

Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Programme

Annual Report 2024-25

I am so happy with the strides made by PROJECT Sshakti, a joint initiative between India Vision Foundation & Spark Minda Foundation. Today Project Sshakti is a beacon of hope for the female inmates in DELHI PRISONS, HARYANA, UTTAR PRADESH AND UTTARAKHAND, addressing the critical issue of menstrual health and hygiene. The Project aimed to promote menstrual hygiene practices among women inmates for easy access to resources in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals #SDG2030, along with the Global WASH program by UNICEF.

I have been told that through this initiative, sanitary napkin vending machines were installed, essential sanitary products were distributed, and awareness workshops were held to educate the female inmates about menstrual hygiene, thereby empowering the vulnerable women to enjoy healthy periods and a life free from period poverty even behind bars.

I am proud to see the impact Project Sshakti has had on the lives of these women, improving not only their physical health but also their mental well-being and self-esteem by ensuring that they menstruate with dignity. The project's success is a testament to the power of collaboration and the dedication of our team.

As we move forward, I encourage all to continue working tirelessly to ensure that every woman in our prisons, across the country, has access to the resources and support they need to maintain their health and dignity, even inside prisons. I hope our teams continue in their mission to break various myths and taboos regarding menstrual health and hygiene practices. Also, they focus on menstrual equity because everyone deserves equal opportunities for education, empowerment, and health, regardless of their circumstances.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all the stakeholders, partners, and Foundation team members who have contributed to the success of Project Sshakti. Together, we can create a more compassionate and inclusive society where every individual has the opportunity to thrive in our quest to **“LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND, NOT EVEN THOSE BEHIND BARS”**.

Dr. Kiran Bedi
Chairperson,
India Vision Foundation



Sshakti in Prisons – Restoring Dignity Through Awareness and Access

At Spark Minda Foundation, we believe that every woman regardless of her circumstances deserves dignity, care, and the right to manage her health with confidence. With this vision, we launched Project Sshakti under our Health and Wellbeing pillar, a focused initiative aimed at addressing menstrual hygiene in one of the most underserved spaces: Prisons.

Driven by our commitment to create meaningful impact where it is needed most, Spark Minda Foundation along with India Vision Foundation and CSR Box conceptualized and implemented Project Sshakti as a pioneering step toward menstrual equity in custodial settings. Taking this programme behind prison walls where silence and stigma around menstrual health are deeply entrenched was both intentional and transformative.

In FY 2024–25, the initiative reached 22 prisons of Uttar Pradesh and 1 Prison of Uttarakhand, positively impacting 2,101 female inmates. Building on our work in previous years across prisons in Uttarakhand and Haryana, we continued our commitment to menstrual health and dignity behind bars. From installing vending machines and ensuring a regular supply of sanitary pads to conducting structured awareness sessions, we worked to create a safe and informed environment where women could speak openly, adopt healthier hygiene practices, and reclaim a sense of self-worth.

The results have been deeply encouraging, and this progress wouldn't have been possible without the support of the prison authorities their help has been truly invaluable. Post-assessment findings indicate a clear shift in awareness: women now have a better understanding of menstrual hygiene, actively maintain it, and feel more empowered. Building on this momentum, we aim to take the initiative further and empower even more women in the times to come.

This initiative has been shaped and strengthened through valuable partnerships. Spark Minda Foundation, in collaboration with India Vision Foundation as the facilitation partner, worked to engage inmates and sensitize prison staff. CSRBox, our knowledge partner, conducted educational sessions and facilitated coordination with state-level stakeholders. ASSOCHAM contributed by raising the initiative's visibility on national platforms, helping extend its reach and impact.

Project Sshakti is more than a health programme, it is a movement to restore dignity, raise awareness, and bring compassion to spaces often left behind. As we continue this journey, we remain committed to empowering every woman we reach because meaningful change is driven by the combined force of policies, empathy, and action. Together, we reaffirm: every woman matters, everywhere.

Warm regards,

Ms. Sarika Minda
Chairperson, Spark Minda Foundation



It gives me immense pleasure to congratulate Spark Minda Foundation, India Vision Foundation and Bharat cares for introducing Project Sshakti in the Prisons of Uttar Pradesh. Project Sshakti aims to promote health and hygiene awareness among women inmates in all the prisons of Uttar Pradesh. This project highlights the commitment to address the unique challenges faced by women in correctional facilities, ensuring their well-being, dignity and empowerment. Commendable work was done by all the stakeholders of Project Sshakti in the first phase of Project Sshakti by installing sanitary napkin vending machines in 22 district Prisons of the State and by organising training sessions on the use and maintenance of these machines for both the inmates and female prison staff.

Simultaneously, the teams held awareness sessions aimed at creating knowledge and awareness on menstrual health and hygiene among the female inmates. Through the awareness workshops, healthy practices of self-care and hygiene were taught, and access to a practical and sustainable solution to menstrual health was provided. I am hopeful that the education and good practices instilled through Project Sshakti will benefit them not only while in custody but also when they reintegrate into society. I wish the success of Project Sshakti in the coming years and extend my thanks to all the stakeholders for empowering the female inmates of UP Prisons through this unique initiative called Project Sshakti.

Mr. P V Rama Sastry
Director General, IPS



Project Sshakti offered a chance to work at the intersection of neglect and necessity, bringing attention to an issue long rendered invisible in carceral systems. At BharatCares, we recognised early that any intervention here had to be more than functional. It needed to honour context, build trust, and leave room for dialogue.

It has been a privilege to work alongside Spark Minda Foundation and India Vision Foundation to catalyse a shift, from silence and stigma to informed agency. As we look ahead, our focus remains on deepening this impact, scaling responsibly, and continuing to centre the voices of women who are too often left unheard.

Mr. Bhomik Shah
Founder and CEO, CSRBOX



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Introduction

Spark Minda Foundation, in collaboration with BharatCares and India Vision Foundation, is leading **Project Sshakti**, an initiative focused on improving menstrual health, hygiene, and sustainability among female prison inmates in Uttar Pradesh. As the key enabler of this initiative, Spark Minda Foundation has played a pivotal role in shaping and supporting this intervention, which aligns with SDGs 3, 5 & 6 and UNICEF's Global WASH programme.

