



WOMEN HYGIENE DRIVE

WHAC/20/2019-20

Harkeesh Nagar Slum, Delhi

August 8th, 2019

On Thursday Aug 8th, morning charitable Health center run by Hans Foundation, Harkeesh nagar was packed up by engaging session on the importance of menstrual hygiene and menstrual health management. Social workers from Oxygen & Sahyog Foundation actively participated in the much needed conversation that tackled various issues like effective methods of menstrual hygiene education, inclusive periods and effective sanitary waste disposal — the challenges, solutions and inclusivity during periods in India. Raising awareness breaks period taboos. Waste management is a big part of creating awareness.



A discussion on sanitary waste disposal, recycling and segregation in particular offered a great insight. “No one wants to talk about waste management. Once it is in the trash can, it’s not the end of the story. Some still flush their sanitary pads in the toilets or simply throw them out, which can then be consumed by animals. People need to segregate sanitary waste first, for it to be recycled or disposed off well,” said one of the panelists. The effectiveness of incineration as a disposal option was also debated. ‘Why are women made to feel so awkward to talk about something as basic as their periods?’

Ahead of discussion, CSR Activist questioned, “Why can’t you talk about periods like it’s a normal thing? Why are women made to feel so awkward to talk about something as basic as their periods?” She shared personal experiences laced with humor. She revealed, “We give this weird terminology to periods. ‘Down ho gayi hu, I am chumming’. The funniest one was when this girl in my school said, ‘Aunty a gayi hai. Aarti ka samaan ready hain kya’? Aarti ka samaan is sanitary napkin and aunty is periods! This terminology was coined so that we could speak openly about the issue. It was amusing at that point, but you follow it because you are told it’s supposed to be a secret.

Gyane Doctor present at health center joined us for some time in between and shared “I wondered why sanitary napkin ads showed the color of blood as blue and not red. Or why napkins are often wrapped in black packets or newspaper, and sold like meat or alcohol.” “As a child, I would wonder if a sanitary pad was something so expensive that it can’t be shown to people. Further things like, not getting out of your room if you get period cramps. Dad would understand, but Mother will let her that she is having

headache or food poisoning... and these were all excuses to cover up period cramps. I wondered why one needed to hide it like it was some crime. We are educated, live in metros and yet, we look at it as an embarrassment? It's ironic how people in certain parts of the country celebrate puberty and then, don't allow you to enter temples. Also, parents celebrate when their daughter gets pregnant, but how does she get pregnant? How come this embarrassment then turns into celebration during pregnancy? People even call it a girl's 'problem'. Why is it a problem? "



Taking this forward we discussed a lot of women feel psychologically down during their periods. For some it happens right before it starts. They feel everything bad is going to happen to her. There seems to be no hope, but the mood is back and spirits are high once the periods are done, so women are always on a roller-coaster ride. How many women even talk about this?", she discussed, "From being carefree children, girls suddenly find themselves isolated as they can't share anything about menstruation with anyone. The shame, stigma and taboo surrounding menstruation need to end. Our Session let girls know that periods are totally normal and there is nothing to be ashamed or afraid of. Safe disposal is also an issue. We learnt a lot and met some truly well-informed women who are getting important work done here, shared group of girls attending computer classes at center and requested for one more session where they can call their mothers to be with them. CSR Activist who was spreading awareness about menstrual hygiene, concluded her talk by saying, "Women should ask questions, and learn to ask why."



Seema Khurana
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