*"For this exercise, the participants standing on the chairs have more power than the participants standing in front of them on the floor."*

- b. *"The participants standing on the floor have their hands behind their backs and this will remain so until we say otherwise."*
- c. *"There is one way for the pairs to become equal. This is by drawing a perfect circle and an equal sign in the middle of that circle on the paper between them (as seen to your right). However, the woman and man must do this together with both partners holding the pen—not just one of them."*

a.  Participants on the chairs must remain standing and cannot squat. Participants on the floor have to keep their hands behind their backs.

b. *“Participants standing in a circle around them, you are community members. You will watch the game inside the circle. You will remain silent until I show you a flipchart with a certain statement. At that point you will read the statement aloud to the pairs in the middle.”*



Ensure there are no questions, and begin.

7. After about **3 minutes**, ask participants: *“Is this working? Are there any perfect circles?”* (There will be no perfect circles.)
8. Announce: *“Let’s switch roles. Change with your partners. Women should stand on the chairs and the men on the floor with their hands behind their backs. Now try to do the same exercise.”*
9. After another **3 minutes**, ask participants: *“Are there any perfect circles now?”* (There will still be no perfect circles.)
10. Ask the pairs to switch again. When the men are back on the chairs, say: *“Men have power over women, but the community members think this is not right. Community members, please read your statement!”* Hold the flipchart with the statement high in the air so that every community member can see it. (*“In our community everybody is equal; no one has the right to use their power over another person.”*)
11. After the community members have read the statement, say: *“Community silence has been broken. Women standing on the floor, your hands are free now. Now try to do the same exercise again.”*
12. Make sure no one cheats by squatting on the chair.
13. After another **3 minutes**, say: *“Things have improved but there are still no perfect circles. Men, please balance your power with the women by getting down from the chair. Can there be perfect circles now?”*
14. Allow participants to figure out how to draw the circle—let them show their efforts to community members who can clap for them. Ask participants to return to their seats.
15. Debrief the exercise by asking the following questions:
  - a. *“How did the exercise make you feel?”*
    - i. *Those of you on the chairs?*
    - ii. *Those of you on the floor with your hands behind your backs?*
    - iii. *Those of you who were community members?*
  - b. *“How did you feel when you were able to switch places and have power over the other person?”*
  - c. *“Did it help you accomplish your goal?”*





- d. *“Do men often worry that sharing power means they will lose their power? Does this happen? Does both people having power mean one person has less?”*
- e. *“How did it feel to be equal?”*
- f. *“Do you think the community is a powerful force influencing how we behave?”*
- g. *“What else can we learn from this exercise?”*

16. Summarize the following key points:

- a. *“Power imbalance between women and men is not healthy for anyone. It creates tension, struggle and resentment.”*
- b. *“Balancing power does not mean losing power because power does not come in limited supply. It is not a quantity, it is a feeling.”*
- c. *“When someone uses her/his power over another person, the two are not able to work properly together to reach their goals.”*
- d. *“Women and men can create a balance of power in their relationships and have non-violent relationships.”*
- e. *“Only when the community speaks out and rejects the power imbalance between women and men will violence against women end.”*
- f. *“Men’s power over women and the community’s silence about this are the causes of*

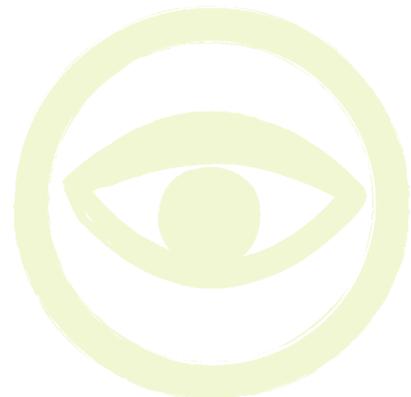


## Optional: Power Walkabout (60 minutes)



### Preparations

- Photocopy and cut the “**Power Walkabout Characters: Name Tags**” at the end of these instructions for participants.
- Prepare 30 pieces of tape in advance.



## Steps

1. Explain to participants: *“In the last exercise, we saw how the beliefs that the community holds about women and men, girls and boys, affects what is expected of them and what they are able to do and become. Generally, communities value men more than women. This means men are allowed to more freely use their power, and women are restricted in using theirs, thereby allowing some men to use their power over women. This next exercise will explore the consequences of the imbalance of power between women and men.”*
2. Ask the group: *“Because of the difference in power between women and men in most intimate relationships, who is more vulnerable? Why?”*
3. Gather responses and ask questions to create and understanding of the following: The woman usually is more vulnerable.
4. Give each participant a piece of tape and a name tag.
5. Ask participants to tape their name tags to the front of their bodies.
6. Explain the game as follows:
  - a. *“Each of you has a name tag representing a person in our community.”*
  - b. *“You will walk around the room as the character written on your name tag.”*
  - c. *“Using your notebooks collect as many signatures as possible from characters you encounter.”*
  - d. *“You can only get a signature from those who you feel more powerful than you in the community. If you and another character cannot agree who has more power—from the perspective of society as a whole—then neither of you should give a signature.”*
  - e. *“You will gather signatures for about **5 minutes.**”*
7. Ensure there are no questions, and let the game begin.