A core component of the project has been the installation of sanitary napkin vending machines within prison premises, implemented by Spark Minda Foundation with operational support from India Vision Foundation and the prison authorities. This step ensured that inmates have consistent and dignified access to sanitary napkins, addressing a critical hygiene need. To compliment this Spark Minda Foundation along with BharatCares also developed a context-specific menstrual hygiene module tailored to the realities of women inmates in Uttar Pradesh. Through focused awareness sessions, the project worked to dispel myths around menstruation, promote sustainable hygiene practices, and educate both inmates and staff on the proper use and maintenance of the vending machines. Together, the initiative advances menstrual dignity, accessibility, and health within correctional facilities.

Context Setting

Menstrual health and hygiene are not merely matters of sanitation, they are fundamental human rights tied to dignity, equality, and well-being. In India, the Right to Life and Personal Liberty (Article 21) guarantees every individual the right to live with dignity, which includes access to health, hygiene, and a safe environment. Likewise, the Right to Equality and Non-discrimination (Articles 14 and 15) prohibits gender-based discrimination and upholds every woman's right to equitable treatment and opportunities. Denial of menstrual hygiene facilities, products, and awareness directly infringes upon these rights, particularly for women in custodial settings who already face systemic neglect.

Uttar Pradesh, with over 4,000 female inmates across 71 prisons, emerges as a critical focus area for addressing menstrual health and hygiene challenges within the prison system. The existing infrastructure and hygiene conditions in many facilities are inadequate, there is limited access to sanitary napkins, insufficient toilets and bathing spaces, and low awareness around menstrual health. These systemic gaps not only pose health risks but also compromise the dignity and basic rights of incarcerated women.

Poor menstrual hygiene management can lead to infections, discomfort, and emotional distress, all of which undermine women's overall health and well-being. The lack of awareness among inmates and prison staff further perpetuates stigma, leaving menstruation an unspoken and poorly managed issue within correctional spaces.

Recognizing menstrual hygiene as a basic right and a component of humane treatment is essential. Ensuring that every woman, regardless of her circumstances, can manage her menstruation safely and with dignity aligns with India's constitutional principles of equality and justice.



Given the scale and urgency of the issue, Uttar Pradesh has been identified as a high-priority state for intervention under Project Sshakti

The need for this project in Uttar Pradesh is driven by the following factors:

| High Incarceration Rate:

Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of female prisoners in the country, necessitating focused interventions to manage their menstrual hygiene effectively.

| Inadequate Facilities:

Many prisons in Uttar Pradesh lack the necessary infrastructure to support proper menstrual health and hygiene, including sufficient toilets and bathing facilities.

| Limited Access to Hygiene Products:

Female inmates often have restricted access to sanitary products, leading to the use of unhygienic alternatives and increasing the risk of infections.

| Health Risks:

Poor menstrual hygiene management can lead to severe health issues, including urinary tract infections and reproductive health problems, which are exacerbated by inadequate medical support in prisons.

| Awareness and Education:

There is a significant lack of awareness among inmates and prison staff about menstrual health and hygiene practices, contributing to the stigma and neglect of this critical issue.

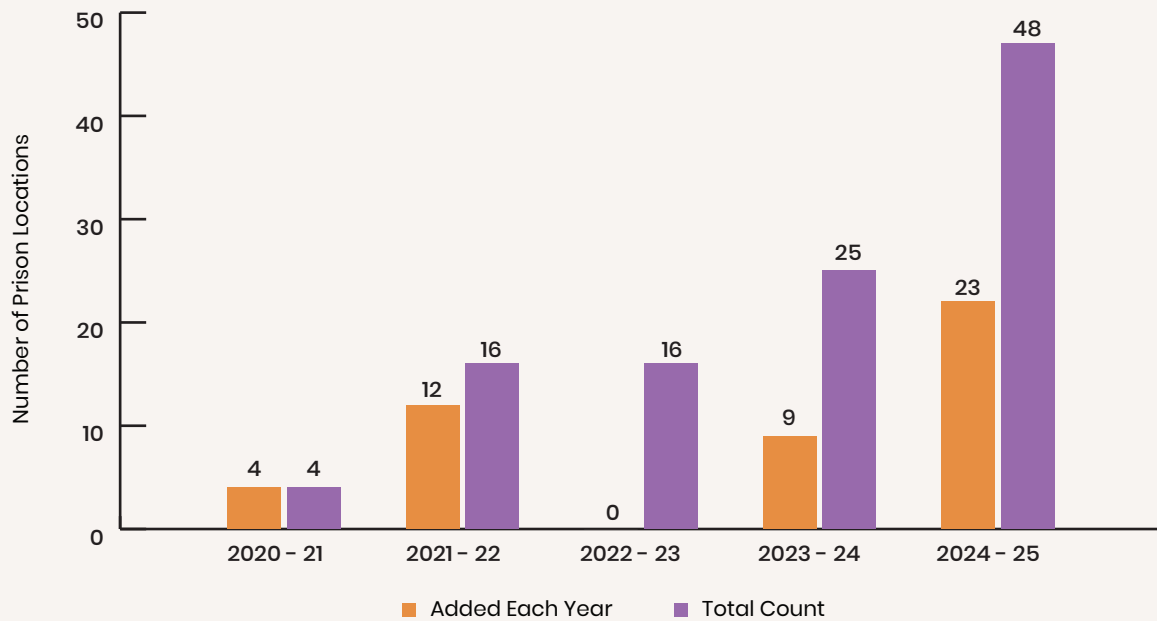
The compelling evidence presented underscores the critical need for an intervention in menstrual health and hygiene management in Uttar Pradesh's prisons. Addressing the gaps in menstrual hygiene management, influenced by the high number of female inmates and the inadequate facilities, is vital for ensuring the health and dignity of women in prisons. Implementing this intervention will not only improve the prison infrastructure but significantly enhance the capacity to provide essential hygiene products and education, thereby improving health outcomes and reducing the stigma associated with menstruation.

Holistic Work Done as Part of Project Sshakti

Since its inception in 2020, the project has reached multiple locations across Haryana, Delhi, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh, steadily expanding its footprint each year to improve menstrual health awareness and access among women inmates.

The graph below presents a year-on-year summary of prison sites added under the initiative, highlighting the project's consistent growth trajectory.

Summary of Prison sites added Year on Year



The program began in 2020–21 with work in 4 prisons, establishing the foundation for menstrual health interventions in correctional settings.

In 2021–22, the initiative expanded to 12 additional prisons, bringing the total to 16 sites.

The year 2022–23 focused on strengthening and consolidating efforts at existing locations.

A renewed expansion took place in 2023–24, with 9 more prisons brought under the program, taking the total to 25.

The most significant growth occurred in 2024–25, when the project scaled up to 23 new locations, reaching 48 prisons in total , a reflection of its growing acceptance, effectiveness, and collaborative reach with state prison departments.

