

AWAJ

(Health Program 3- year Report)



Genesis of Health Rights and Awareness Intervention

As per the government data, 70% of the adolescent girls in the Kangra district are below hemoglobin level. The reason being women have no knowledge and understanding of their bodily processes. Talking about menstruation cycle and reproductive health are taboos.

In this region, women are unaware about their health rights and entitlements. The health care system does not respond to the issues related to their sexual health as there is total silence around these issues. Similarly, the mental and emotional health of girls and women is not integral to the health care system, thus there is no support for women who are going through depression or other mental and emotional difficulties. Depression, anxiety and other mental health issues are not even addressed unless the person reaches at stage of maniac disorder or schizophrenia.

There is a vital relationship between women's overall health and wellbeing with the widespread incidence of Violence against girls and women. If there is domestic violence in the home or experience of sexual abuse, either in the childhood or later, it affects women's sense of emotional and mental wellbeing. This perspective is also not addressed by the present health care system.

It is against the above mentioned factual status of women's health that the JRCT's health intervention program has been designed to respond to these pertinent issues. The program was initiated in the year 2009 with the formation of women's health collectives. A cadre of barefoot community health workers, swasthya sakhis are regularly selected and trained based on the objectives of the program.

The health program also works in synergy with the government departments to bring about sustained impact at the larger level.

Goal

1. To make women aware about their bodily processes, address their health related issues to respond to them and continuously work towards ensuring better health and wellbeing and create accurate information on issues of health.
2. To break the silence around sexual abuse

3. To educate girls about menstruation and reproductive health so that they will be able to speak up and educate others.

Objectives

- Form Women's Health Collectives.
- Increase awareness among women about their health needs.
- Support women to break silence around issues of body processes and reproductive health and increase their access to healthcare facilities.
- Increase knowledge and gender sensitivity among the members of health collectives and the community to enhance the overall wellbeing of women in the community.
- Identify and build community health workers as barefoot health workers in order to create a pool of active and trained village level health workers.
- Revive the age-old knowledge of home remedies and propagate their use for improving the health indicators.
- Helping them gain access to medical facilities and government schemes.

STAKEHOLDERS

- Members of women's Health Collectives.
- Women from among the marginalised community.
- School Students (Adolescent Girls/ Boys).
- Women, men and children with special health needs and medical support
- Multiple Government Health Functionaries :
 - ASHA Workers
 - Anganwadi Workers
 - District Programme Officer
 - Child Development Programme Officer

STRATEGIES

- Capacity building of active members of village women's collectives.

- Conduct training workshops for the government health professionals about gender justice and to make them aware about gendered impact on women's health issues.
- Conduct sessions with adolescent boys and girls on bodily function and gender equality to provide scientific knowledge.
- Increase outreach of the marginalised members of the community including women, men and children to access health services.
- Organised Public events to build wider reach in the community and to participate in national and international campaign to commemorate special days for women's rights, environmental awareness, and violence against girls and women.

Activities

- Conduct Monthly Meetings with Women's Health Collectives.
- Workshops and Training on Gender and Health for the members of the health collectives and other women in the community.
- Conduct workshops and hold training sessions with the government health functionaries, barefoot health workers and newly-wed couples.
- Conduct regular sessions with adolescent girls and boys on gender discrimination and how to reduce it, on menstruation cycle and the scientific information about the menstruation, challenge existing taboos around menstruation.
- Regular Health Fairs/ Health Camps.
- Prepare and propagate the use of Herbal remedies.
- Build awareness about the special health related entitlements and support community to increase their access to such schemes.
- Regular Follow- ups with patients and beneficiaries.
- Work with Government Department health functionaries such as asha workers, angan wadi workers, Village Health Committees(VHC)

An over view of multiple activities

a. Monthly Meetings with NSS

In the last three years Jagori has conducted a total of 711 meetings at the village level (246 in 2018; 238 in 2019; 182 in 2020) in 51 villages across four blocks of the Kangra district. The meetings were conducted and organized by the full time health team and the swasthya sakhis. During these meetings, interactive sessions were conducted to educate girls and women on menstrual health, sexual health, common ailments that women suffer from and also address the general feeling of shame to talk about the reproductive and sexual health. They are educated helped to understand the value of leading a healthy lifestyle with balanced diet and nutrition.

