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impact analysis of sehat kendra on mental, sexual and reproductive health: An assessment of Bihar

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of Sehat Kendra, a community health initiative, on enhancing youth awareness of mental health and sexual & reproductive health (SRH) in Bihar, India. Recognizing the pivotal role of youth in shaping the future of public health, this research focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of Sehat Kendra in addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by this demographic group. Bihar, characterized by its unique socio-economic disparities and health inequities, provides a pertinent context for examining the impact of Sehat Kendra on youth awareness. Sehat Kendra implemented tailor-made programs & activities suitably dovetailed as per community ethos of Bihar to convey its core message effectively & deeply. Employing a comprehensive case study methodology, incorporating qualitative interviews, surveys, and observational data, this research sheds light on the nuanced dynamics of healthcare delivery and its implications for youth well-being. The findings underscore the significant positive impact of Sehat Kendra on enhancing youth awareness of mental health and sexual & reproductive issues. Through targeted outreach programs, counselling sessions, various programme & activities and peer support groups, Sehat Kendra has succeeded in reducing stigma surrounding mental illness and promoting help-seeking behaviours among youth. In conclusion, this research underscores the transformative potential of community-based healthcare interventions like Sehat Kendra in promoting youth awareness of mental health and sexual & reproductive health. By fostering a supportive environment, leveraging innovative outreach strategies, and tailoring services to meet the unique needs of young individuals, Sehat Kendra serves as a catalyst for positive health behaviour change among Bihar's youth population.

Keywords: Sehat Kendra, impact analysis, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, youth awareness etc.

1. Introduction

Community healthcare is the bedrock upon which the overall progress and growth of a nation depends. A healthy community is not only more productive, but also contributes to overall resilience and stability of a nation. This resilience is heavily dependent on a very important but often neglected aspect of overall social well-being, namely, mental health combined with sexual & reproductive health. Mental health is the secret sauce that differentiates an extraordinary community from an ordinary one. At par with mental health, sexual & reproductive health deeply impacts the mental state and overall fitness of an individual. As these two are taboo topics in a conservative society like Bihar, not much useful information & advice is available to youth when they need them most. Hence, discussing them directly in a holistic manner while maintaining the delicate balance required for a sensitive topic creates an opportunity to educate the target audience, reduce the stigma and further an overall understanding & supportive community.

Another significant aspect of mental & sexual health is the impact it has on a very vulnerable section of our population: women & teenagers. While sexual health is pivotal for men and women both, it is very intricately linked with the overall welfare of females. For women, sexual health encompasses physical, emotional, social & economical dimensions. Sexual health coupled with mental health not only impacts women's relationships, but also often determines their self-esteem, peer-respect and quality of life. It is for this reason that scholars everywhere agree that regular gynaecological investigations, access to contraception and education about Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are fundamental components of sexual care for women. On similar lines, teenagers and young adults everywhere constitute

another vulnerable group with regards to sexual & mental health. The teenage years & young adult years mark a significant period of physical, emotional & social developments. Adolescents experience rapid changes in their bodies due to puberty including growth spurts, hormonal changes and development of secondary sexual characteristics. Psychologically, these young adults experience mood swings & sexual curiosity. When correct information is not provided to them, this natural biological curiosity leads them to undesirable path which often ends with depression, anxiety & confusion which adversely impacts their mental health and maturity. Further, given the fact that sexual discourse and mental health both are taboo subjects in many parts of India including Bihar, deeply rooted in cultural, religious, & societal norms. Traditional cultural norms result in silence and unreasonable modesty regarding sexual matters leading to lack of open discourse and timely access to information on the topic.

2. Objective

The primary objective of this study is to assess the impact of Sehat Kendra, a health awareness initiative, on the mental

health and sexual & reproductive health (SRH) of individuals in Bihar. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of Sehat Kendra in improving mental health outcomes among the target population.
- Assess the impact of Sehat Kendra on the knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to sexual and reproductive health.
- Identify any disparities in the utilization and effectiveness of Sehat Kendra services among different demographic groups especially adolescent and youth.
- Provide recommendations for optimizing the implementation of Sehat Kendra to better address mental health and SRH needs in Bihar.

