



H T Parekh
FOUNDATION



engage, innovate, empower

SPHOORTHI Bi-Monthly



November - December 2023

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.

Social and Behavioural Change Sessions on Nutrition

Life skills-based sessions to develop nutritional awareness and behaviour change are being conducted for adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers of Koppal district. The girls and women are being trained in life skills, leadership and communication skills. Content

around gender, nutrition and menstrual hygiene are being discussed with them, to address girls' knowledge and awareness around these topics, and build self-esteem, confidence and communication.

Additionally, pregnant women and lactating mothers are provided supplementary knowledge on nutrition, immunization, dietary diversity, regular Antenatal Care and Postnatal Care check-ups, exclusive breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices.

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EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES

Adolescent girls taken on exposure visits

Role Model Girls (RMGs) from the seven Sphoorthi districts had the chance to meet with three senior women officials of the Government of Karnataka. The girls got to interact with Ms Shalini Rajneesh, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary and Development Commissioner, Ms BB Cauvery, IAS, Commissioner, and Ms Vijaya, Joint Director of the School Education Department, Government of Karnataka. The girls shared their experiences with the Sphoorthi project and how it positively impacts their communities. The officials also shared their personal and professional experiences with the girls. These visits were an opportunity for the girls to learn and aspire to bigger things in life.



Adolescent girls with Ms Shalini Rajneesh

Ninety-one adolescent girls from 45-gram panchayats of Belagavi, witnessed the winter session of legislative assembly at Suvarna Vidhana Soudha. The girls learned the administrative system and how the members assembled to discuss various issues in Karnataka.



Adolescent girls at the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha

So far, 21,154 girls and mothers have attended the LSE sessions . Along with awareness sessions, Fortified Blended Food in the form of Shakti Vita is being distributed to beneficiaries with low BMI and poor socioeconomic status.



A Community Organiser conducting the LSE session for mothers

Role Model Girls conduct Life Skills Education sessions for their peers

Role Model girls across the Sphoorthi project are now on a mission to impart crucial Life Skills Education sessions to their peers. Peer Girls' groups have been formed with the support of Community Organisers and the RMGs are conducting these sessions within their villages. Around 17,000* peer girls have attended the LSE sessions across the Koppal and Yadgir districts.

Peer-to-peer learning is an important strategy of the Sphoorthi project that trains and empowers one group of adolescent girls as RMGs who then train another group of girls known as peer girls.



An RMG to Peer LSE session in progress

WHAT ARE OUR GIRLS UP TO?

Adolescent girls participate in a live YouTube broadcast

Four adolescent girls from Kalaburagi district participated in a live YouTube broadcast called 'Odu Belaka,' which was organised by Siksha Foundation, a Bengaluru - based NGO. They got an opportunity to know and understand the different career opportunities available for adolescents and the importance of choosing a career which suited their interests. The girls also spoke on how the Sphoorthi project has helped them continue their education and also motivated their parents to invest in girls' education.



The girls during the live YouTube broadcast

** Data for Nov and Dec 2023*

Adolescent girls take part in Samvadas with key stakeholders

Adolescent girls across the Sphoorthi projects are taking part in samvadas (dialogues) with different stakeholders like parents, boys and community leaders. The goal of this activity is to gain support, improve the parent-daughter relationship, encourage boys to respect girls and break gender discrimination and get support from the community to solve their problems.

“ In Kolihal village, Yadgiri district, a few girls were having difficulty finding a suitable place to attend their remedial classes. During a community meeting, the girls shared their concerns with community leaders, who took action. As a result, the Gram Panchayat provided them with a space next to the village library at the Anganwadi centre. This new space allowed the girls to study effectively while also taking advantage of the library's resources for further learning.”

“ In Hiresindogi village, due to eve-teasing, a class IX girl had to drop out. Following a Samvada between girls, boys and teachers, the girls and teachers met the boy's sister who assured to speak to her brother and make him understand the negative impact of eve-teasing on girls. Since then, the boy has stopped teasing the girl.”

The Samvadas have had a positive impact on the community members. Across the districts, Samvadas have garnered support from boys in the villages to organize sports camps for girls and have changed parent mindsets. They have also helped to solve local problems of transportation and infrastructure which contributed to girls' dropping out of schools. Panchayats and other community stakeholders have started actively monitoring school quality, ensuring resources such as blackboards, teachers, and remedial education for girls.



An adolescent girl interacting with a group of parents

DISTRICTS' CORNER

District Coordination and Executive Committee meetings held in Koppal and Vijayapura districts

On 29 December, the first District Coordination and Executive Committee (DCEC) meeting was chaired by Mr. Nalini Atul, IAS the District Commissioner (DC) of Koppal. The main agenda of the meeting was to establish a review mechanism to monitor the health and nutrition status of adolescent girls in Koppal. KHPT's Sphoorthi initiative and nutrition program were presented and discussed at the meeting, and KHPT's district adolescent health team was identified as a potential technical support partner to various line departments working with adolescents. The DC has called for monthly meetings to review the health and nutrition of girls and children in the district. Along with the DC, the meeting was attended by Mr. Rahul Ratan Pandey, the CEO of Koppal, and Ms Yashodha Vantgodi, the Superintendent of Police (SP) in Koppal.

