

Population First

June 2018

E-newsletter

'Chhed Chhaad Kyun?'

"A group of boys is passing suggestive comments about a girl in the college canteen, making her uncomfortable and when she tries to leave the canteen they obstruct her path and molest her." If you are wondering where this is happening, it is a scene from a play - 'Chhed Chhaad Kyun?' performed by the team of "Theatre of Relevance", on the 9th of June, 2018 on the occasion of *Laadli Day!*

The play about sexual harassment was directed by Manjul Bhardwaj, the founder of "Theatre of Relevance", followed by an interactive session by him with all the young girls and boys who formed the majority of our audience this year.



Earlier this year, in the backdrop of the rising incidents of violent crimes against young girls, we had organized a couple of meetings with some NGOs and individuals working with young boys and girls in an effort to reach out to the community at large to understand and change the mindset that resulted in violence against young girls and women. The culmination of these meetings was this event which saw a big gathering of youngsters from the

community.

So this year, as *Laadli* turned 13, we organized an event focusing on prevention of violence against young girls. We had invited these young boys and girls with the express purpose of starting a dialogue with them on multiple issues like the reasons for violence against girls being so prevalent, deep-rooted gender discrimination in society, the meaning of consent, gender stereotypes and peer pressure to conform to them. Media professionals had also been invited as an effective means of propagating our thoughts to a wider cross section of people.

The Kathua rape case and the media campaign that followed shook the collective conscience of the nation and haunted all concerned citizens for months together. Not only were the crimes horrendous and bestial, the impunity with which they were committed was also shocking.

The media campaign, giving graphic details of the rape and with lingering images of the young eight year old splashed all over print and electronic media only aggravated the sense of shock and disgust. What was disturbing about this campaign was that it violated all codes of privacy of the victim and her family and exposed them to the public glare. We at Population First too were deeply disturbed by the spate of crimes and decided to do our little bit to address this situation.

So one of the highlights of the event was the Release of a White Paper - "How Sensitive, How Nuanced?" on the reporting of rape in the media (http://populationfirst.org/Common/Uploads/HomeTemplate/80WNDoc_White%20Paper%20Final.compressed.pdf).

The white paper titled "How Sensitive, How Nuanced": A review of the media coverage of the Kathua Rape Case was authored by Maggie Paul and it focused on how rape and violence against women are reported in the press and what it means to adopt a 'gender lens'. It raised some relevant points about media coverage of gender based violence (GBV), some of which were as follows:

- Media coverage of gender based violence cannot be looked at in isolation as it is part and parcel of the reporting on women in general.
- The media often falls prey to systemic biases and it tends to affect their objectivity while reporting.
- Women are not well represented in media and not many women are cited as sources.
- When reporting gender based violence there is a tendency towards victim blaming and victim bashing as well as pathologisation of the perpetrator.
- The language and phrases used often propagate the already existing sexist biases.
- Reports in majority of the cases give the public a provocative but not a representative perspective.
- The concerns raised about the reports of the Kathua gang rape and brutal murders of an eight year old were that there was delayed coverage, gruesome details were revealed as was the identity of the victim.
- The reports also did not deal with how women's bodies are used for waging wars for political dominance.

The white paper was released by Mr. Kumar Ketkar - veteran journalist and editor, the Chief Editor of renowned newspapers, recipient of Padmashri and Rajiv Gandhi Award for Excellence in Media, Mr. Ramesh Narayan - founder of Canco Advertising and recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award given by AAAI in 2014, Ms. Abha Singh - renowned legal expert, Suneeta Rao - Pop – Diva, Mini Nair - reputed news reporter and Dr. A. L. Sharada – Director, Population First.



The event culminated in a press conference in which Dr. A. L. Sharada and our other guests answered questions from the press about the release of the white paper and the need to address the increasing violence against women.

It was indeed a very different and historical *Laadli Day* on which our concern about violence against women and the need to address it was echoed in the large number of youngsters and their parents who turned up for the programme despite torrential rain and water logging in the city that day. We had an audience of about 150 – 200 people.

All of us need to pool our efforts to address the misogyny that is still so rampant in society and change patriarchal mindsets that are the basis of gender based violence by reaching out to the people through community initiatives and through the media.

Compiled by Ujjwala Mhatre



How the Village Panchayat solved their water woes!

