



# Project SWECHHA

*Empowering the Adolescent Girls in Menstrual Hygiene and Life Skills*

## *SHOP For A GIRL Campaign*



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## **1. Introduction**

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World is racing in the path of progress through science and technology. At the same time the human society has some intrinsic impediments to its own forward journey in the form of superstitions, age old customs, misbeliefs and cultural taboos.

We, SWECHHA Team at Padala Charitable Trust have given our attention and concentration towards the plight of adolescent girl child in rural population.

**SWECHHA** - **To end silence**

- **For better thinking process**
- **For liberation from common superstitions**
- **For cleanliness and hygiene**
- **For infusing self confidence**
- **To provide mental strength**
- **To march forward by breaking the chains of cultural taboos**

The journey of SWECHHA has begun on the day of *September 12<sup>th</sup> in 2015* towards discussion about adolescent girl child in remote rural parts of Andhra Pradesh.

The journey towards the protection of health and hygiene by advocating to shirk away from age old unscientific blind beliefs that are deeply rooted in the mindset of rural population.

At the outset it all started to “talk” by breaking the silence and the hushed down queries about menstrual hygiene of adolescent girls. Later with the very many experiences that we faced and taking the feedback from the rural children, we included many more facets for the programme of “SWECHHA – Break the Silence”.

## 2. Magnitude of the problem

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Adolescence is a delicate phase that every girl passes through. From the bubbly childhood the child will have multiple changes in the bodily habits. Often times the relatives and elderly family members would exclaim, “*See you have come of age, you should be careful*”. These words of caution induce fears in the child. Womenfolk often tell them that it is the fate for any girl to become a woman, that the menstrual flow is the bad blood passing out of the female body periodically.

The menstruation is very often projected as a curse on a female and is not explained to the young mind as a very natural physiological process. The menstruation process is linked to child bearing and is not discussed properly and in a straight forward manner. The girl child is asked to stay away from the family, is not allowed to mingle with other children and is always warned to be careful not to interact with opposite sex.

Thus instead of acquiring scientific reason about the menstrual cycle and future child bearing activity, the adolescents are bestowed with no idea about the hygiene, nourishment and precautions to be taken during the monthly episodes.

Swecha team has conducted interactive sessions, didactical lectures, meeting with health care workers and even one to one conversations with team members extensively.

This paved the way to make the village girls to realize that menstruation is truly an indication of a healthy female reproductive system and that they need not feel shy or belittled to talk about it and know more about it. Thus the young minds quickly absorbed what care to take regarding innerwear how to dispose off the stained clothes and what food rich in iron and minerals to be consumed.

Adolescence is as well the stage for mental maturity. The hormonal changes and environment around will have amplex interaction leading to mental confusion. Media, feature films and even seniors and peers influence the young psyche to “make-believe” world fill of fanciful dreams and variegated imagination. This is the time when teachers, family members especially parents, elder brothers and sisters

and academic seniors need to guide and advise the adolescents towards right attitude and correct attitude towards character building, understanding life and society.

The present trend is either to plunge in the highly competitive academic activity or the mesmerizing “eat and enjoy” fun, frolic of life.

The mental, emotional and physical changes, volatile nature of the youth need to be discussed with the adolescents in a friendly manner. The changes are to be explained in a scientific method, the goals and objectives for a stable future career are to be proposed in a practical approach.

There is a huge generation gap between adolescents and society around due to working parents, lack of quality parenting, academic stress and so on. Hence the adolescents appear to be rebellious and begin to clash with the people and elders around for no obvious reason. Hence the interpersonal relations with family get diluted paving way to inferiority complex and feeling of insecurity. This provides an opportunity for the adolescents to grow unhealthy relationships and harmful infatuations even with fair sex. Any upsets in such false attractions and even minute setbacks are having deleterious effects of mental depression, lowered self-esteem and evens suicidal tendencies.

In this backdrop, we, the swechha team has planned interactive classes with the rural children at the school level. The upper primary sections starting from 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 10<sup>th</sup> grade have been chosen as target audience.

Swecha team has also started working with expert persons like doctors such as general physicians and gynecologists. This gave a professional impetus to the programme. Explaining the physiology, changes in anatomy of a girl made an easy in roads into their psychology by addressing their preconceived misbeliefs. Later we extended the programme to interact with them to convince that people especially from rural background also can make a mark in life, both academic and otherwise. The ability of a female to undertake multitasking with professional and personal organization of her resources has been highlighted.

### **3. SWECHHA – Towards Solution**

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The solution offered by swechha team surprisingly has many facets and are received with much inspiration. The following roles have been played with the best possible outcomes by our swechha team and we now proudly present the details there of:

#### **As a Friend:**

Team Swechha provides a friendly environment to talk aloud about tiny doubts for the rural adolescents.

#### **As a Sibling:**

We comprise many female volunteers who have a positive attitude to spread the message of “Do”s and “Don’ts” about the menstrual hygiene and general health to the rural female adolescents. We can say swechha team became a responsible sibling as an elder sister to the rural folk.

#### **As a Mother:**

Team Swechha became a “Mother” for the rural adolescents by providing warm care and tender affection in the time of their physical and mental needs in a soothing manner offered without any selfish motto.