On 11 December, the second DCEC meeting was held under the chairmanship of Mr KK Chauvan, the Deputy Director of the Women and Child Development Department. During the meeting, the KHPT staff presented the progress of the Sphoorthi project and the Deputy Director had the opportunity to interact with adolescent girls to understand the positive impact the project has had on their lives.



The 1st DCEC meeting in progress in Koppal



The DCEC meeting in Vijayapura

Situation and Needs assessment study of Kavalu Samitis undertaken

The Adolescent Health team is conducting a situation and needs assessment to strengthen Kavalu Samitis (Vigilance Committee for Women and Child Protection) in seven Sphoorthi intervention districts. The study is being undertaken in 15 panchayats covering 15 Talukas of Bagalkot, Belagavi, Kalaburgi, Koppal, Raichur, Vijayapura, and Yadgir districts. Based on the results of the study, strategies will be developed to strengthen the Kavalu Samitis' capacities to address Gender-based Violence (GBV) against adolescents at the community level, with a specific focus on child marriage prevention.



The Adolescent Health team interacting with community members

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

LEARNING TO NEGOTIATE CASTE BARRIERS

Intimate Interactive Theatre helped 15-year-old Naina overcome her fears and gain support from her parents

Naina* is a 15-year-old girl from Kalagi village and panchayat, Muddebihal block, Vijayapura district. She belongs to the Scheduled Caste community and is a Role Model Adolescent girl in the Sphoorthi program. Although she was very interested, her parents were not supportive of sending her outside her home and were comfortable only sending her to school. Despite multiple efforts by the Community Organizer (CO) to convince the parents, Naina could never participate in any trainings like Intimate Interactive Theatre and exposure visits except for the leadership camp.

Naina used to cry due to the lack of support and encouragement from her parents, but every new training opportunity sparked hope in her. The RMAGs who were selected to attend the IiT training came back and trained Naina as well. When Naina wanted to perform the IiT show in a nearby village, her parents did not allow her to perform. However, when the chance came to perform in her village, Naina stood up for herself and said she would perform. That day, 2-3 shows were planned in the village. The first show went well and was organized for the Community Health Center (CHC) staff during their meeting.

The second venue was at Agasi Katte, a common place for people of upper caste to meet in the village. When Naina learned about the next venue, she declined to join the show as she was afraid that she would be discriminated against. However, the CO was determined to motivate Naina to perform in the Agasi Katte. Talking to her the CO said, "Caste should not be a barrier and this is a chance to change the situation." Initially, Naina was not fully convinced but then changed her mind to face her fears. The team performed two shows on gender discrimination and the importance of education, and sports for adolescent girls. Later, Naina, confidently involved the audience in discussions. This opportunity proved to be a chance for her to overcome her fears of interacting with upper-caste people and have the confidence to deal with discrimination.



Representative Image: IiT show

Naina is a shining example of how support from CO, Life Skills Education sessions and other activities of Sphoorthi enabled her come out of her bubble and take this leap.

The family after witnessing the show applauded and participated in the discussion, and their perception changed. They told Naina and the CO that they would send her to exposure visits and other training programs in the future. The CO also reassured them that in the Sphoorthi program, all girls are treated equally, and discrimination on any basis is not tolerated. The parents thanked the CO. Naina was overjoyed to see this significant change in her father, and her happiness knew no bounds.

A BRAVE NEW GIRL

The once shy and reserved adolescent is an inspiration to her peers

16-year-old, Suma* is popular in the Vajrabandi Gram Panchayat, Yelburga taluk, Koppal district. The once shy and reserved girl is now an inspiration to her peers and has made her mother and younger sister proud. Her parents wanted Suma to work and she attended school only for six months every year and for the rest of the months, she worked. Adding to her woes, her father abandoned the family as he wanted a male child. This pushed her mother to make Suma work and drop her out of school.



Suma with her mother

The situation changed when she became a Role Model Girl (RMG) as part of the Sphoorthi project. Being an RMG, she fully immersed herself in the project and Life Skills Education sessions armed her with confidence, knowledge, and negotiation skills which she used to go back to school.

Also, a parents' meeting was organized where our Community Organiser (CO) spoke on the importance of education for girls and supporting them to work towards their goals. This changed her mother's mind. Meanwhile, Suma promised her mother not to worry and made her understand that girls too can study, work hard, and take care of their loved ones.

During her exposure visit, she was taken to a fire station where she learned how to extinguish fires. When she returned home, she utilized her newfound skills and, with the help of other brave RMGs, stopped a fire from spreading to a nearby hut. She was appreciated by the community members who were happy to see young women like her bravely putting off the fire.

The LSE sessions helped Suma to understand the importance of working collectively to solve issues for the well-being of girls. So, Suma and her group of RMGs organized plays in villages to raise awareness about the harmful effects of child marriage. Her communication skills improved gradually, prompting her to approach the Panchayat Development Officer with their concerns, and boldly speak up at children's gram sabhas on the issues affecting girls like her.

Suma and her group of RMGs have been leading the way in bringing about positive changes within themselves, their families, and their villages.

"Sphoorthi has given me wings. No girl should be confined to the four walls of their home," says this bright young woman.

**names changed to protect identity*



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