3. Sehat Kendra: An Overview

According to Fifth National Family Health Survey, 3.3 crore youth population in Bihar between the age group of 15-24 years. There are many health issues in adolescent and youth are found because of lack of awareness. Following boxes illustrated the Bihar's Adolescent/Youth Health scenario:

Adolescent/Youth Health: Bihar State Scenario	
1.	The Adolescent fertility rate in Bihar for women (age 15-19 yrs.) is 77 %.
2.	8.3% Young women (age 18-29 years) experience sexual violence by the age 18 years.
3.	Only 58.8% Women (age 15-24 years) use hygienic methods of protection during their menstruation.
4.	Only 10 % women and 25 % men have a comprehensive knowledge on HIV/AIDS in the age group of 15-24 years.
5.	65.7 % of women (age 15-19 years) are anemic.
6.	40.8% of women aged 20-24 years are married before 18 years and 30.5% of men aged 25-29 years are married before 21 years
7.	11% of women aged 15-19 years begin childbearing or are already mothers

In view of the health-related problems of teenagers and youth in a state like Bihar, there is a need for a platform where they can be directly made aware. The Sehat Kendra initiative has been created for this noble purpose. In Bihar, Sehat Kendra began operations at 28 colleges in 2021, and as of March 2024, it had grown to 52 colleges. Each Sehat Kendra is managed by a Red Ribbon Club (RRC) Nodal officer and two peer educators who have received outreach and activity training from BSACS and PFI through workshop. Financial and technical support is provided by the Bihar State Health Society (BSHS) for the establishment and operation of Sehat Kendra. The implementing partner is the Bihar State AIDS Control Society, while the technical and knowledge partner is the Population Foundation of India (PFI).

4. Research Methodology

The research methodology for studying the impact of Sehat Kendra on mental health and sexual & reproductive health in Bihar will involve a comprehensive and systematic approach to gather, analyze, and interpret data. Firstly, a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative techniques will be employed to ensure a holistic understanding of the subject matter. Quantitative methods will involve the collection of primary data through surveys

and questionnaires administered to a representative sample of youth involving the activities of Sehat Kendra in Bihar.

Qualitative methods will complement the quantitative data by providing in-depth insights into the lived experiences and perspectives of Sehat Kendra's nodal officers and participants. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions will be conducted with a subset of participants to explore their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions regarding the impact of Sehat Kendra on their mental well-being and sexual & reproductive health. Thematic analysis will be employed to identify recurring themes and patterns within the qualitative data.

Additionally, secondary data sources such as government reports, academic literature, and program evaluations will be reviewed to contextualize the findings within the broader healthcare landscape of Bihar and to provide insights into existing policies and interventions related to mental health and sexual & reproductive health. Ethical considerations will be paramount throughout the research process, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for the participants' autonomy and privacy.

By employing a rigorous and multi-faceted research methodology, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of evidence on the effectiveness of community-based healthcare interventions such as Sehat Kendra in addressing

the complex health needs of youth populations, particularly in resource-constrained settings like Bihar.

5. Impact Analysis of Sehat Kendra

The survey was conducted amongst the target population of Sehat Kendra as well as its Nodal Officers. About ten percent of the survey-population was covered through these questionnaires. It was observed that 75% of the respondents were in age group of 18 to 21 years. Women constituted more than 80% of the respondents. More than three-fourth of the respondents were in the intermediate-graduation group. Thus, these three inputs establish the present analysis was able to penetrate the correct population in a comprehensive manner, thereby making this study highly relevant.

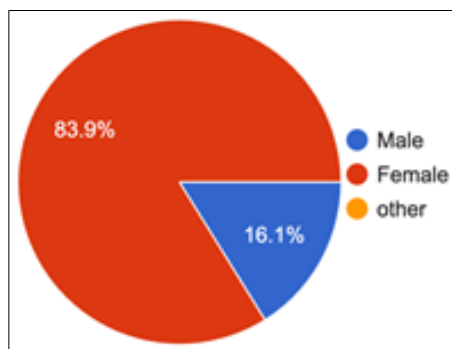


Fig 1: Pie Chart: Responded Gender

More than 95% of the respondents said they had heard about the community health services rendered by the Sehat Kendra by the time this survey was undertaken. Most of them (92%) had learnt about the Sehat Kendra through their college/university. This highlights the pivotal role played by the educational institutes in promoting youth awareness. It also cements the assertion that sensitive but vital topics which cannot be discussed at home (due to cultural barriers) should be safely & responsibly be imparted at educational setup for maximum benefit of the youth population. Further probing revealed that more than 96% of respondents said they were aware regarding mental health issues, with about 62% asserting that they were “very aware”. This is highly encouraging on part of Sehat Kendra activities, given the situation that less than one percent of Bihar’s healthcare expenditure is directed towards mental health (Times of India 10 Oct 2022). Majority of these respondents had sought information from the Sehat Kendra itself.

