

## WOMEN HYGIENE DRIVE

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Despite several well-planned policies like the Adolescence Education Programme (AEP), The Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A) program and the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karakorum (RKSK), there are gaps in the on-ground implementation. Around 28 per cent of India's population comprises of youngsters and adolescents between the age group of 10-24. Despite such a large section comprising of youngsters, there is a complete lack of focus on their sexual and reproductive health, especially education pertaining to the subject.

However, we do not have a policy that makes sex education compulsory in schools or outside it. There are certain questions on sexuality and human reproductive system that remain unanswered for many adolescents and even youngsters. Examples abound on what the lack of education and awareness about sexuality can do which has had drastic results. But not just cases of sexual harassment and intimidation, even basic concerns about menstrual health and hygiene remain unaddressed. During a One -day workshop on menstrual hygiene and sanitation at Shiksha Sansthan School in Mohyall Colony , Gurugram on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2018 , which was attended by more than 90 adolescents (12-17 years of age), few school dropout adolescent girls, the ASHA workers, and School officials. The session focused on young girls' knowledge, awareness and practices around menstrual health. While programmes have been made to promote sex education in schools, yet menstruation is an overlooked chapter in the curriculums. It is even more difficult to reach out to rural adolescents and women.



It was obvious that the girls got incomplete information on menstruation with the minimum discussion in their home, schools and even in Anganwadi. "We have never spoken about menstruation in school. Not with teachers not even with our friends," shared a school girl. The girls also shared that they knew that every friend of them has started menstruating but no one talked about it. For many, menstruation is a taboo which is not to be spoken about. They said that this was the first time that they were discussing and talking to their friends about it. They realised that they could discuss it openly without any need to hide. "We didn't even know that we were allowed to talk about it," was a common refrain.

There were hardly any discussions about the subject with the male teachers and ironically they are the ones who teach subjects like biology and science and hesitate to discuss it.

The girls, in their feedback, expressed how pleased they were to have a workshop that discussed a taboo subject. There is a need for more awareness-building sessions among not only the young women, but also among those who engage with these issues, including administrative officers, educational institutions, parents and frontline health workers, who must be sensitised on engaging with young people.

Another issue that was flagged was that since 2016, Govt is distributing sanitary Napkins to promote menstrual hygiene among school girls, but till the day, the school had not received the sanitary pads once. Apart from the lack of sexual hygiene and menstruation awareness, there is yet another stigma which has now been worked on to a great extent — transgender people. At Session along with awareness on Menstrual Hygiene management team also deliver the following messages:

1. Use safe water for drinking and cooking;
2. Collect water from a safe source and protect it;
3. No open defecation; install and use hygienic latrines;
4. Proper way to use & dispose of Sanitary Napkins
5. Security and dignity for women and family;
6. Importance of hand washing & Undergarments with soap, with instruction on how to do it;
7. Shared responsibilities of parents and all family members to personal hygiene
8. Educating girls about Menstruation, before they start menstruating.

Oxigen & Sahyog Foundation has launched “Women Hygiene awareness Camp” as an integrated programme with hygiene, sanitation and water as complementary elements, focused on underprivileged groups, especially ultra-poor families and women. Menstrual Hygiene has been the backbone of the programme, based on the premise that programmes that fail to secure consistent hygienic practices are unsustainable.

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