Project Overview: Sshakti (FY 2024-25)

Project Sshakti’s menstrual health and hygiene awareness is a transformative session encompassing a range of engagement activities designed to catalyse positive change. From dispelling myths and fostering awareness to promoting sustainable menstrual hygiene practices, the initiative adopts a holistic approach, recognizing the interconnected nature of reproductive and menstrual health.

OBJECTIVES

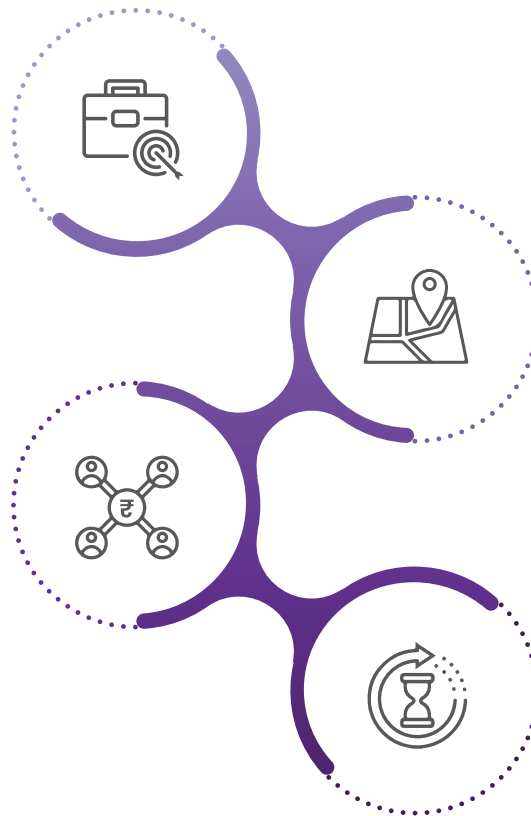
The programme's core objective is to promote dignified and sustainable menstrual health management among women inmates by ensuring awareness, access to sanitary napkins, and improved hygiene infrastructure.

WOMEN ENGAGED

Total Reach: 2,101

- Through Awareness Sessions: 1,198 (Female Inmates – 1,155, Prison Staff- 70)
- Through Sanitary Napkins Distribution: 897

- In 2024–25, the project scaled up significantly, reaching 23 locations, with a primary focus on Uttar Pradesh along with continued work in Uttarakhand. This demonstrates a major expansion of the program, targeting a much larger number of women inmates in one of the states with the highest female prison population.



LOCATION

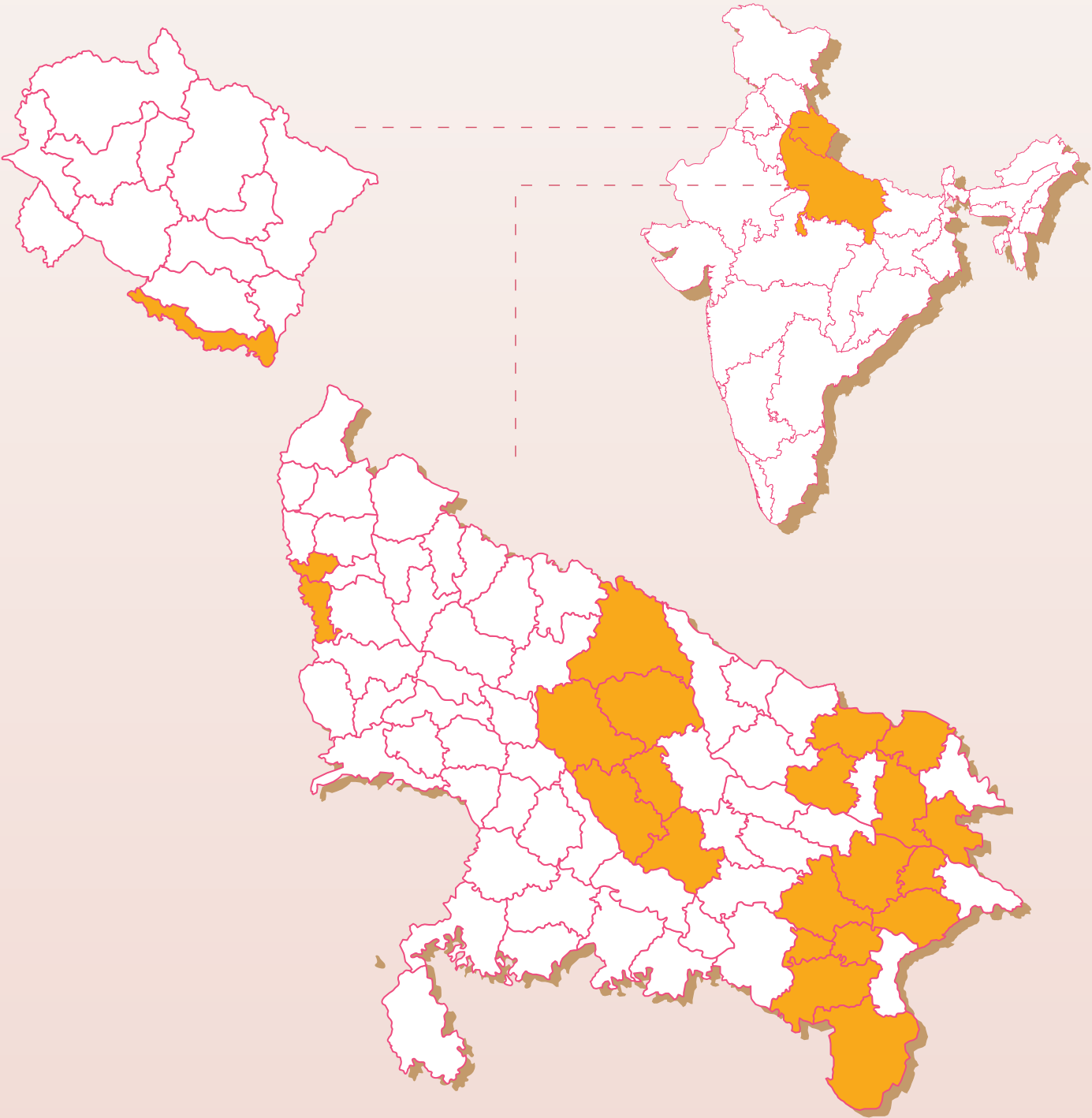
22 districts in Uttar Pradesh in three zones –Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Lucknow and 1 district in Uttarakhand.