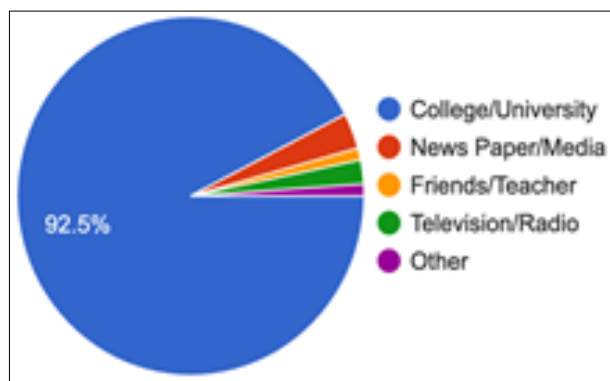


Fig 2: Pie Chart: Respondent View's on “How did you learn about Sehat Kendra”

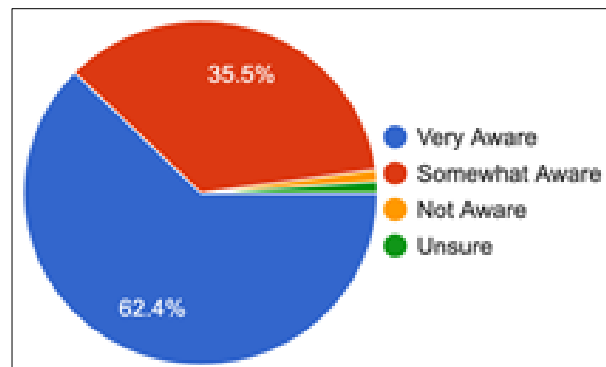


Fig 3: Pie Chart: Respondent View's on “How would you rate your awareness of Mental Health issues”

The respondents were also gauged regarding their knowledge of Sexual & Reproductive Health (SRH) issues - with more than 95% stating they were aware of SRH issues. About 17% respondents accessed SRH services/information via internet while more than 55% accessed it via the agency of the Sehat Kendra. The students/citizens relayed that they also sought information/services regarding anemia, women empowerment & youth health along with mental health & SRH issues.

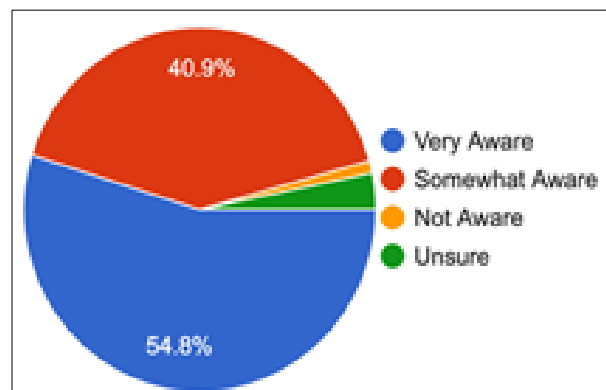


Fig 4: Pie Chart: Respondent View's on “How would you rate your awareness of sexual and reproductive health issues”

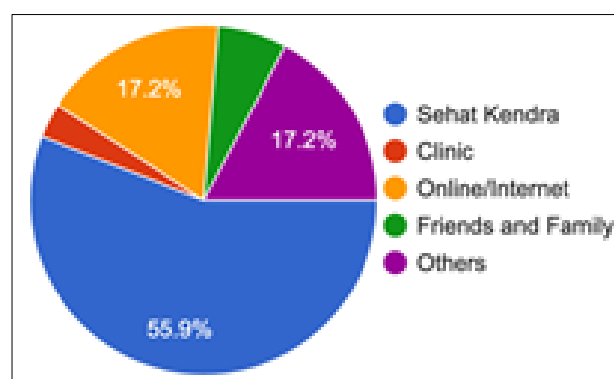


Fig 5: Pie Chart: Respondent View's on “Where did you access these services or information”