#### **As a Teacher:**

Swecha team became a “Teacher” to the rural adolescents by providing the most recent technological methods to teach and convince them. Power point presentations, posters, videos, short stories and even songs in native language were offered to the rural adolescents.

This made valuable information transfer in a suave and acceptable manner with least resistance from them. It was never drudgery for them to attend “Swechha” classes. Infact children thronged in large numbers with pleasant smiles and fun filled faces to attend with clarity and imbibe the details of what swechha taught as a warrior.

Team swechha did face troubles, brickbats and taboos from the village folk. The teachers, parents and even village heads and other “Bigwigs” of the village society ridiculed and tried to dilute our spirits. But we focused on our aims and targets. The result was almost a silent battle against the superstitions and ignorance. Many times the swechha team was

prevented to meet the children saying that we want to exploit them and turn them against their own traditions.

Slow, steady and repetitive persuasion with many efforts from the team swecha made swecha a valiant warrior to sail against all odds and finally succeed to develop friendship with the concerned people.

#### **4. Members of Swechha Team:**

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##### **Project Advisors:**

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- ❖ Dr. A Vijayalakshmi MD DGO Sri Sri Holistic Hospital, Hyderabad, Founder, CEDOW(Centre for Empowerment and Development of Women)
- ❖ Smt. Bhanumathi, Secretary CEDOW, Life Member Rotary Club, Kakinada.
- ❖ Dr. R Adinarayana Rao, Trustee, CEDOW and Executive Vice-President of Bhagavathula Charitable Trust, Kakinada.
- ❖ Smt. Vadrevu Veeralakshmi Devi, Retired Lecturer and Famous Writer, Kakinada.

## 5. Approach

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The specialty of SWECHHA is to leave the normal routine of ‘teaching’ the adolescents in a one-way didactical teaching method.

SWECHHA broke the conventional methods and introduced the ‘*Secret Box*’ into the program. Here the children are asked to write their queries and doubts on a paper and drop it in a ‘Secret Box’, a small box which we provided to each gathering. Name or identity is not necessary.

This has given the children a chance to come out openly with their trivial and seemingly unimportant doubts also.

### Some interesting questions were:

- ✚ Is the menstrual blood harmful or impure?
- ✚ Are there any forbidden fruits or foods during this period?
- ✚ Is not the beauty of a person important? If so how can we change tone of facial skin? What makeup material to be used?
- ✚ Are pimples a sign of internal impurities? etc.,

Based on these observations we divided the SWECHA program into “*two*” principal Phases with a very interactive mode using video clips, small stories and activities.

### Phase 1:-

1. Understanding cyclical nature of menstruation
2. Removing misconceptions about loss of blood
3. Hygiene during menstruation
4. Usage of sanitary pads and their disposal
5. Personal cleanliness

**Phase 2:-**

1. Practical demonstration of usage of sanitary napkins.
2. Explaining about Hormonal Changes
3. Interaction with Parents
4. Explanation about Peer Pressure, Beauty Kits.
5. Difference between Infatuation and Hero worship.
6. Goal Setting.
7. Life skill management.
8. Importance of Clean surroundings, Literacy, Primary Education.
9. Success stories told through PPTs.
10. Role models for better understanding.

## 6. Feedback

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✓ Till date I was in the opinion that the menstrual blood is impure. With SWECHA team interaction I understood that the uterine line grows for every 25-30 days in a cycle fashion and that is shed periodically. This I explained to my illiterate parents also. I told them it is a misconception. They too agreed and understood the science behind it. - *L.Rani, ZPHS, Chagantivaripalem*

✓ Until now, what we have learnt from teachers was in scientific jargon, but what we learnt from SWECHA is very practical and is ideal to share with our elders, even with illiterate and superstitious females. This is helpful for us to explain to them about their limitations. - *Rajeswari, 10<sup>th</sup> class, ZPHS, Kumdavali*

✓ Dear SWECHA team, I was all these years ill-treated at my home by discriminating me and isolating me from household during the period of menstruation. I am served in a separate bowl and water tumbler. Even when by mistake if I touch anything especially cloth items like bedsheets, door curtains etc., I was made to wash them. My weakness is not a matter of concern to them. Now, I understood how physiological this process is just like loss of hair or regrowth of nails. Now I shall explain to my family members and shall try to change their attitudes. - *Jyothi, 9<sup>th</sup> class, ZPHS, Valli*

✓ I was thinking till date that it is a curse to be born as a female with the monthly ordeal of loss of impure blood. Now, I understood that it is due to the same harmness the effect of which we, the females have the power of fertility and the ability to bear the children in our womb. Now, I am proud to be a female. - *Durgalakshmi, 9<sup>th</sup> class, ZPHS, Chandrampalem.*

✓ I usually take less food during menstruation. I was thinking that the food we eat can make the menstrual loss of blood more. Now, I understood about this misconception and from now on, I shall take care of my input of food and health during menstruation.

- *Santhoshi, 10<sup>th</sup> class, Pippara*

✓ My mother used to feel shy to explain to me about menstruation changes and about the sexual functions of female reproductive organs. Now, SWECHA team explained to me about all these. My fears and doubts have been answered.

