

WOMEN HYGIENE DRIVE

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**Kapeshera Slum, Delhi- GGN
January 7th, 2020**

It may appear that things have moved in a positive direction when it comes to removing stigma around menstruation in India's biggest cities, but walk its urban slums and you'll still witness women saying s, it is better to die of an illness than live with shame

Menstruation is still such a taboo in Delhi's urban slums; during the session organized at NGO Nipun center at Kapeshera Slum on January 7th, 2020 this was transparent when many participants out of 90 women attending the session shared that many women won't even walk to a chemist to buy a sanitary pad. Married and middle-aged women still prefer using old rags, partially because of the cost, but more because of the shame associated with going out and buying a pad. Even at the age of 45, Gomati Devi, who lives in kapeshera slum which is on the border of Delhi- Gurugram border, did not know the biological role of menstruation in a woman's body, till she attended an awareness session conducted by Oxygen & Sahyog Foundation.



"We want to know more about the menstrual process and related hygiene. It is the first time that I have come to know why I bleed every month. Earlier, I thought that this was because all the girls were cursed. Now that I know that this happens because of biological reasons and not some myth, I feel so much better about myself and about being a woman," said Kamna a 16 years old girl, who is learning Vocation course at Nipun Center.



"Young girls have no prior knowledge about the biological process they will go through most of their life," says Sahyog Foundation's Activist Seema Khurana who leads the women empowerment programme at Sahyog foundation, and goes from slum to slum, with community mobilizers, and health counselors, to establish a bond with poor women, and create awareness on menstruation-related health issues. . Thirty-six-year-old Meera Devi recounts a similar tale. "I now know that menstruation is important for a woman's well-being. It is also necessary to have these periodic cycles for healthy childbirth, and also for the feeding for the foetus as the unborn baby gets his nutrition from the blood," she said.

“I also learned that if a girl is 16-18 years of age and not menstruating, then there is a problem, especially if she hopes to have children in the future. So, menstruation is indeed good news,” she said, sharing her learning.

During the session we not only discuss menstrual hygiene, women’s health and nutrition in silos. We talk of all issues—family planning, nutrition, anaemia, breastfeeding, and reproductive health. The idea is to get a conversation going so that these issues are not discussed behind doors and women can feel free to talk about their problems, know their bodies and also take charge of their health and well-being

At the interaction session undertaken with women and girls as part of an Awareness to understand attitudes around MHM, revealed that most of them understood menstruation as the expulsion of ‘dirty blood’ (ganda khoon) from the body. “This deeply ingrained notion was associated with the perception of menstruation as impure and consequently, with the need to follow several restrictions. Women mentioned that in the village, they followed several restrictions during menstruation. They were not allowed to cook, did not interact with other members of the household, lived away from the house, etc. However, given the lack of space in urban slums, it was not always possible to observe these taboos,” .



“In villages, we used to be isolated [during our period], but in urban locations, that is not possible—we have no space. And if we women don’t cook, how would people in the household eat? So we only follow what [restrictions] we can,”30 years Vidya.

Yet, when it comes to measuring the impact of these measures on women living in India’s cities, clearly a lot needs to happen. “The bigger and more important hurdle is changing mindsets. The focus should be on reducing and finally removing the stigma around the issue,” said Mr. Pradeep a senior official and NGO director.

Seema Khurana
CSR Lead & Activist