Taking a bird's eye view, the respondents expressed deep satisfaction over the quality of services offered by the Sehat Kendra, with more than 60% respondents rating 4 & above (out of 5) in this regard. In fact, more than 85% respondents shared that they were actually using the information they gained at Sehat Kendra. Thus, it can be concluded that the Sehat Kendra is not only spreading awareness but also

rendering impressive service in the area it is able to reach by providing do-able information that can implemented in practical life for better mental & sexual health outcomes. It is pertinent to mention here that comparisons were made between Sehat Kendra beneficiaries' data versus the average population of Bihar based on Fifth National Family Health

Survey data. It was found that, in Bihar, on average, 58.8% of women (age 15-24 years) use hygienic method of protection during their menstruation. When the same question was put before the Sehat Kendra respondents, it was observed that more than 84% of respondents used sanitary napkins during their menstruation cycle.

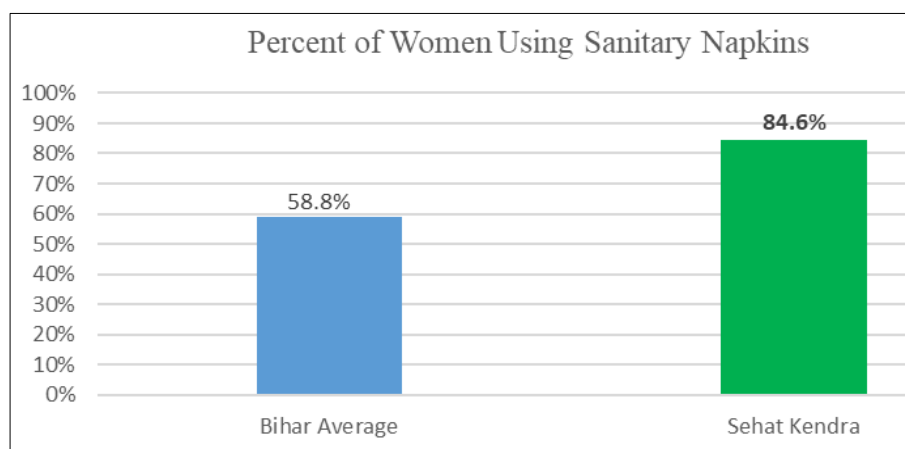


Fig 6: Bar Chart: Respondent views on usage of sanitary napkins

The Fifth NFHS data also reveals that in Bihar, only 10% women & 25% men have comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS (age-group 15-24 years). In the Sehat Kendra

group, it was found that more than 85% respondents had comprehensive awareness of AIDS/HIV and related issues.

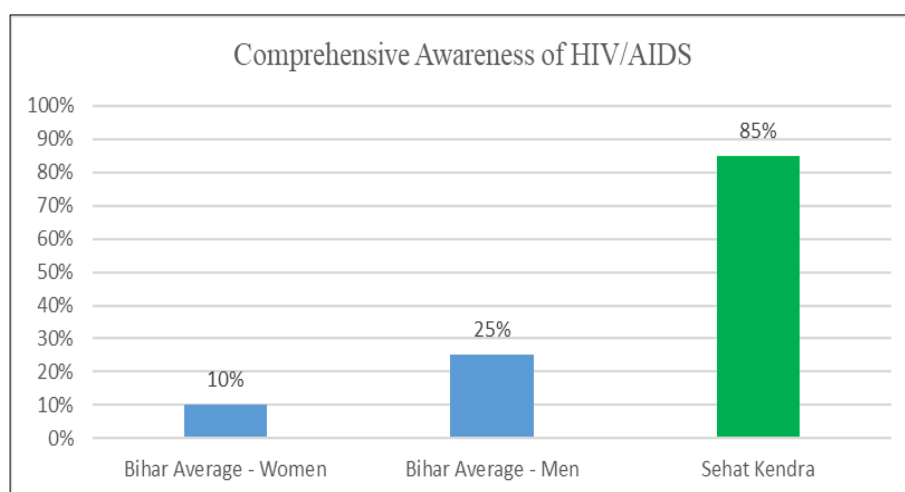


Fig 7: Bar Chart: Respondent views on Comprehensive Awareness of AIDS

Both these findings are very encouraging and point towards the fact that a well-crafted community health service like Sehat Kendra can achieve magnificent results and contribute

significantly towards building a healthy and well-informed community.