The sessions use extensive interactive dialogue, hold group discussion, sing motivational songs, play games, teach yoga and massage and explain the Menstruation cycle through menstrual apron and with the use of other support teaching training material.

b. Health camps



So far 28 Women Health Camps have been organized in 50 villages with the main objective of addressing women's health related issues and provide remedies or refer difficult and chronic cases to the government hospitals. In each of the villages during the health camps, the health team checks the vital health indicators of all the women who come for the camps such as their hemoglobin levels, BP, sugar. All the existing ailments of women all are recorded. The health team with support of a full time trained nurse maintains these records for the follow

sessions and actions. Some of the camps were organized in collaboration with the government health workers (ASHA & Anganwadi).

Approximately 1060 women in total were examined in the camps. Most of the women examined were middle aged married women with children. More than 48% of the women had high blood pressure. High blood sugar, (active diabetes,) prolapsed uterus, joint pains, thyroid and high uric acid were the most prominent issue found among women. In every village, the *swasthya sakhis* conduct session on the use of home remedies, yoga and exercise. Which if they use and practice regularly they can prevent/cure these diseases. Women were made aware of the benefits of eating different vegetables and fruits that they can consume in order to keep themselves healthy.

c. Workshops & Trainings



Seventeen workshops and trainings were conducted in 3 years by the Jagori team including the *Swasthya Sakhi.*, for the community people, young couples and adolescent girls to strengthen their knowledge on gender discrimination and its impact on their health; caste inequalities hindering the health status of marginalized women. During these sessions, women are provided accurate and the right information about

necessary herbal and other remedies and made aware of the existing health facilities.

The workshops were designed in such a way that the participants get comfortable in opening up about sensitive gender and health related issues. Activities and games were planned to bring out the common issues and sessions were conducted related to the problems in order to seek some solutions.

d. Sessions in schools



The school sessions are conducted regularly with girls and boys to build understanding around issues of gender discrimination, how to bring about gender equality in terms of equal food, mobility, good nutrition for both and the freedom from sexual and other kinds of

harassment. The Health Program conducted 11 sessions in schools where the common issues of adolescent girls and boys are discussed.

Generally, it is observed that the chapter on the menstruation is not discussed in detail. Thus, the sessions conducted by the Jagori team, provides full and accurate information and responds to their queries which they have never asked their teachers or parents. These sessions explain the scientific information about menstruation as a bodily process and also challenge the taboos and misinformation. As there is a lack of knowledge about proper menstrual cycle among the adolescent girls, they are also not able to discuss these issues openly with their families. Even the school teachers have appreciated these sessions . This is a step towards gender equal society as today's adolescents are tomorrow's change agents in the society. As a result, 886 girls became aware about the healthy food and hygiene practices along with developing an understanding of gender.

For adolescent boys, special sessions are designed to easily understand the role of gender discrimination and the patriarchal privilege of boys in the homes as well as in the society. Open discussions took place so that they can become aware about how they can initiate the process of bringing gender equality in the society. A total of 654 adolescent boys have been introduced to these conceptual ideas and practices.

For the year 2020, the schools were not allowing training sessions because of COVID 19. Therefore, whenever possible, the team conducted workshop and village meetings with 79 adolescent girls on gender, menstrual and reproductive health and basic knowledge of the POCSO Act.

e. Preparation and propagation of Herbal Remedies

Jagori puts a lot of emphasis on Ayurvedic and herbal medicines and the health sakhis prepared many useful remedies such as triphala, sitopaladi, calendula balm and joint pain oil. Over a long period, the benefit of the regular use of such remedies has made them very popular. The use of such medicines has increased over time both the inside the villages as well as by outsiders. So far the team has distributed these medicines extensively to the people in the project villages. They are one hundred percent organic and have shown very good results by almost 550 people in 3 years.

f. Enable and support women and men to Access government schemes

An essential component of the program is to work as a mediator to support the access of the people to the health care system.