DURATION

180 Minutes, each session



Project Reach FY 2024-25



Districts

■ Lucknow	■ Jaunpur	■ Deoria	■ Hardoi
■ Nari Bandi Niketan, Lucknow	■ Gazipur	■ Mau	■ Unnao
■ Dasna	■ Mirzapur	■ Azamgarh	■ Rae Bareilly
■ Gautam Budhha Nagar	■ Gorakhpur	■ Sonbhadra	■ Siddharth Nagar
■ Varanasi	■ Basti	■ MaharajGanj	■ Sitarganj (Uttarakhand)
■ Gyanpur	■ Lakhimpur	■ Sitapur	

Theory of Change



Input



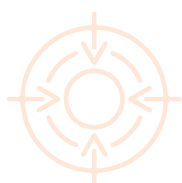
Activities



Outputs



Outcomes



Impact

- Installed sanitary napkin vending machines
- Distributed sanitary napkins
- Provided educational material (booklets, trackers, posters)

- Conducted awareness & training sessions (myths, anatomy, PMS, hygiene, products, disposal)
- Sensitized & trained prison staff
- Conducted pre- and post-assessments

- 23 vending machines were set up (22 UP, 1 Uttarakhand)
- 41,700 sanitary napkins were made accessible
- 23 awareness sessions were delivered (80+ hours)
- 2,101 beneficiaries were engaged (inmates & staff)
- Educational booklets & trackers were shared
- Partnerships were strengthened with authorities & NGOs

Short-term:

- Greater knowledge and awareness of menstrual health
- Myths and taboos actively challenged
- Safer hygiene practices adopted
- Enhanced dignity, confidence, and self-esteem
- Increased autonomy in managing menstrual needs

Long-term:

- Consistent access to menstrual products and information
- Menstrual health education embedded in prison systems
- Inmates empowered to share and transfer knowledge after release

- Improved menstrual health & reduced infections
- Enhanced dignity & equity for incarcerated women
- Menstrual health integrated in prison healthcare & rehabilitation-
Breaking stigma in custodial settings
- Contributing to SDG 3 (Health) & SDG 5 (Gender Equality)
- Recognising menstrual hygiene as a fundamental right and
promoting its inclusion in institutional policies and practices



Nari Bandi Niketan



Hardoi



Sitapur



Raebareli



Unnao



Varanasi



Lakhimpur Kheri



Soanbhadra



Siddharthnagar



Mirzapur



Mau



Maharajganj



Lucknow



Basti



Jaunpur



Gyanpur



Gorakhpur



Gazipur



Ghaziabad District



Deoria



Gautam Budh Nagar



Azamgarh

Session Overview and Modules Covered

Ice Breaking Sessions /Pre Session Questionnaire

Attitude/Knowledge/Behaviour Addressed

The session begins with an ice-breaking activity to create a comfortable and open environment where participants feel at ease discussing sensitive topics.

Additionally, a pre-session questionnaire is conducted to assess participants' baseline knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding reproductive and menstrual health. This helps to understand their perspectives before delving into the core topics.



Session at Unnao Jail

Methodology/Tools Used

- **Ice Breakers:** Engaging activities to create a comfortable atmosphere.
- **Story Telling:** Using story telling for initiate the conversation.
- **Questionnaire:** Simple, non- intrusive questions to gauge existing knowledge and attitudes.

Addressing Myths/Taboos and Practices

Attitude/Knowledge/Behavior Addressed

Challenging common myths and misconceptions helps participants develop a more informed and positive attitude toward menstruation. By addressing stigma, this segment aims to encourage open conversations and promote awareness.

Methodology/Tools Used

- **Open Discussions:** Creating a safe space for participants to share their beliefs.
- **Role Plays:** Showcasing how myths/taboo can affect us
- **Myth-Busting Game:** Chinese Whispers



Demonstrating key concepts using models at Lakhimpur Jail

Understanding Anatomy – Body Literacy

Attitude/Knowledge/Behavior Addressed

This module is designed to enhance participants' understanding of female anatomy, emphasizing the importance of body literacy. By familiarising themselves with their own bodies, participants develop a more informed and positive attitude toward reproductive health.

Methodology/Tools Used

- **Tools Used:** Rubber Models illustrating reproductive anatomy such as Uterus, Menstrual disc
- **Interactive Sessions:** Open discussions to address questions and concerns.



Demonstrating key concepts using models at Lakhimpur Jail

Science of Menstruation

Attitude/Knowledge/Behavior Addressed

This section helps in deepening understanding of the physiological aspects of menstruation here in biological lens encompassing the following fundamental knowledge drivers- Natural phenomena, as an indicator of good health gives the ability to procreate, and as a protective and defensive mechanism essential for survival.

Methodology/Tools Used

- **Visual Presentations:** Educational visual aids and explaining the menstrual cycle.
- **Interactive Discussions:** Encouraging questions and sharing personal experiences



Session at Nari Bandi Niketan

Premenstrual Syndrome

Attitude/Knowledge/Behavior Addressed

This segment focuses on establishing periods as '*har mahine ka saathi*' for women by fostering awareness of PMS, encouraging participants to share their experiences, normalizing symptoms, and addressing emotional, hormonal changes, and period pain to reduce stigma.

Methodology/Tools Used

- **Discussion Prompts:** Encouraging participants to share their premenstrual experiences.
- **Interactive Sessions:** Open conversations to normalize PMS symptoms, emotional shifts, and period pain.



Pain Management and Light Exercises

Attitude/Knowledge/Behavior Addressed

This segment focuses on promoting effective methods for managing menstrual pain, helping participants adopt a healthier and more informed approach to self-care during their periods. It introduces various pain management techniques, including light exercises and relaxation methods, to ease discomfort and improve overall well-being.

Methodology/Tools Used

- **Demonstrations:** Showing effective pain management techniques.
- **Interactive Exercises:** Simple exercises or relaxation techniques for pain relief
- **Visual Aid:** Participants were given handbooks with yoga poses for future reference

Menstrual Management Products

Attitude/Knowledge/Behavior Addressed

This segment aims to educate participants about the various menstrual products available, enabling them to make informed choices based on comfort, convenience, and sustainability.

Methodology/Tools Used

- **Product Showcases:** Displaying various menstrual products such as sanitary pad, cloth pad, and menstrual cup.
- **Informative Sessions:** Providing details on usage, disposal, and environmental impact.

