

PROJECT ADHIKAAR

Report on Event to Raise Awareness on Menstruation and Sexual and Reproductive Health of Girls and Women, Held on November 28, 2022 in Saran, Bihar.

ABSTRACT: The event was named Project Adhikaar and it was dedicated to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 which is "good health and well-being". The term "Adhikaar" is a commonly used Hindi word which translates to "Rights" in English and the event was named so because it is every one with active uterus right to be not tabooed for a biological process like menstruation and it our duty as a society to provide them the essentials. The purpose of the event was to create awareness about destigmatising menstruation amongst the people belonging to underprivileged section of the society as well as to sensitize the women of all age groups about menstrual health and hygiene.

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I. Concept Note [Same formatting as below, but bold]

"Menstruation is not a problem but poor menstrual health and stigma around it is"

The United Nations Millennium Fellowship 2022 and Symbiosis Law School, NOIDA provided a platform for conducting awareness programs to cater the needs of the society and to work towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Project Adhikaar was one such opportunity wherein awareness and sensitization event was conducted for menstrual health and hygiene.

The inspiration behind the project is a very disheartening survey conducted by Ministry of Health, Government of India in which it was reported that 88% of menstruating population uses absorbents like husk, soil, ashes and used clothes, what is even worse is the silence around the same. It's shocking to know that how 1 out of every 10 girl misses school during periods, 80% of menstruating population uses unsensitised absorbents and 70% suffers severe genital infections by putting these in undergarments sitting next to their skin. The worst is the stigma which is very prevalent in the rural area, it is heart aching to share how menstruating person is forced to sleep outside the house in a shed, not allowed to enter the kitchen area and can't even talk to the other men family member during the cycle. This is why, Project Adhikaar was envisioned to cater to the needs of people who are facing such issues on the account of lack of knowledge.

We are slightly at an advantageous position as we are well aware of menstruation but there are people associated with us like our domestic workers, staff etc. who are not privileged enough to have adequate education and knowledge on the same. The Project Adhikaar did its bit to this need by collaborating with NGOs operational in the Heartland of India such as Rural Uttar

Pradesh and Bihar to conduct awareness and sensitisation events for all genders and age groups.

II. Objectives

The primary objectives of the event were as follows:

1. To raise awareness about menstrual health and hygiene
2. To sensitise the target group with respect to the stigma around treatment of menstruating person.

III. Preliminary Preparations

Before conducting the event, the organiser made the following preparations:

1. Researching and zeroing on an area outside of the city where persons were more likely to be underprivileged and less likely to be beneficiaries of other NGOs' schemes.
2. Preparing the action plan with the NGO, *Geeta Shukh Foundation*, which focuses on distributing essentials to socio-economically marginalised women.
3. Designing and preparing pamphlets.

IV. Conducting the Event

The event was in collaboration with the team of the Non-Governmental Organisation named "Geeta Shukh Foundation" (Registration Number 07/2020) which mainly focuses on providing essentials to women and underprivileged section of the society. The NGO operates in multi-dimensional spectrum from distributing eatables, blankets to providing education

opportunities and animal rescue. The NGO team frequently conducts events especially in places having crowd to enhance the impact of the event. The team consisted of members residing in the heartland of Bihar and that is why they are very well-versed with the persistent problems of the society. For this particular event, we contacted Dr. Kumar, Medical Officer, Community Health Centre, Amedkar Nagar for his insights on the subject as he has been practising in sub-urban and rural areas for almost a decade now. The most crucial information that we received from his was that the women facing genital infections are not even aware that it is genital infection and treats in like a regular body infection. This lack of knowledge makes the condition even worse as they put talc and ointments that is full of chemicals and fragrance to the infection further aggravating it. He told us that we should not ask the women if they have genital infection rather should ask the symptoms separately.

This event took place in Saran, Bihar as the NGO is based out of here and helped to identify the target group better and since they frequently conduct events, people are not hesitant to involve in the process. The team visited the place at around 5 pm as the selected area gets busy in during this time.

We took along 2 sets of Pamphlets, one set had the event name on it and the second set was to distribute as it has some pictures and instructions pertaining to menstrual hygiene. We first interacted with women, asked them their experiences of menstruation to have a better idea about all needs to be discussed. The event was intended to target two objectives. The first was to explain menstruation to the audience, regardless of gender, and to do this, the biological process was addressed. This was essential in eradicating the stigma associated with menstruation. The persons with active uteruses are more likely to contract vaginal infections due to a lack of knowledge about

menstrual health and are more susceptible to mental trauma because of the stigma in their homes. Therefore, it was addressed with them about the safest absorbents to use and the best course of action for menstruation women. The session came to an end with a discussion on the need for women to be comfortable during menstruation cycle to strike a harmony between mental and physical health and this could only be attained with sound mental health and hygiene. Queries from the crowd were appropriately addressed by the team.

V. Response of the Target Population

During the event it was observed by the team that it was majorly women who did not participate in the discussion and very hesitant. Upon asking, they all said that they are embarrassed to discuss the topic publicly especially in presence of men around them. The target audience lacked the foundational knowledge and that is why this topic was misunderstood and it had to be pursued in order to raise public awareness. The vast majority of the intended group never have received education and lacked information, and even those who could read were ignorant of the subject of menstruation because they had never been taught about it properly. Even in households, this topic is never addressed to the male members building a taboo around the subject. This demonstrated to us the pressing necessity of the hour as a society with nearly an equal population menstruation.

The target audience appeared to have very rigid ideas about what it means to "bleed," believing that menstruation is nothing more than filthy blood, which is why women who are menstruating should avoid the kitchen, places of worship, and men in general. They completely denied the fact that other genders can bleed too and had a conservative mentality that menstruation makes

women inferior. They were informed by the team that about the entire process and were given examples on how this makes the women stronger and not inferior by any means.

The women in the audience showed interest in understanding the concept and they then promptly asked us the symptoms and signs to diagnose the genital infections.

Amidst the deeply ingrained stigma in people's thoughts, the event was still successful in educating the audience on menstruation health and hygiene. We may draw the conclusion that it will take some time and ongoing work to get everyone on the same page regarding menstruation, but with activities like these for awareness-raising, we are moving closer to the main objective.

VI. Conclusion

Despite the rooted stigma in the minds of the people, the event was still successful in instilling the audience with the knowledge on menstrual health and hygiene. It can be concluded that it will take some time and constant efforts to bring everyone on the same page regarding menstruation and with such awareness - sensitisation events we are taking one step closer to the primary goal.

GLIMPSES OF THE EVENT