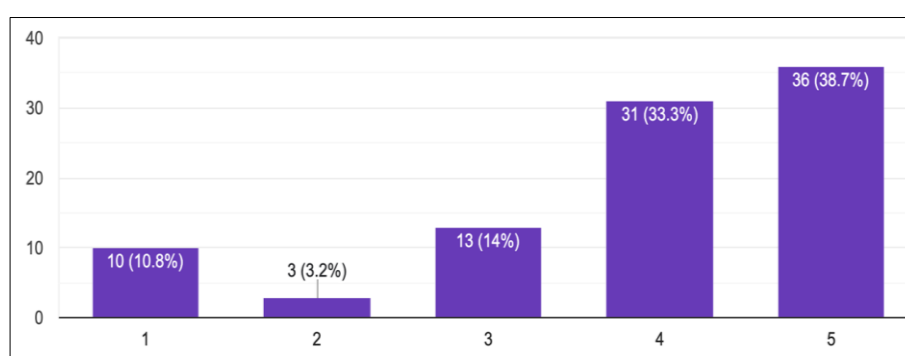


Fig 8: Bar Chart: Respondent View's on rating about Sehat Kendra

Lastly, the respondents were asked if they would recommend the Sehat Kendra to their friends or peers. More than 97% said they certainly do so considering the valuable service & information relayed.

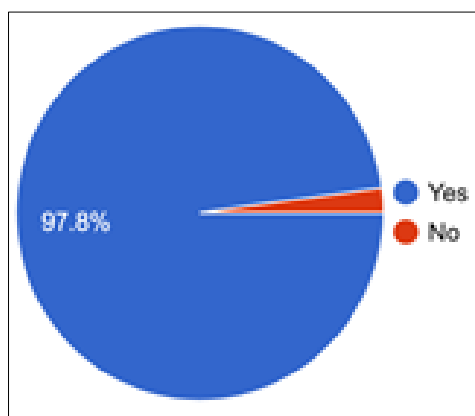


Fig 9: Pie Chart: Respondent View's on spreading awareness in society.

Along with the students/citizens, the Nodal Officers of the Sehat Kendra were also requested to share their feedback. These nodal officers belonged to the age group of 37 years & above, with about 40% above the age of 40. 60% were male and the rest were female. About 80% of these officers were Ph.D. Majority of them had been associated with Sehat Kendra for more than twelve months. The broad experience,

awareness & benefits were similar to as relayed by the students/ respondents discussed above.

Regarding number of activities concerning youth health conducted by the Sehat Kendra in one year, about 40% officers said more than 15 activities were organized in their college. All this was greatly enabled by the dedicated support from BSACS & associated agencies and about 80% nodal officers rated 4 & above (out of 5) regarding how satisfied they were with the support from these agencies. In conclusion, like students/citizens, the nodal officers agreed that they would recommend their families/peers to Sehat Kendra for mental health and SRH issues. Thus, we can hope that with continued activities Sehat Kendra will not only kindle a culture of informed decision making & mutual support but also enhance Human Rights and Right to Life by alleviating avoidable suffering inflicted by gaps in mental & sexual health services and information.

6. Swot Analysis

The matrix below provides a quick overview of a SWOT analysis of the Sehat Kendra highlighting its internal strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats arising from the external environment. Strategic options can be found by using the SWOT analysis. Strength can be used to limit threats, minimise vulnerabilities and grab opportunities. In response to the present demands of Sehat Kendra initiative, it can also be utilised to establish objectives for eradication of various health issues in adolescent and youth through awareness.