Menopause and Coping

Attitude/Knowledge/Behavior Addressed

The objective of this segment was to provide a better understanding of menopause, its symptoms, and its impact on physical and emotional well-being. Additionally, participants were introduced to practical coping strategies to navigate this stage of life with confidence.

Methodology/Tools Used

- **Informative Sessions:** Discussions on physical and emotional aspects of menopause.
- **Coping Workshops:** Providing practical coping strategies and resources.

Interactive Activities

Attitude/Knowledge/Behavior Addressed

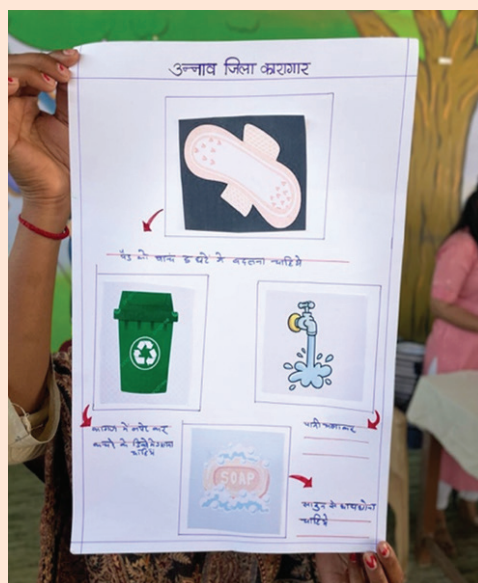
The MHM sessions undertaken in each prison are aimed at disseminating information so that the inmates can make informed choices for themselves and pass on facts instead of myths to at least the next of kin if not members of the community. To reaffirm the takeaways of each session, an interactive activity is conducted with the inmates in each jail. Here are some of the activities conducted:

At **Lakhimpur Kheri District Jail**, at the end of the session, the inmates were gathered around a table where a chart displaying various body organs, from head to toe, was placed before them. They were then asked to encircle the organs they believed were affected during menstruation. It was encouraging to see that the women accurately identified and associated the uterus, urinary bladder, abdomen, and brain, reflecting the effectiveness of discussions on female anatomy.

At **Unnao District Jail**, the session revealed that the women could successfully recognize hygiene-related images from a diverse set presented to them. They then arranged the images in the correct order and wrote a one-liner summarizing their key learning from the session. The session and activity reinforced crucial menstrual hygiene practices, ensuring that all participants understood the importance of changing a pad every 5-6 hours, disposing of it properly, and washing their hands afterward.



Activity in Lakhimpur



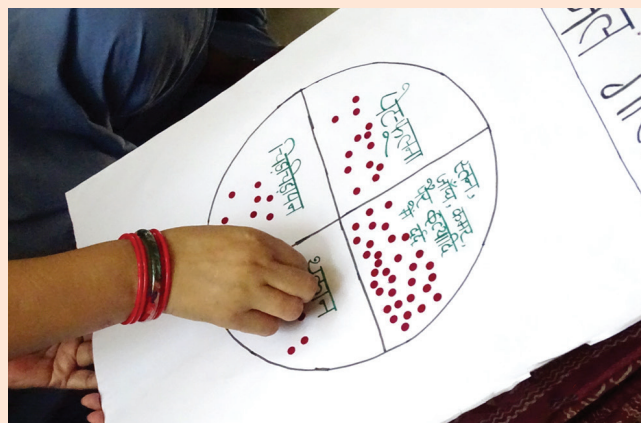
Activity in Unnao



Activity in Hardoi

At the end of the session at **Hardoi District Jail**, the inmates were asked to identify images of menstrual products from a set of random images. They not only successfully recognized and named them but also enthusiastically participated in pasting them one by one on a sheet of paper.

At **Gorakhpur District Prison**, beneficiaries were introduced to a PMS tracker—a pie chart divided into four quadrants, each representing a different PMS symptom. They were then invited to place a bindi on the symptom they typically experience before their periods. This activity helped normalize PMS symptoms by highlighting how many individuals share similar experiences while also increasing awareness of common premenstrual symptoms.



Activity in Gorakhpur

Wrap up, Q & A, Post Session Questionnaire

Attitude/Knowledge/Behavior Addressed

This concluding session aims to summarize key takeaways, address any remaining doubts, and evaluate participants' knowledge retention and session effectiveness.

Methodology/Tools Used

- **Review Session:** Recapitulating essential information
- **Open Q & A:** Addressing any remaining concerns or questions.
- **Post Session Questionnaire:** Collecting feedback on the session and their learnings.



Post Session Q&A

Informative Communication Material: Dissemination of Maasik Dharam Swasthya Prabandhan Patrika

Attitude/Knowledge/Behavior Addressed

To reinforce the knowledge gained during the session, a resource booklet is provided to serve as a reference for participants. This aims to encourage continued learning and awareness about menstrual and reproductive health.

Methodology/Tools Used

- **Booklet Distribution:** Providing each participant with the educational booklet
- **Encouraging Use:** Emphasizing the booklet as a valuable resource for continued learning.



Distribution of educational book

Sanitary Napkin Vending Machine Installation and Training for Use of Vending Machine

The installation of 22 sanitary napkin vending machines across multiple prisons in Uttar Pradesh marked a significant step toward improving menstrual hygiene access for female inmates. These machines were strategically placed in facilities including District Jail Lucknow, Nari Bandi Niketan, Ghaziabad, Gautam Budh Nagar, Varanasi, Gyanpur, Jaunpur, Ghazipur, Mirzapur, Gorakhpur, Deoria, Mau, Azamgarh, Maharajganj, Sonbhadra, Basti, Siddharth Nagar, Lakhimpur Kheri, Hardoi, Unnao, Sitapur, and Raebareli.

Prior to this intervention, inmates had no direct access to sanitary napkins, often depending on prison wardens or family members to meet their needs. This reliance not only affected their menstrual health but also reinforced silence and stigma around menstruation. In the absence of proper products, some women resorted to using repurposed or discarded cloth, which posed serious health risks due to poor hygiene and embedded materials like metal hooks.

To address these challenges, interactive demonstration sessions were organized to train both inmates and prison staff on the correct use of the vending machines. As this was a new concept in the prison environment, the sessions helped ensure smooth, hygienic, and stigma-free adoption. This initiative goes far beyond the distribution of sanitary napkins, it promotes dignity, self-reliance, and menstrual health equity, while contributing to the broader goal of breaking taboos and improving the quality of life for incarcerated women.

