



SPHOORTHI BI-MONTHLY

MAY-JUNE 2024



ABOUT US

KHPT is a not-for-profit entity, founded in 2003 to improve the health and wellbeing of communities in India through focused, scalable, evidence-driven interventions, particularly among vulnerable communities in India. Starting with interventions to address HIV/AIDS, which were scaled well beyond Karnataka, we learned and reflected on our decade-long experience leading us to look beyond HIV to four other thematic areas namely Maternal, Neonatal & Child health (MNCH), Tuberculosis (TB), Adolescent Health (AH), and Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC).

The **Adolescent Thematic** focuses on gender-based empowerment programmes to address malnutrition, menstrual hygiene, gender-based violence and the mental health of adolescent girls, particularly across the Kalyana Karnataka region. KHPT's 'Sphoorthi' adolescent girls' empowerment program has been scaled up by the Government of Karnataka to prevent child marriages. The Sphoorthi model works to build 'power within' adolescent girls through life skills education, leadership and communication training, exposure visits and sports camps; improves parent-daughter relationships to build girls 'power with' significant stakeholders, and encourages community-level participation of girls to gain 'power over' or access to community resources.

KHPT launches #PeriodFriendlyVillage Campaign

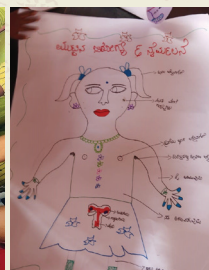
On May 28, celebrated internationally as Menstrual Hygiene Day, KHPT launched the #PeriodFriendlyVillage campaign across the Sphoorthi districts of Kalaburagi, Belagavi, Bagalkot, Vijayapur, Raichur, Koppal and Yadgir districts to encourage communities to take responsibility for creating a supportive environment for adolescent girls and women during their periods and breaking taboos around menstruation.

The community-centric campaign involved rallies, Intimate Interactive Theatre shows, and dialogues (Samvadas) between adolescent girls and community members. It also included interactions with district government officials. The campaign saw participation from adolescent girls, their parents, panchayat officials, frontline workers, and local government functionaries. Red ribbons were tied around the participants' wrists representing the unity and shared responsibility in breaking menstrual taboos and working towards making villages period-friendly.

Here's what the participants had to say after the campaign.

"It is easy for me to discuss period-related issues with my friends and parents. In addition, I explain menstrual care to my friends who are experiencing their first period." Ankitha, class IX, Raichur district.

"We usually organise programs to create awareness of malaria, and dengue but this year we are also celebrating Menstrual Hygiene Day. Such programs are very helpful to eradicate the myths related to menstruation"- Seetavva Singadi, Community Health Officer, Belagavi district.



Adolescent Health Thematic team discusses the way forward for the Sphoorthi projects

At the recently concluded Quarterly Review Meeting held between 25-27 June in Belgavi, Adolescent Health team members from seven implementation districts - Koppal, Yadgir, Belgavi, Bagalkot, Vijayapura, Raichur, and Kalaburagi, together with the central team, discussed the way forward for the Sphoorthi interventions. Key suggestions for the next phase included vulnerability-focused geographic expansion, deepening the community-centric intervention through the engagement of families and boys, building key linkages with relevant partner institutions for implementation,

and adoption of digital learning models. The team discussed the role that KHPT can play as a technical support partner to other agencies interested in scaling up the Sphoorthi model.



Central and district staff in a group activity

EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES

Frontline health workers and panchayat officials trained in health and nutrition

180 frontline health workers and panchayat officials from Gangavathi, Yelburga, Koppal, and Kushtagi taluks of Koppal district received training on important health and nutrition-related



PADI trainers interacting with the frontline workers

information. This training utilized visually appealing flipcharts and activity-based pedagogies, games, film screenings, and group activities, developed by KHPT. The training was intended to supplement the training received by frontline workers to work with communities and deliver nutritional content. The training focused on building skills amongst frontline workers to deliver nutritional awareness sessions for adolescent girls and women in an interesting and simple manner. KHPT collaborated with PADI to conduct the training.

“We are only tuned to give training in lecture mode. Now, I have realised that if interactions and activities are part of the training, the girls and women will show more interest in listening to us.” Gangamma, Block Health Education Officer, Koppal.

WHAT ARE OUR GIRLS UP TO?

Adolescent girls participate in a training organised by Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram officials

30 Sphoorthi adolescent girls from Yelburga taluk, Koppal district participated in a 3-day training program organized by officials of Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) between May 28 and May 31. The training, aimed at addressing adolescent issues, covered important topics such as sexual health, the significance of consuming nutritious food, health and hygiene, gender discrimination, and gender-based violence as part of RKSK's efforts to reach out to girls.



Adolescent girls at the training

World Environment Day observed across Sphoorthi projects

Adolescent girls in seven Sphoorthi districts, including Koppal, Yadgir, Belagavi, Raichur, Vijayapura, Raichur, and Bagalkot, took part in observing World Environment Day on June 5. They joined the ground staff in planting saplings and participated in activities such as rallies and Interactive Intimate Theatre performances. The girls were also educated about the significance of preserving the environment and its benefits.



Adolescent girls planting a sapling



Girls caring for a young tree



Environment Day celebrations at a school

DISTRICTS' CORNER

DC of Koppal chairs the 2nd District Coordination & Executive Committee meeting

The second District Coordination & Executive Committee (DCEC) meeting was held on May 23, chaired by Mr. Nalin Atul, IAS, District Commissioner, Koppal district. The meeting was attended by Mr. Rahul Ratnam Pandey, CEO of Zilla Panchayat, and other line departments including Education, Health, Women and Child Development, and Social Welfare. The meeting involved a review of the progress of the Sphoorthi project in the district,



An adolescent girl interacting during the DCEC meeting

with a particular focus on the Life Skills Education sessions being conducted for adolescent girls in hostels. The District Administration expressed interest in expanding this aspect of the Sphoorthi project to all pre-metric hostels in Koppal with support from KHPT.

