

Smile Days

"Every girl has the right to Smile and lead a Healthy life"



Menstruation is an integral part of female life. Globally, approximately 52% of the female population is of reproductive age and menstruates for two to seven days, every month. In rural and backward areas of India, menstruating girls are considered impure. They are often kept in isolation for as long as they menstruate and treated like untouchables.

Menstrual hygiene and basic sanitation are fundamental to the well-being of the female gender. Yet, a vast majority of the rural population has no access to clean sanitary products that are commonly available in other parts of the world, or even to a clean and private facility where they can change their menstrual cloths/pads and keep themselves disease-free.

Millions of girls and women are subject to severe restrictions in their daily lives - simply because they are menstruating. Besides health problems, poor hygiene practices during menstruation push girls temporarily, and in many cases permanently, out of school.

Menstruation - a misunderstood natural phenomenon in many backward areas of India - therefore carries life-altering implications for girls. Instead of turning into healthy, well-educated young adults, girls drop out of school, are forced to get married at a young age and asked to bear children, relegating them to a life of serfdom. Poor healthcare during puberty often causes problems in child-bearing, leading to divorce and a life of destitution.

Menstruation shouldn't bring with it a fork in the road for these young lives. Through the Smiley Days campaign, IDF hopes to bring about lasting positive change. The pilot program will involve educating five thousand girls and their families about menstruation and providing them with basic sanitary kits. Smiley Days will also help IDF build (and renovate) 'girls-only' toilets at schools under its care.

The main menstrual issues faced by girls and women in rural/backward India are:

- Limited education about menstruation
- Limited access to consulting and guidance
- Malnutrition and general lack of health awareness
- Gynecological issues and infections
- Fear caused by cultural myths and taboos regarding menstruation
- Embarrassment and low self esteem
- Hesitation and trepidation in buying sanitary products
- Inability to bear expenses of commercial sanitary products
- Unhygienic ways of using cloths and rags during menstruation
- Lack of privacy required for changing menstrual cloth/pad
- Lack of resources for washing sanitary products before reusing them
- Inadequate waste disposal facilities
- Avoiding social interaction during menstruation that often results in girls dropping out of schools
- Early marriages and early pregnancies

Survey findings

In May 2016, Indian Dreams Foundation (IDF) conducted a survey among 570 adolescent girls (ages 11 to 20) and married women from slum areas in Agra, UP, India. These were the main findings:

1. 65% had no information on menstruation and were in a state of shock when they experienced it for the first time.
2. 60% used rags made from old clothes as pads to soak up menstrual blood; 11% reuse the same cloth without properly washing and drying it.
3. 70% experience stomach pain.
4. 50% are anemic and experience extreme weakness and body ache.
5. 22% don't have a toilet in their house and have to use common toilets in the communities that are used by everyone and are rarely cleaned properly.
6. 48% catch infections and experience irritation, itching and rashes.
7. 38% girls did not tell anyone about what they were experiencing until it was unbearable.

Upon collecting the data, IDF's team consulted specialists on the long-term impact of these infections and researched their socio-economic implications. Such infections, if left untreated, could result in gynecological issues that can impede future pregnancies. Lack of awareness and social pressure also results in early marriages and early pregnancies, with complications.

Smiley Days – A campaign to promote menstrual hygiene and well-being

Initial Targeted Area:

The project will be rolled out in different urban slums and rural/backward communities in Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Target Beneficiaries:

The project will be targeting adolescent girls between the age of 11 to 20 years, married adolescent women and other older women.

Core Objectives:

1. To increase awareness among girls in the age group of 11 to 20 on menstrual hygiene and sanitation practices.
2. To create an environment in which everyone is motivated to talk and discuss openly about menstruation and related health issues.
3. To make health care services more accessible for adolescent girls and women.
4. To counsel and empower girls to build their self-esteem and confidence.
5. To motivate women to educate their daughters on menstruation and hygienic practices.
6. To promote disposal of sanitary napkins in an environment friendly manner.
7. To build toilets in schools for girls.
8. To improve school attendance among menstruating girls and reduce drop out ratio.
9. To make older women understand the importance of menstrual education and appropriate hygienic practices.

Key Strategies in the target areas:

1. Generate Awareness:

- a. Counseling sessions, workshops, distributing handouts and hygiene kits (Smiley Kits)
- b. Broadcast information & knowledge through interactive Menstrual booklets/Guides
- c. Counseling to the mothers and older women to educate everyone in their family on hygienic menstrual practices and nutrition
- d. Regular health check ups of the adolescent girls
- e. Mentoring some chosen females to help with sustainable outreach with SAKHI (mentors/friends/elders)

2. Resource Availability:

- a. Involving local stakeholders, specialists (includes gynecologists, psychologists and teachers),
- b. Accessible and affordable sanitary napkins
- c. Engage family members to collectively target social cultural myths and taboos
- d. Engage Schools as the project partners

3. Reward:

- a. Development of 3 toilets and renovation of 5 toilets in targeted areas for girls only
- b. Installation of Smiley Box in the partner schools for collecting girls queries
- c. Provide Smiley Kits to every beneficiary
- d. Motivating girls to save their petty amount to purchase their own affordable sanitary products

Short Term Impact:

- Girls and women will have access to information on safe menstrual hygiene practices
- Smiley Kits will give them a head start and motivate them to follow hygienic practices
- Knowledge and awareness will expand and sustain menstrual hygiene management among girls and women in targeted areas.
- Access to affordable sanitary products
- Girls will be regular in school and will enjoy their right to education.

Long Term Impact:

- Unobstructed education for girls
- Girls and women empowerment in backward communities in India
- Holistic development of girls (mental, physical & social)
- A positive impact on the coming generations

A PROJECT BY:



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