Sanitary Napkin Vending Machine installation





Deoria



Mirzapur



Ghazipur



Gorakhpur



Jaunpur



Maharajganj



Siddhartnagar



Soanbhadra



Varanasi



Basti



Gautam Budh Nagar



Ghaziabad



Lakhimpur kheri



Lucknow




Mau



Sitarganj



Alignment with SDG, National Priorities, CSR Policy, ESG & WASH

Basis of Alignment	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 	  
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Priority 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) 	<p>Aligned with SDG 2030 and UNICEF's Global WASH Program Project Sshakti fosters access to hygiene products, education, and empowerment for incarcerated women, ensuring their dignity and well-being.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CSR Policy Section 135 A, Schedule VII 	<p>Area 1 Eradicating hunger, poverty and malnutrition, promoting healthcare including preventive health and sanitation (including contribution to the swachh Bharat Kosh set-up by the central government for the promotion of sanitation) and making safe drinking water.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESG (SEBI Principles) 	<p>Principle 8 Businesses should promote inclusive growth and equitable development.</p>

Our Impact



22
Prisons across
Uttar Pradesh



01
Uttarakhand



80
hours of learning

2101
inmates benefitted

70
wardens through
sessions reached

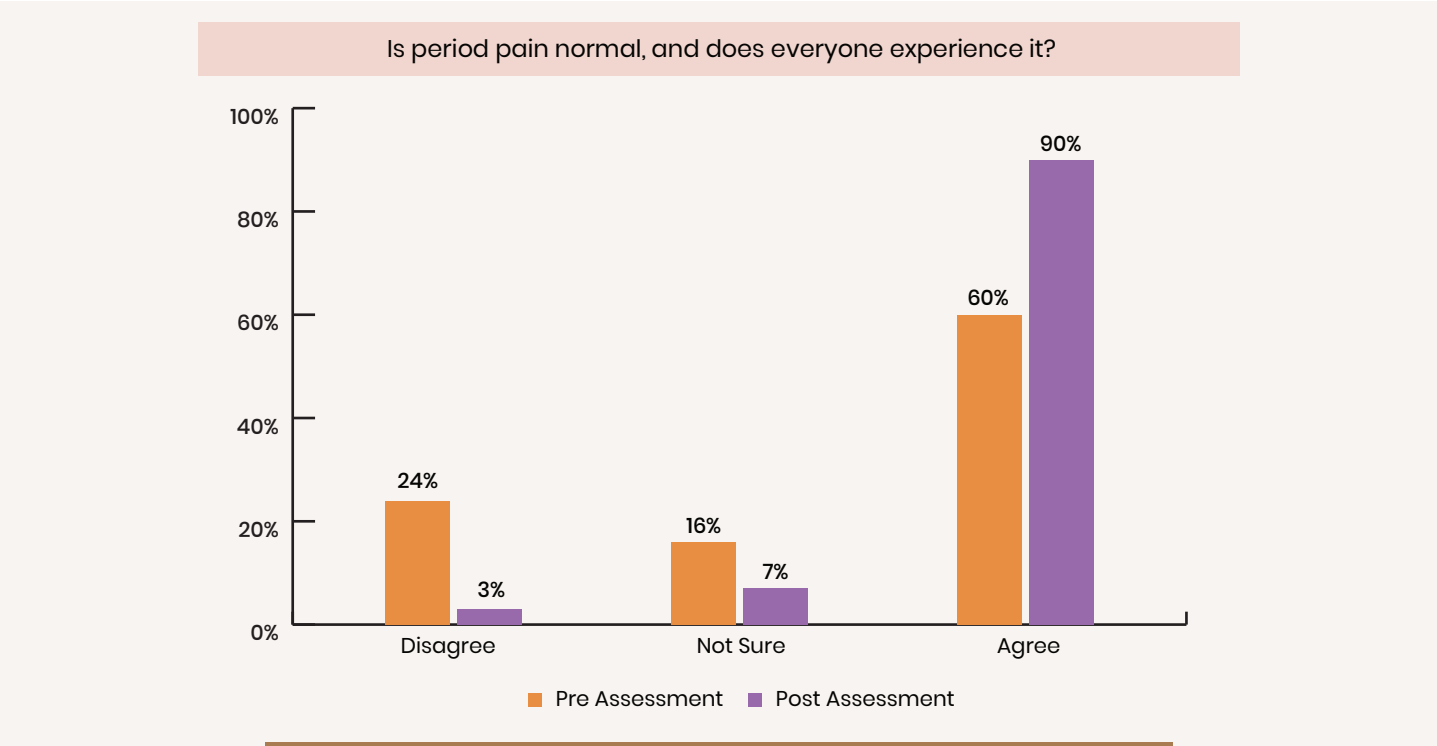
23
sanitary napkin
vending machines
installed