8. When **5 minutes** have passed, call “stop!” Ask everyone to come back to the large circle for a discussion.
9. Ask participants: “*How did you feel during this exercise?*” (Probe: How did it feel giving your signature? How did it feel taking the signatures of others?) Discuss.
10. Explore with the group who collected signatures from whom.
11. Ask all the female characters to raise their hands. Ask each of them for the number of signatures they gathered.
12. Ask the adolescent girl how many signatures she gathered.
13. Ask all the male characters to raise their hands. Ask each of them for the number of signatures they gathered.
14. Ask the group:
  - a. “*What does this difference in numbers tell us about who in our community has the most freedom to use their power?*”
  - b. “*Were there any encounters where it was not clear which character should give the signature? Which ones?*”
  - c. “*Why do you think the male characters often felt more powerful than their female counterparts?*”
  - d. “*Please explain why some women did manage to gather some signatures.*”
  - e. “*What about the adolescent girl? What does this tell us about girls’ vulnerability?*”
  - f. “*When men often feel more powerful than women, how do you think some women became a leader or a judge or a business woman anyway?*”
  - g. “*When men often feel more powerful than women, what does this mean for sexual relationships?*”
  - h. “*Is this power imbalance healthy for our communities?*”
  - i. “*How does this power imbalance cause violence against women?*”
  - j. “*How does it lead to HIV infection and AIDS among women?*”
15. Summarize the exercise with a focus on the following:
  - a. “*Generally as a group, men have power over women, even though in individual cases a woman may have more power than a man.*”
  - b. “*Adolescent girls are extremely vulnerable in our society. They are seen to have little power, making them vulnerable to sexual abuse and transactional sex.*”
  - c. “*The limits on women’s use of their power increases their vulnerability to violence and HIV infection.*”
  - d. “*Although many men may strive for equality in their relationships, other men can still have power over women. This affects women’s choices and movement in the community.*”



**Power Walkabout Characters: Name Tags**



**1. Male Doctor**



**2. Female Doctor**



**3. Female Judge**

**4. Male Judge**

**5. Male University Student**

**6. Female University Student**

**7. Male Police Officer**

**8. Female Police Officer**

**9. Businessman**

**10. Businesswoman**

**11. Widower**

**12. Widow**

**13. Female Local Leader**

**14. Male Local Leader**

**15. Female Soldier**

**16. Male Soldier**

**17. Homeless Man**

**18. Homeless Woman**

**19. Male Member of Parliament**

**20. Female Member of Parliament**

**21. Sugar Daddy**

**22. Adolescent Girl**

**23. Male Taxi Driver**

**24. Male Clan Chief**

**25. Male Butcher**

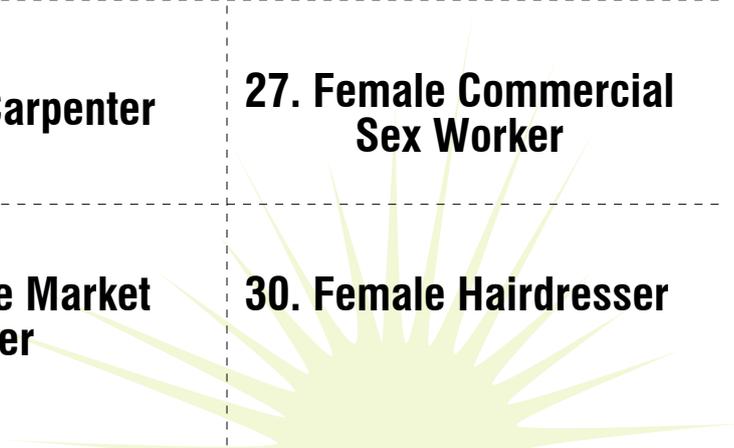
**26. Male Carpenter**

**27. Female Commercial Sex Worker**

**28. Male Priest/ Imam**

**29. Female Market Seller**

**30. Female Hairdresser**



# Validation Options

Validation is another way to say “assessment” or “pre/post-test”. It is used to determine whether the participants in a training learned what the facilitator intended for them to learn. Instructions for how to use each validation method can be found in *Training Validation Methods: A how-to guide for assessing participant learning* downloadable at [www.raisingvoices.org/staffskills.php](http://www.raisingvoices.org/staffskills.php)

Select validation methods for each competency using the table below:

1. Choose whether the competency (specific skill) needs to be validated at a group or individual level.
2. Looking at the validation methods listed in that category (group or individual), select only **one** of the validation methods marked with an 'X' for each competency.
3. Plan a time in the training agenda to use the validation method you've chosen to test each competency.

Competency (Specific skill)	Suggested Validation Methods								
	Group Validation					Individual Validation			
	Activity in Training*	Game Show	Card Game	Answers Bingo	Pick and Play	Activity in Training*	Exit Interview/ Role Play	Game Show (All Play)	Written Quiz
Identify 1 social difference between women and men and how they lead to a power imbalance across the life span for girls and women.**		X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Describe the cause of VAW and relate it to “power over”.**		X	X	X	X		X	X	X

\*Activity in Training includes many possibilities, depending on the module, including brainstorming, group activities, debates, agree/disagree/not sure exercise, and others. The *Teach Back* series can also be considered as an Activity in Training.

\*\*See Validation Questions for this competency, to be used in Game Show, Card Game, Answers Bingo or Pick and Play methods, on next page.



# Validation Questions



(Double points!!) Name 1 difference in the way males and females are socialized and describe how that difference leads to a power imbalance between women and men.

What is the root cause of violence against women?



Answers Bingo



Facilitator's Note: Find out what the participants really learned! These cards can be cut out and used with Game Show, Card Game, Answers Bingo or Pick and Play validation methods.

Full descriptions of how to use each of these validation methods are available in the *Staff Skill Building Library*. Download at: [www.raisingvoices.org/staffskills.php](http://www.raisingvoices.org/staffskills.php) and go to *Training Validation Methods: A how-to guide for assessing participant learning*.