Case Study by AMCHI

Padvalpada, like many of the villages of Shahapur, faced a severe shortage of water. Also like the other villages of Shahapur, the problem was more of corruption and lack of collective action on part of the community rather than actual shortage of water. However, unlike other villages facing the same problem, people of Padvalpada decided to do something to resolve the problem.

Padvalpada is located at around 30 Km from Shahapur town and is part of Kharade Gram Panchayat. A water scheme was sanctioned and implemented in the village in 2010 by the Panchayat Samiti Shahapur but it closed down in 2013 as the pipeline and electricity connection were damaged. The quality of work was poor due to corruption and lack of monitoring on the people's part. Since then women were forced to fetch water from a well at a distance of one km from the village.

Population First (PF) started working on sanitation and hygiene issues in Padvalpada in October 2017. In the need assessment process, scarcity of water was found to be one of the major issues along with poor management of garbage and waste water. As PF implemented its intervention on sanitation and hygiene, it regularly conducted community meetings. In one of the community meetings where members of the Gram Panchayat were also present, PF explained to them the procedure of repairing the old water supply scheme at the Panchayat Samiti through the Gram Sabha. More importantly, PF made people aware that the onus of solving community issues was on them. People understood that the



situation would change only if they took the right actions. They conducted a Gram Sabha, made a resolution regarding repair work and sent the proposal to the Panchayat Samiti. But funds were not available for repairing the water supply scheme as per the rules.

Another meeting was conducted on the same issue in which PF suggested that people should contribute money. Coupled with funds from the Gram Panchayat the pipe line could be changed and electricity connections could be revived. The 'Police Patil' Mr. Vinayak Padval and Gram Panchayat member Mr. Santosh Padval took the initiative and collected contributions from each family. They raised donations worth Rs. 50,000 from some donors outside the community too. Villagers participated in the repair work by giving Shramdan (free labour) and the water scheme was repaired. Now every family gets water in the village.

Police Patil Vinayak Padval said, "My mother and sister spent hours every day, fetching water. Sometimes I too fetched water. I blamed the Gram Panchayat as they did not repair the water pipeline. I thought that it was the responsibility of Gram Panchayat and not mine. But in the meeting conducted by PF I realized that water is my need, I must work for it. Other villagers, especially women, too thought the same. All those who were in the meeting were motivated to take action for repairing the water scheme. We sat together and planned for repairing the water supply scheme with the support of the PF team. As a result of our collective action today we all get water easily."

Written by Meenal Gandhe

Get rid of the Taboo: Period

India saw a massive social media wave this February, with the release of the movie "PadMan", focusing on the importance of menstrual hygiene and the dangers associated with lack of it, challenging the social norms and bringing the taboo subject out in the open for everyone to see, talk about, understand and witness the enormity of the shame attached to the most natural phenomenon, menstruation.

Now four months on, it is time that we look at the subject again but from another lens, that of the environment. The World Environment Day (WED) was celebrated on 5th of June and this year's theme was "Beat Plastic Pollution" which led to a zealous initiation to ban the single-use plastics such as straws, low micron plastic bags, cutlery and cups and India has pledged to ban single-use plastics by 2022. However, banning single-use plastics cannot be the only solution and the government, industrialists, environmentalists, and citizens have to address the degradation of all kinds of plastics by 2022. One such item which gives an impression of easily degradable material but takes nearly 500-800 years to decompose is sanitary products such as pads and tampons as well as diapers used both by babies and adults.



Sanitary pads are chemically treated, made of Rayon, a cotton-like synthetic textile and superabsorbent polymers and non-woven plastic. Incinerating these products leads to the release of other chemicals like dioxins and furan which is further harmful to the environment and health. Disposal of sanitary napkins and products is a problem the world over with 700,000 panty liners, 2.5 million tampons and 1.4 million sanitary towels flushed down the toilets in the UK every single day to 44,125 million kilos of menstrual waste collected in India. According to the NHFS report, 48% rural women and 77% of urban women use sanitary napkins and other related menstrual hygiene products while 209 million women in India still do not have access to these products.