41,700
Sanitary Napkins
Distributed

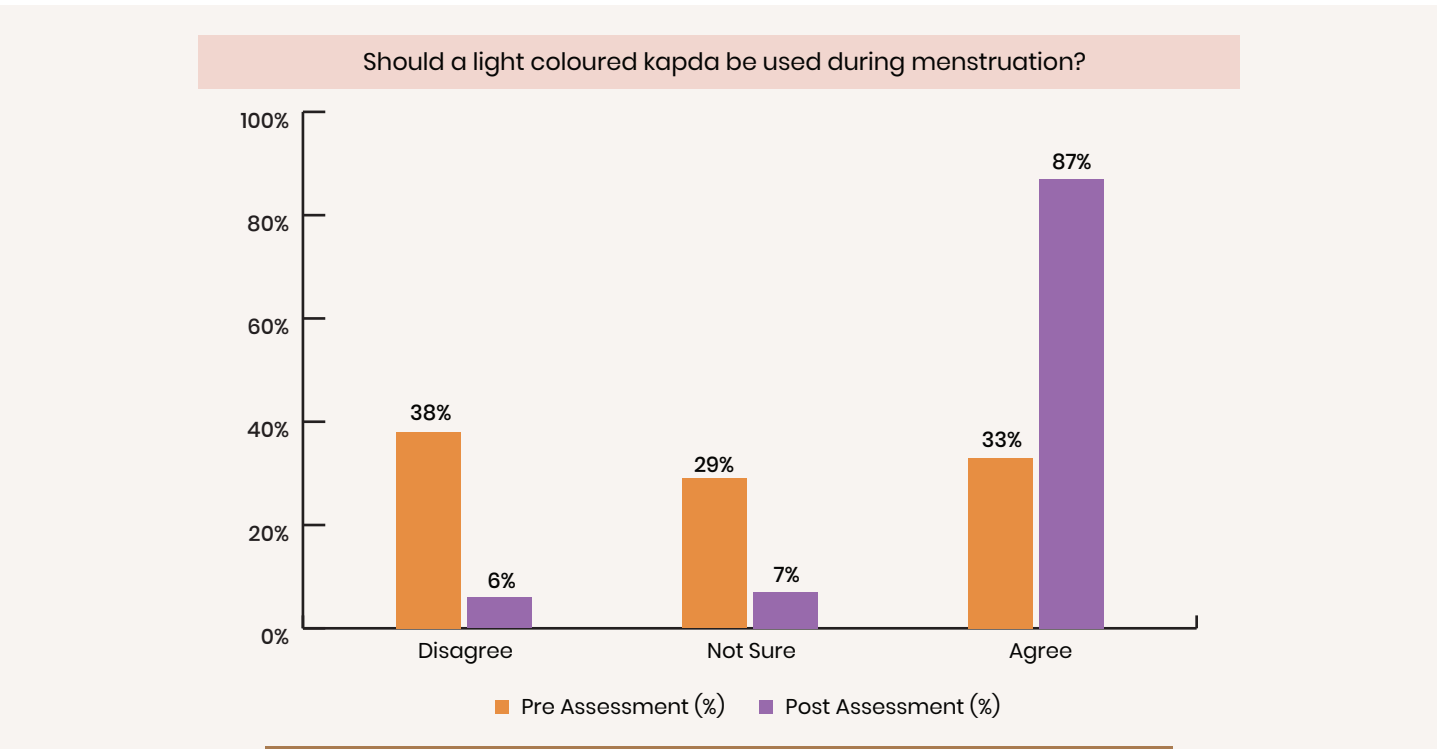
23
Awareness sessions
conducted

Pre and Post Test Analysis

Before and after each educational session conducted in prisons, a structured pre- and post-assessment quiz is administered to evaluate the inmates' knowledge and awareness levels on the given topic. The pre-quiz aimed to assess their baseline understanding, while the post-quiz measured the impact of the session in enhancing their knowledge. These assessments were conducted across 22 prison locations, and the compiled results are presented below, showcasing the shifts in awareness and comprehension among the participants.

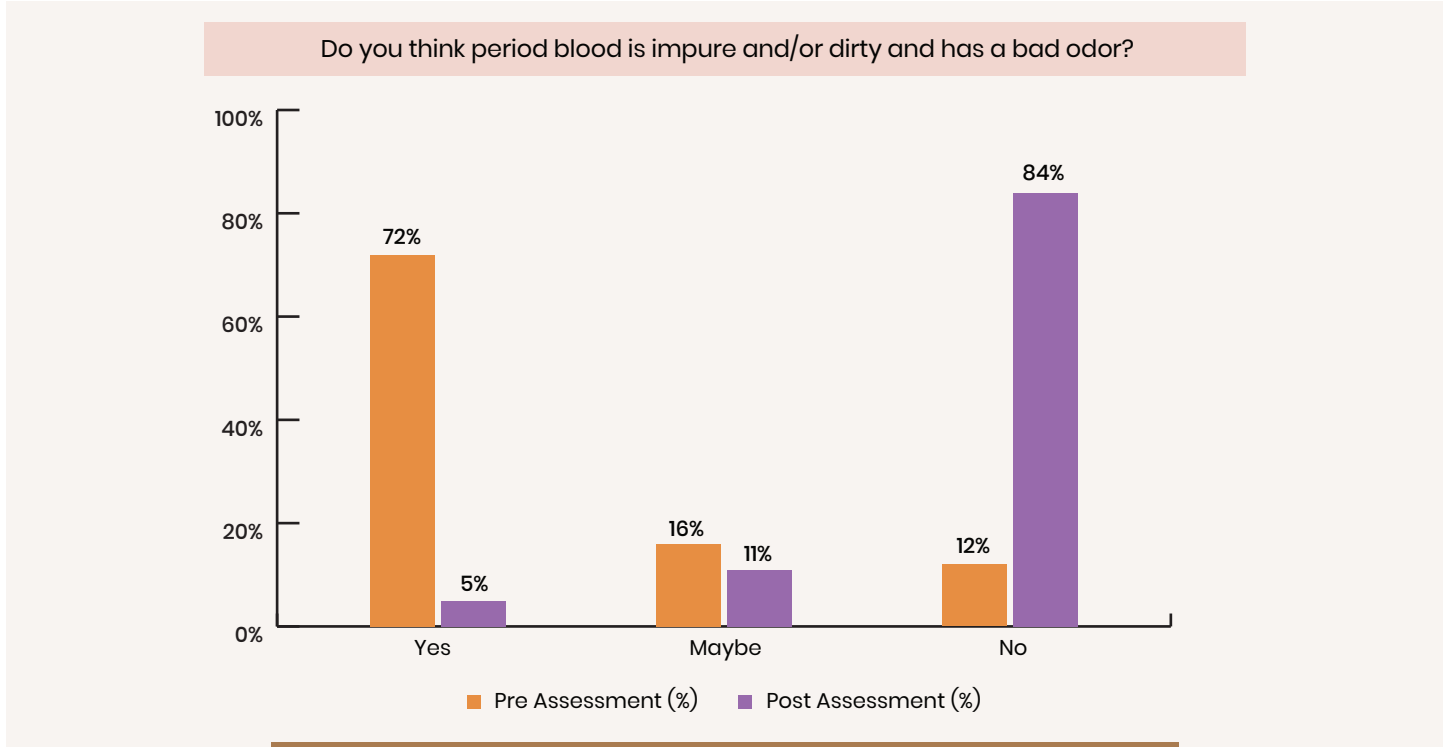


Post-assessment results show a significant improvement in awareness, with 90% acknowledging that period pain is normal, compared to 60% before.