- *Mahalakshmi, 10<sup>th</sup> class, ZPHS Pallipalem*

✓ Dear SWECHA team, Please explain to our parents also about all these scientific details about menstruation. This will enhance their primary understanding about the process and they will allow me to use sanitary pads.

- *Prashanthi, 9<sup>th</sup> class, ZPHS, Kolanka*

✓ SWECHA handout I received was given to my mother to be read by her. Then she read it with interest and now has taken a vow to be more scientific and logical. She also agreed to buy sanitary napkins for me.

- *Lakshmi, 10<sup>th</sup> class, ZPHS, Kolanka*

✓ Dear SWECHA team, I was in love with a male co-student since 2 years, hailing from same school. My mother came to know about this and tried to convince me about the false infatuation notions natural to my adolescent age. But I always was lost in the thoughts of him. I also used to curse my mother regarding this issue. But now your patient explanation about the hormonal changes that occur in adolescence struck in my brain the chord. I now understood about my evanescent emotions and I am now ready to leave the thoughts of love and attraction towards opposite sex. I shall concentrate on my career. I shall also apologize to my mother.

- *Bhavani, 9<sup>th</sup> class, GNP Boys High School*

✓ Dear SWECHA, today I understood about the emotional turmoil that is so common in this period of adolescence. My seniors and peers are also equally disturbed like me. They could

not guide or help us and in fact they encouraged me about my attention towards unnecessary things of life. Now, I promise to you that I shall be more conscious and shed the fanciful ideas about future and turn more responsible myself. I shall also guide my junior students.- *A Amulya, 8<sup>th</sup> Class, GNP Boys High School*

✓ Dear fellow students, all of you know me as a class monitor but deep within my heart I had some fanciful ideas about sex, relationships with opposite sex and wasting of my time. Today I am liberated from all the false opinions and dreamy ideas and now I am able to openly declare about this change after the interaction with SWECHA team. From now on, I shall be career oriented. - *Rajeswari, 10<sup>th</sup> class, ZPHS, DK Valli*

✓ Dear SWECHA team, I lost my mother at a young age. My father is a drunkard and beats me often. I developed frustration and anger towards my father and developed negative emotions towards life. But today with SWECHA team, I had understood about the importance of life, the various challenges to be faced and the emotional balance I have to obtain. I am now able to weigh my opinions towards a brighter future. - *Deevena, 9<sup>th</sup> class, ZPHS Pippara.*

## **7. Appeal**

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If you look at the nature of feedbacks and responses we get from the girls, it tells us the dire need of programmes like Swechha to reach out to more girls.

We need support and help from like minded people and organization to scale up this programme. Please join our efforts to make a difference in the lives of our future mothers. We all have to believe in one thing – by empowering the adolescent girl today, we are educating her mother at home and also the girl will become a better mother for her girls. Better and healthier mothers can only build better and healthier societies.

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## - Shop For a Girl Campaign (SFAG)

### What is SFAG (Shop For a Girl)

This is the campaign we started this year (2018) to increase the awareness of Menstrual Hygiene in adolescent girls in government schools and hostels in AP and TS.

- As part of this campaign we have prepared a HYGIENE KIT with a collection of items in such a way that it increases the awareness of menstrual hygiene and personal hygiene)



N	Item Description	Cost (Rs.)
1	Sanitary Napkins (Pack of 8)	20
2	A Pouch to safely keep Napkins	15
3	Hand Wash Liquid	20
4	Hand Kerchief	3
5	Swechha Handout Material	10
6	Monthly Menstrual Chart / Calendar	2
7	Jute Bag	30
	<b>Total Cost of the Kit</b>	<b>₹ 100</b>



If anyone sponsors this bag to 1000 or more girls, the donor name can be printed on the Jute Bag

## HOW can you Support SFAG Campaign

You can support this campaign by sponsoring this HYGIENE KIT to one or more girls in government schools and hostels. The cost of items in the kit is Rs. 100 and the cost of conducting Swechha programme (Interactive awareness session) in the school/hostel is Rs.50 per girl. So, you can support one girl for Rs. 150.

There are typically 150 girls in a government high school and hence you can sponsor one school for Rs. 22,500/-. You can pick a school from your side OR we can choose one in our list.

### Cost Sheet for Single Kit

N	Description	Cost
1	Kit Cost (Material)	100
2	Awareness Session Cost per Girl	50
<b>Total Cost of Swechha Kit</b>		<b>₹ 150</b>

### Cost Sheet for Shop For a Girl Campaign

N	Description	Cost
1	Campaign in one school ( <i>With an Average number of 150 girls - 150 x Rs. 150</i> )	₹ 22,500
2	Campaign in one mandal ( <i>10 Schools with an average number of 150 girls per school - 1500 Girls x Rs. 150</i> )	₹ 2,25,000

It is our promise that Rs. 150 per girl will truly make a huge difference. It will be a life time gift for any girl. Empowered girls will become empowered mothers who will create empowered families.

All your donations will come under 80(g) Tax Exemption and you will be provided the receipt accordingly.

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