With the intervention of the *Swasthya Sakhis*, Jagori helped women to become aware of their health rights and entitlements. Significant achievement in the 3 years include: 411 people availing benefits from different government schemes like the HIMCARE (the State government health service scheme), Ayushman Card (the Central government sponsored health insurance scheme), HP Sahara Yojana, disability certificates and State social security schemes for persons with disabilities. Along with this, 7 differently abled patients received

wheelchairs and many others received financial help for treatments and for buying medicines.

g. Achievements

More than 844 women showed improvements in their health behavior in the last 3 years. Most of them suffered from diseases and were treated with allopathic medicines under the guidance of *swasthya sakhis* or with help of Ayurveda and home remedies.

Visible enhanced capacities of community women are a positive indicator. Similarly there is definite shift in the health behavior within the wider community.

The health team has closely observed and Recorded changes in their eating habits. A large number of women have begun using iron cooking utensils, maintaining bodily and menstrual hygiene as well as increased cleanliness around their homes are very positive changes.

In the past women had to be mobilized to attend the village level meetings of the women's collectives. There is a visible increase in the number of women coming to attend the meetings as they find the information shared in these meetings very relevant.

Earlier women kept delaying going to the hospitals for their serious ailments. Now they have become more aware of taking care of their health care and whenever needed, they have also started going to the hospital without delay and are openly able to share their gynecological and sexual health problems during the visits to hospitals.

h. Newly-Wedded Couples Trainings

Many young people in the community get into arranged marriages without any understanding or even knowledge about each other. In the majority of the cases, they have not even seen the partner till the day of the wedding. The task of adjusting in a new family and almost with no information about contraceptives and reproductive health, causes stress especially, for the woman.

The Health team conducted two residential workshops with them, one in 2019 and one in 2021 with 37 newly-wedded young couples in order to make them understand the value each other, listen and become friends

with each other. The team conducts sessions about reproductive and the sexual health.

Since these are residential workshops and provide the couples an opportunity, away from the home, to form emotional bonds with their respective partners. The session also makes men aware of the difficulties a woman faces as she is forced to shift to another home with strangers leaving her own family behind. They are made to understand the extent of stress she experiences after marriage and the difficulties she faces in adapting to the new environment, physically and emotionally. Often, women break down sharing how their lives are completely changed after marriage. This works as a catharsis for her. Men having to hear for the first time, the pain of their wives become more sensitive.

These sessions have provided men and women with new ways of relating and appreciating the difficulties for both, especially of the women. These sessions are full of laughter and bonding.

i. Exposure Visits

To help health team gain more knowledge about medicinal plants and herbs that can be used for prevention and treatment of various diseases, an exposure visit was arranged for 15 members of Health team and Health sakhis. The participants visited Herbal Garden, in Joginder Nagar. During this exposure, the team visited Herbal gardens and a herbal museum where they were oriented on various herbs and medicinal plants such as Stevia, Aloe Vera, Bergenia Ciliata (Pashan Bhed), Arjun, Tulsi, Brahmi, Lemongrass etc. they are very beneficial herbal plants that can be used for the prevention and treatment of various ailments. The team interacted with the Director of the institute and the Director of herbal garden to get more information about local medicinal plants. The team toured the entire big herbal garden and brought back organic seeds to grow in the region.

j. Village Health and Nutrition Day

Since the very beginning of the programme, the Women's Well-being Week (WWW) are organised every year and celebrated for women by women of the program. The last WWW was organized in 2018. These are more like the health camps with a very strong focus on the information on how to heal oneself. The wellbeing camps are attended by a large number of women and even children and multiple alternative and allopathic remedies are prescribed to them. A senior female doctor attends to each one of them.

Jagori team also attended the village health and nutrition day in collaboration with the government health department. There are interactive sessions with each other about the various programs that they conduct and how with the involvement of swasthya sakhis these programs can be made more effective. During these dialogues, the gap between the government schemes and the lack of their implementation was also discussed.

The team discussed how the health sakhis can collaborate with the government health workers to spread information about services/schemes and enhance the access of the community members to the existing schemes.

k. Community Activism

From time to time, the Community Health Workers (*SwasthyaSakhis*) organized certain community protests supporting women's rights and demanding access to health facilities for the villagers. The dynamic educational activities have tremendously helped the community members to become aware of their rights and demand the same. For example – Apart from the protests, the active community women have petitioned the government to set up sub-health care centers in three villages as there was no public health center in the village. With regular follow-up, one of the villages got the sanction to set up a health care center.

