**Celebration of ‘International Safe Abortion Day’**

**A brief report to Common Health by SAHAJ**

September 28, 2019 is celebrated as International Safe Abortion Day’. SAHAJ conducted some events in this context in the months of September and October 2019.

Group session with married and unmarried youth were conducted in Dahod, Mahisagar and Vadodara. The session was on understanding what safe abortion means, the methods of safe abortion, its legality till certain period, consequences of unsafe abortion. The session outline and pre-post assessment form were developed before conducting sessions in the field.

An ***education pamphlet*** on safe abortion was designed and finalized after reviewing the content from an expert. Then it was disseminated to all women who came for the meetings either during sessions or an expert talk.

***Group sessions in Dahod and Mahisagar:*** These are tribal districts in Gujarat where SAHAJ works with the adolescents and youth aged 11 to 24 years on their SRHR. These group sessions were conducted separately with older unmarried adolescents and youth (15 to 24 years of age) girls and boys. They were also carried out with married youth – men and women separately

Table: Number of adolescents and youth attending the group sessions

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **District** | **PHC** | **No of anganwadis** | **No. of unmarried girls** | **No. of married girls** | **No. of unmarried boys** | **No. of married boys** | **Total** |
| Dahod | Madhva | 15 | 128 | 91 | 91 | 56 | 366 |
| Ballaiya | 12 | 91 | 69 | 66 | 47 | 273 |
| Mahisagar | Batakwada | 09 | 54 | 43 | 86 | 19 | 202 |
| Ukhreli | 15 | 74 | 84 | 112 | 46 | 321 |
|  | **Total** | **51** | **347** | **287** | **355** | **168** | **1162** |

Common reasons for under going abortions according to the participants

* If there are more children already.
* In want of a son
* If the girl is not married
* In case of rape
* Abortions happen naturally also
* Failure of family planning operation
* If the child to be born has disability

**Some different responses**

* If the girl is married and she wants to continue her education (early marriages are prevalent in these areas)
* If the couple is on the verge of a divorce and incase the girl is pregnant then she goes for an abortion

**Reasons for unsafe abortion according to the participants**

* In tribal areas there are no trained doctors for abortion.
* The private hospitals here are not registered for abortions but the doctors perform them
* Women opt for herbs and home remedies because they are less expensive and available locally
* Tribals go to quacks due to their superstitions

**More from the participants**

* Did not know about legality of abortions under certain conditions
* They perceived it as a crime or sin
* Men from the family were major opponents for abortions
* There are quite a number of women who go to quacks
* There are quite a number of doctors performing abortions which are unsafe but no action is taken against them**.**

**Their learnings at the end of the discussion**

* Abortions performed by trained doctors and in registered centers under clean conditions are safe abortions
* Abortions are legal in our country if done within 20 weeks of pregnancy and in registered centers.
* Watch out for the danger signs after abortion and avail treatment immediately.
* Post abortive care comprises of watching out for danger signs, rest and good diet

Group sessions were also conducted with about 100 girls/young women in 7 bastis in urban Vadodara.

SAHAJ also works in Anand District in partnership with organization KSSS which is a Christian organization. The team members working with SAHAJ from this organization refused to conduct this session in their project area themselves but organized a session where about 40 people from one village attended it. The local members of the village mobilized the women for the same and the field coordinator from SAHAJ conducted the group discussion on this topic. Early marriages are prevalent in this part also. Women present for the meetings said that today girls even if married early do not want children as early. These young women either go for contraception or undergo abortions. Unsafe abortions are prevalent in the orthodox communities here especially if an unmarried girl/woman is pregnant.

This session will be conducted in the remaining 8 bastis in Vadodara and 7 anganwadi areas in Jambusar in October 2019.

**A talk show with the expert**

SAHAJ also organized a talk on ‘Safe abortion’ with Dr Jigar Mehta, a gynaecologist for the young women in bastis it works in Urban Vadodara on September 30, 2019. 90 women along with five ASHAs and five MAS (Mahila Aarogya Samiti) members.

There was a skit on ‘Safe abortion – abortion by pills’ It brought out the issue of self prescription by women and how it can affect her health. Message on early abortion and post abortion care was given through this skit. A song prepared by SAHAJ team was performed by SAHAJ team telling about the MTP Act and the legality of abortion through this Act.

Then Dr. Jigar Mehta talked about various reasons that women undergo unsafe abortions even in cities like Vadodara. He pointed out the issues of gender discrimination, want of a son and non usage of contraception that lead to unwanted pregnancies. He gave examples of consequences of unsafe abortion , incomplete abortions and late abortions. He stresses on the need of educating the women and their families on early and safe abortions. He said free abortions are available in government facilities. He talked to women on the importance of nutritious diet and post abortive care. He said the women should be aware of their Hb count and blood group.

He expects SAHAJ teams to educate the women on safe abortion. He feels there is a need to talk on contraception as well as post partum care with the women and their families.

Some women approached him with their queries on conception and contraception.

This event was captured in the local media- Sandesh newspaper and VNM channel.

***Glimpse of the event***

Event was began with a role play by college students

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Dr. Jigar was talking the benefits of early abortion



Women shared their personal problems immediate after the talk



Renu Khanna summarized the talks with rights perspective