Executive Officer of Gokak reviews status of child marriages

Concerned about the rising cases of child marriage and teenage pregnancies, the Gokak Executive Officer (EO), Mr. Zahirullah Hussain, called a meeting with the Child Development Project Officer and Sphoorthi staff. The CDPO and Sphoorthi staff



The EO discussing with taluk-level officials and Sphoorthi staff

presented the steps taken to curb child marriages in the taluk, including the strengthening of the Kavalu Samiti and Children's Gram Sabha. During the meeting, it was decided that the Sphoorthi team and government departments would work together to prevent child marriages and curb teenage pregnancies. The roles and responsibilities of various departments and organizations were outlined in a detailed action plan.

Sphoorthi staff assist district administration by identifying orphans and single parents of adolescents

To include Sphoorthi girls in the 'Prayojakatva Yojane' scheme by the Government of Karnataka, the Sphoorthi staff from Raichur, Belagavi, Vijayapura, Bagalkot, and Kalaburagi visited villages to identify adolescents who are either orphans or have single parents. Under this scheme, eligible girls will receive monthly financial support to continue their education.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Breaking taboos and debunking myths

Menstruation is a natural phenomenon. But it has always been surrounded by myths. Restrictions are imposed on girls when they are menstruating. They are not allowed to worship god or enter the puja room, enter the kitchen, not to touch trees, pickles, etc. This is the story of Bhavana* who broke these barriers by developing a clear understanding of menstrual health and hygiene.



Bhavana in a temple

Bhavana is a Role Model Adolescent Girl (RMAG) from Kanavinahatti village. In her village girls face restrictions during their menses. There is a belief in the village that if any woman enters any temple, during menses, it can cause quarrels at home, or snakes and scorpions will enter the home. This belief laid a strong fear among girls and women and restricted their mobility during menses. Bhavana was also one of those girls who developed fear.

After Bhavana received LSE from the Sphoorthi Community Organizer (CO) working in her village, she was able to get over these fears. The CO, Manisha* herself overcame these barriers through the Sphoorthi training she received, and has been dispelling these superstitions amongst girls and women in her villages.

Bhavana said, "Earlier I was afraid that if I visited temples during menstruation then it could bring bad luck to my home or venomous creatures like snakes or scorpions could enter our home. However, after attending sessions held by Akka, I understood that menses are natural. Now, I am confident enough to move anywhere, and touch anything. I am visiting temples during menses. Even, though I have shared the learnings with my parents they have also stopped believing such things".

The CO also expressed "I was also like Bhavana. I was afraid which made to restrict my mobility. But now I am moving with freedom and discussing with girls and women about the myths and taboos attached to menstruation. The girls and women, of my village, are also changing their thoughts."

A New Beginning: A Story of Three Brave Girls

In Marnal, Hunasagi Taluk of Yadgir resided three adolescent girls: Sumitra*, 13 years old, studying in 6th std; her sister, Subhashree*, 15 years old and in class 8; and their neighbour, Shivamma*, also studying in class 8. These young girls were enrolled in the Sphoorthi programme as 'Peer Girls' (PGs) and were residing in the SC colony in their village.

Sumitra and Subhashree had lost their father and were under the sole care of their mother, who struggled to make ends meet through daily wage work. The girls often accompanied her to help with the labour, resulting in their irregular attendance at school. Shivamma shared a similar difficulty, as her family also faced economic hardships. Consequently, the three girls were not regular in school, missing out on basic reading and writing skills. Once they enrolled in the Sphoorthi programme and became PGs, Renuka, the Community Organizer (CO) of their village noticed their absence from school and their lack of reading and writing skills.

Upon investigating, the CO got to know that the girls, dropped out due to a lack of basic education, fear of being shamed by peers, and concerns about caste discrimination. Additionally, the financial burden of purchasing school books, stationery and other school essentials further discouraged their return to education. Renuka acted swiftly, arranging a meeting with the headmaster of the Government school. She spoke to the headmaster about the

apprehensions that the girls had and asked the headmaster to devise a plan for their reintegration into school. The headmaster expressed a strong commitment to providing these girls with the education they deserved. He assured the CO of his support and willingness to integrate the girls back into the school environment.

On the 6th of June, a milestone was reached when the girls rejoined school, marking a new chapter in their lives. During the morning assembly, the headmaster introduced the three girls to the entire school. He delivered a heartfelt speech, urging all students to welcome them with open arms, treat them like sisters, and assist them in learning basic skills. His words of kindness and inclusion resonated with the students, who warmly welcomed the girls back to school.

The other girls in the school embraced the three girls, made them understand the importance of their education, vowed to continue supporting the girls, and provided the necessary school stationery, easing the financial burden on the girls' families. Now equipped and motivated, the girls were eager to embrace their education.

The support from the headmaster and Renuka, coupled with the girls' determination to overcome their challenges, created a conducive environment for their academic growth. The girls are now happily reintegrated into school, looking forward to a brighter future. This story is a testament to the power of community involvement, the dedication of educators, and the resilience of young girls determined to overcome adversity and pursue their dreams.

***names changed to protect identities.**

KHPT

IT Park, 5th Floor,
1-4, Rajajinagar Industrial Area,
Behind KSSIDC Admin office, Rajajinagar,
Bengaluru, Karnataka - 560 044

Ph: + 91 80 4040 0200
Fax: + 91 80 4040 0300
Email: khptblr@khpt.org
Website: www.khpt.org

Scan Here