Yearly Highlights/ Achievements

April 2018 – March 2019

- The barefoot community health workers, *swasthyasakhis* were selected and diligently trained based on the objectives outlined in the programme. 16 *Swasthya Sakhis* worked extensively with the communities in 51 villages in the project locations. The regular intervention of *swasthya sakhis* has resulted in a good relationship with the community members.

April 2019 – March 2020

- As a result of events like WWW and 13 Health Camps conducted so far, the women and girls started to become more open and aware about their reproductive and sexual health, menstrual health and hygiene, sexually transmitted diseases, urinary tract infections, white discharge and uterus prolapses, etc.). With a total outreach to 2775 women, many have taken initiatives to challenge conservative patriarchal myths associated with their menstrual health and bodily processes. They have become more informed about their health, balance diet and gynecological health.
- The meetings and trainings with over 83 ASHA and AWWs were conducted with the main objective of exploring the possibilities for Jagori and the government health workers to work in synergy. As ASHA and AWW workers are the official frontline government health workers and therefore, they are directly engaged with the community. Health workers' engagement with them is crucial to catalyze our efforts and strengthen the existing health delivery system.
- 60% of the total number of women and girls who came in contact with the health team through various events and activities, were found to have a visible attitudinal change in the health behavior. The women were paying attention to their health; bodily processes and minimum of 30% women demanded and accessed various health related health schemes and entitlements.

- As a result of the constant interactions with the community, the team found that many marginalized people were not able to avail the benefits of various state schemes as they were ignorant about these benefits and many did not know how to apply for the schemes. Here, the *swasthya sakhis* played the role of a bridge between the community and the health functionaries. Providing information of such schemes to those who needed it desperately was a very important aspect of the program as they were helped with processes of getting the benefits of state schemes. In numerous cases of people with disability, the aim was to be able to ensure the access to various benefits for them. Helping them to get tested about the extent of disability and getting the certificate was the starting point. As a result, 298 people were able to get the financial support they deserved.
- As working with adolescent girls and boys is a crucial outcome indicator to strengthen the long-term output of the project, sessions were organized in 7 School for the awareness of students on topics such as of gender discrimination, menstrual health, sexuality etc. and the related taboos. Providing accurate information about their changing bodies and common youth issues were addressed in an open environment. In all 577 girls and 384 boys interacted with the teams as part of the adolescent outreach program.

April 2020 - March 2021

- As the regular work of health team got interrupted due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the team had to think of alternative ways of reaching out to the community and of networking with the community. Although, the work progress was hindered for a while but this was the time when people reached out to the *swasthya sakhis* with various health problems and difficulties. During this period, nearly 465 patients directly benefitted from one-on-one guidance and help from the *swasthya sakhis*.
- During this time when the team was not able to visit communities, the main target was to study and get as much educated about the home remedies. A programme to distribute organic seeds of seasonal

vegetables was initiated and women from 45 villages received these seeds so that they can grow and eat healthy food. The *swasthya sakhis* prepared large quantities of herbal remedies and distributed them to more than 250 women who reported to have benefitted after using them.

- During the lockdown, many people lost their jobs and it was difficult for them to get two meals a day. The health program team distributed 206 nutritional food packets to pregnant and lactating women. Along with this, 189 needy families received ration kits with all basic ingredients that would last them for three weeks.

Following is the tabular representation of the outreach and work done by the Health Program team from April 2018 to March 2021

Year	Meetings	Health Camps	workshop and trainings	School Sessions.		beneficiaries (for schemes/ certificates)	medical help (through hospital visits)	medical help (through home and herbal remedies)
2018-2019	246	13	3	4	230 girls and 270 boys	47	60	38
2019-2020	238	8	7	7	577 girls, 384 boys	298	113	168
2020-2021	182	7	7	-	79 girls	66	219	246
Total -	711	28	17	11	886 girls & 654 boys	411	392	452