This dichotomy presents us, an emerging economy, with a complicated situation to contend with, like every other developmental vis a vis environmental issue. Therefore, it becomes imperative that as a primary agenda, our government and concerned authorities help address the environmental concerns of sanitary waste pollution by adopting and implementing appropriate methods and adequate systems for segregation and disposal. But at the same time using sustainable and environmentally friendly options is a way a consumer could contribute to help address this issue.

While Arunachalam Muruganantham is said to have developed low cost sustainable pads made out of highly processed pine wood pulp and cotton, providing us with eco-friendly menstrual hygiene products for rural women, in the past couple of years several companies, NGOs and start-ups have made way for providing similar alternatives such as ecologically friendly disposable pads, cloth reusable and washable pads and silicone cups, as well as sanitary pad disposal and miniature incinerators for the urban demography.

Going through some of the alternatives like cloth pads, one might wonder how this is different from the traditional cloth that our grandmothers and until recently a generation of our mothers used while growing up and which we have been arguing against all this time. There is fundamentally no difference in the *article* of use but the *narrative and context* behind its usage is the polar opposite!

Our grandmothers and mothers used it then because that was the only available option for them up until the point when sanitary pads came into the market. However unknowingly environmentally friendly their actions might have been, menstruation itself was shrouded in secrecy and shame which gradually led to millions of women moving towards unhealthy practices of using dirty rags, drying sanitary cloths in unhygienic conditions and using dry grass and ash in rural areas, instead of clean cloth napkins, washed and dried adequately and hygienically to avoid any health and reproductive issues. Till date, one of the main reasons people avoid using cloth pads is primarily because they are uncomfortable drying them out in the "open" on the laundry line with the rest of the clothes.



So, chuck the taboo aside, be part of the changing narrative of delegitimizing the taboo, build a healthy conversation regarding menstruation and menstrual hygiene with your family members, partners, friends and pick up an environmentally friendly alternative—it doesn't necessarily need to be cloth pads, there are a multitude of options!

Who says we cannot protect our health and our environment at the same time?

PS As on writing this article, the Government of India has lifted the GST on the sanitary products which is a huge relief for both disposable unsustainable sanitary products as well as ecologically friendly ones, making it easier for us the consumers to make the choice. Which ones should we choose?

Written by Swati C. # Friend of Laadli for life

India ranked most dangerous country in the world!!

On June 26, 2018 most Indians were slapped out of their complacent stupor due to the release of a Thomson Reuters Foundation survey which ranked India as the most dangerous country in the world for women. The reasons given in a poll conducted by global experts were "high risk of sexual violence and being forced into slave labour". The result sparked debates on the reliability of the survey, heated arguments and the question of HOW India ended up number one when countries like Syria, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia were in the running.

It is astonishing that people were riled about India being number 1 not because the social reality and statistics actually indicate so but because compared to Afghanistan and Syria, India could not have been worse. In another version of the survey conducted in 2011, India ranked 4. I wonder if a similar ranking this year would have made the general public feel better.

The focus of the conversation must shift from a narrative of comparison with other extremely sexist countries, to looking at the rising number of crimes against women in India. Every time India gets a wakeup call, with yet another incidence of violence rocking the nation, there is the usual round of protests and media campaigns after which we settle down, retreating into our comfort zones of complacency. However, it is time to wake up and address what the core message of the survey is saying.

The survey took into account the opinions of 548 experts on 6 different categories: healthcare, discrimination, cultural traditions, sexual and non-sexual violence and human trafficking. India topped in three categories – cultural traditions like forced marriages, female infanticide and domestic servitude, sexual violence and human trafficking. A look at the official crime statistics for 2016 shows that every 13 minutes a woman is raped, 6 women were gang-raped every day, a bride was murdered every 69 minutes, 19 women are attacked with acid every month and 5 women die every hour during child birth.

15,000 cases of human trafficking were recorded in 2016, out of which two thirds involved were female victims.

Crime against women rose by 83% from 2007 to 2016. (NCRB report 2016)

These numbers are based on crimes reported; there are a multitude of cases that go unreported. The opinions of 548 experts might not matter to most but we cannot turn a blind eye to the reality that is glaring at us right in the face. The government can reject the report and argue that India cannot do worse compared to countries which do not grant basic rights to women. However, it forces one to consider cultural forces and the implementation of laws that influence the way women are treated albeit the presence of laws, education and employment.

Written by Malavika Goyal

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