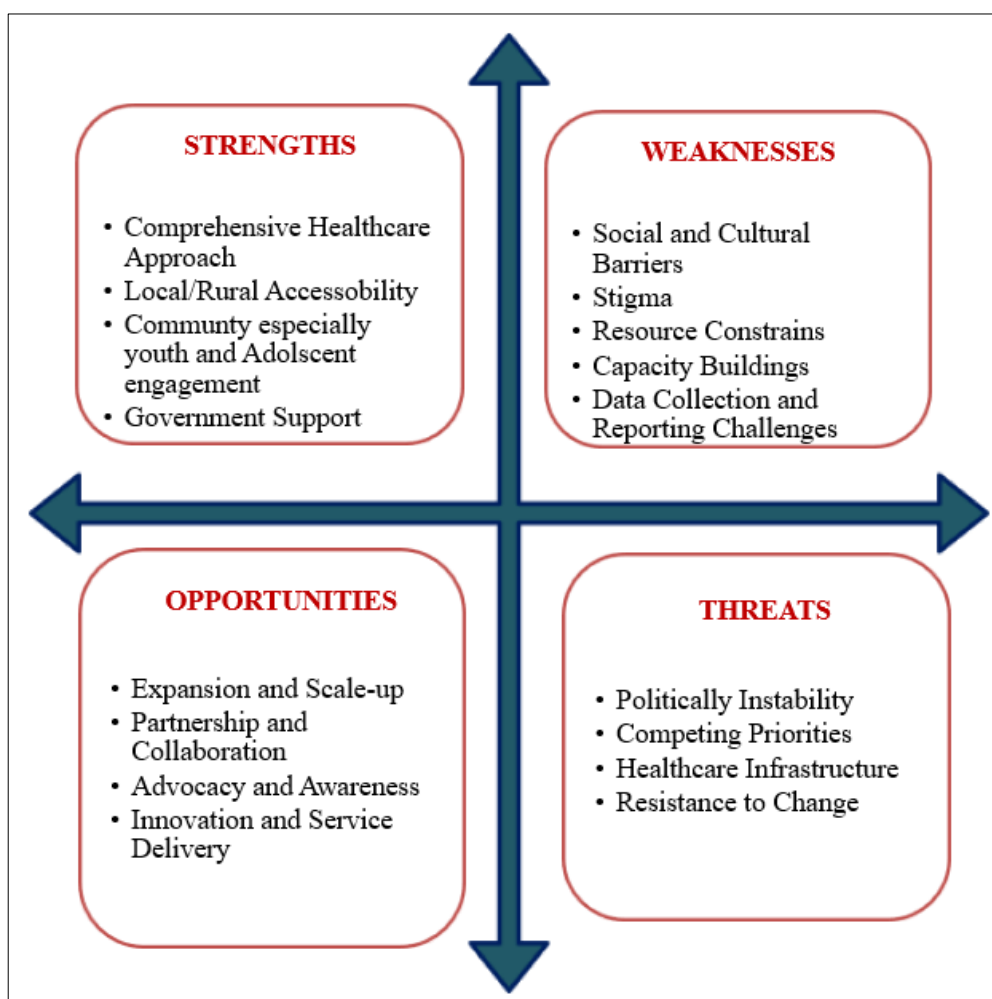


Fig 10: Swot analysis

7. Conclusion

Based on analysis presented above, it can readily be inferred that the Sehat Kendra has been offering exemplary service in several vistas of community health service in Bihar. The surveys and interviews clearly indicate that the awareness level of target population has registered very positive increase regarding mental health and various factors affecting it. How to handle responsibly issues like anxiety, depression, melancholic behaviour and panic attacks are now well known in several families due to unrelenting efforts of the Sehat Kendra. This is expected to have a snowball effect as more and more people gain awareness resulting in lot of saved lives that would have been otherwise lost or ruined due to ravages of treatable & avoidable mental ailments. It is also a matter of deep relief that through the medium of community health service rendered by Sehat Kendra so many youngsters are now at least able to speak with confidence about emotional issues disturbing them, that, if allowed to fester inside for long, would certainly inflict lasting trauma on their psyche.

Further, sexual and reproductive health outcomes have also been very encouraging. As evident from the analysis of questionnaires, several young ladies (& thus, their families) have directly benefited from the tailor-made programmes conducted by the Sehat Kendra. As discussed in the SWOT analysis, taboo with regard to sexuality is still quite strong in conservative state like Bihar and often there is resistance towards change due to entrenched old ideas and customs. In addition, rampant poverty and backwardness only further complicate issues. In this light, it is indeed a big achievement that the Sehat Kendra has been able to impart sexual and reproductive health related authentic information to a large group of beneficiaries. It can be seen that the custom-made interventions are slowly but steadily engendering an organic growth in positive health behaviour regarding mental, emotional & reproductive wellness among Bihar's young population. This augurs very well for our nation's aspirations to meet Sustainable Development Goals and also ensure proper health to every citizen as enshrined in the hon'ble Constitution of India.

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