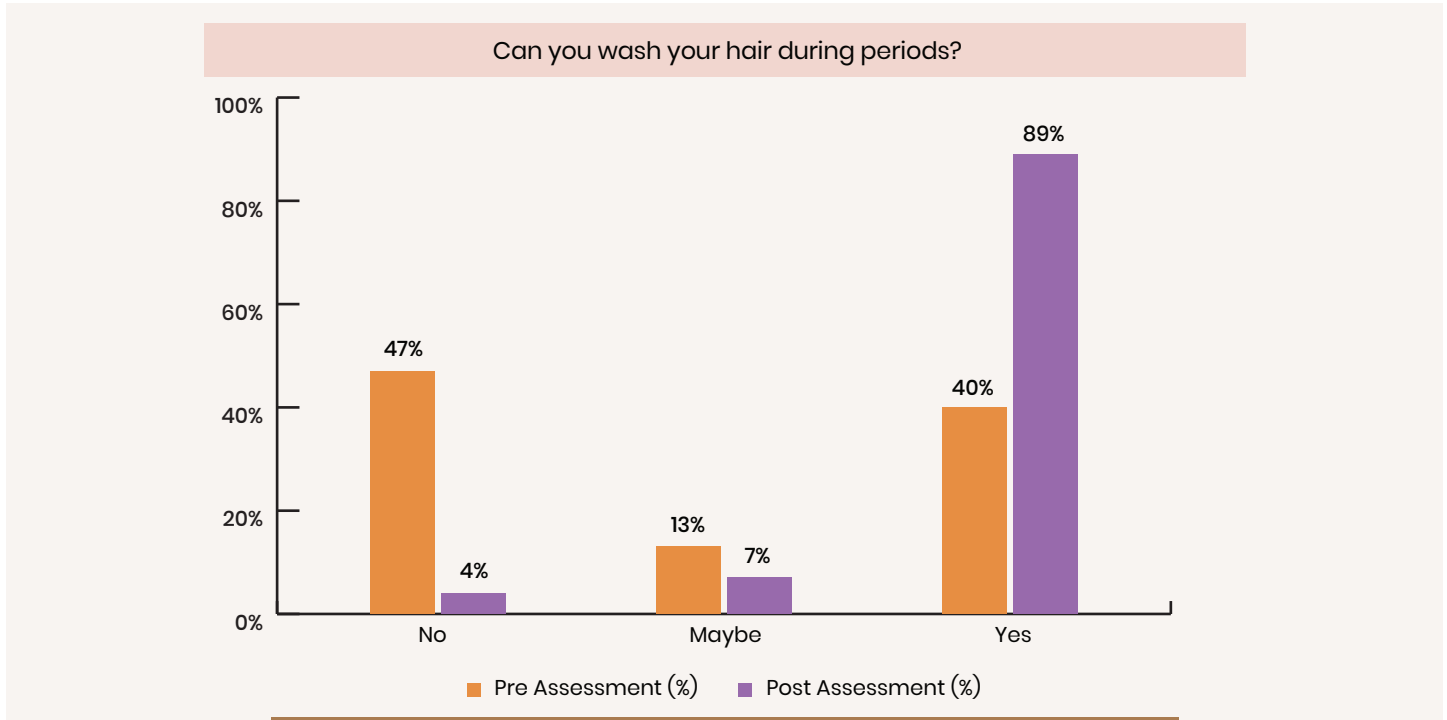




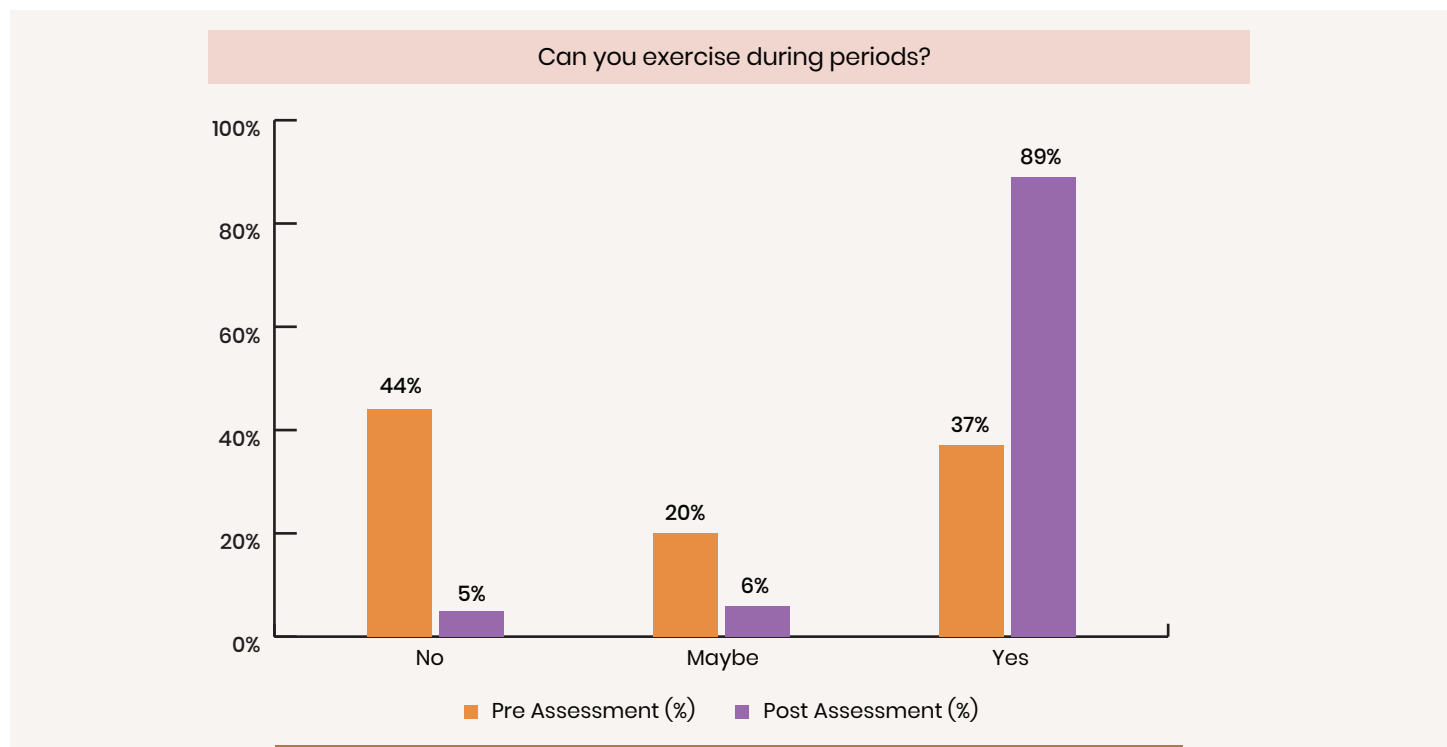
Confidence in wearing light-coloured clothes during menstruation increased, with 87% agreeing post-assessment, up from 33% earlier. In most jails, women preferred using a dark coloured kapda during periods and it was only through the session that they learnt the relevance of using a light coloured one. **A major shift in their opinions was observed in the district jails of Gautam Buddha Nagar, Varanasi, Jaunpur, Gorakhpur, Deoria, Sonbhadra, among others.**



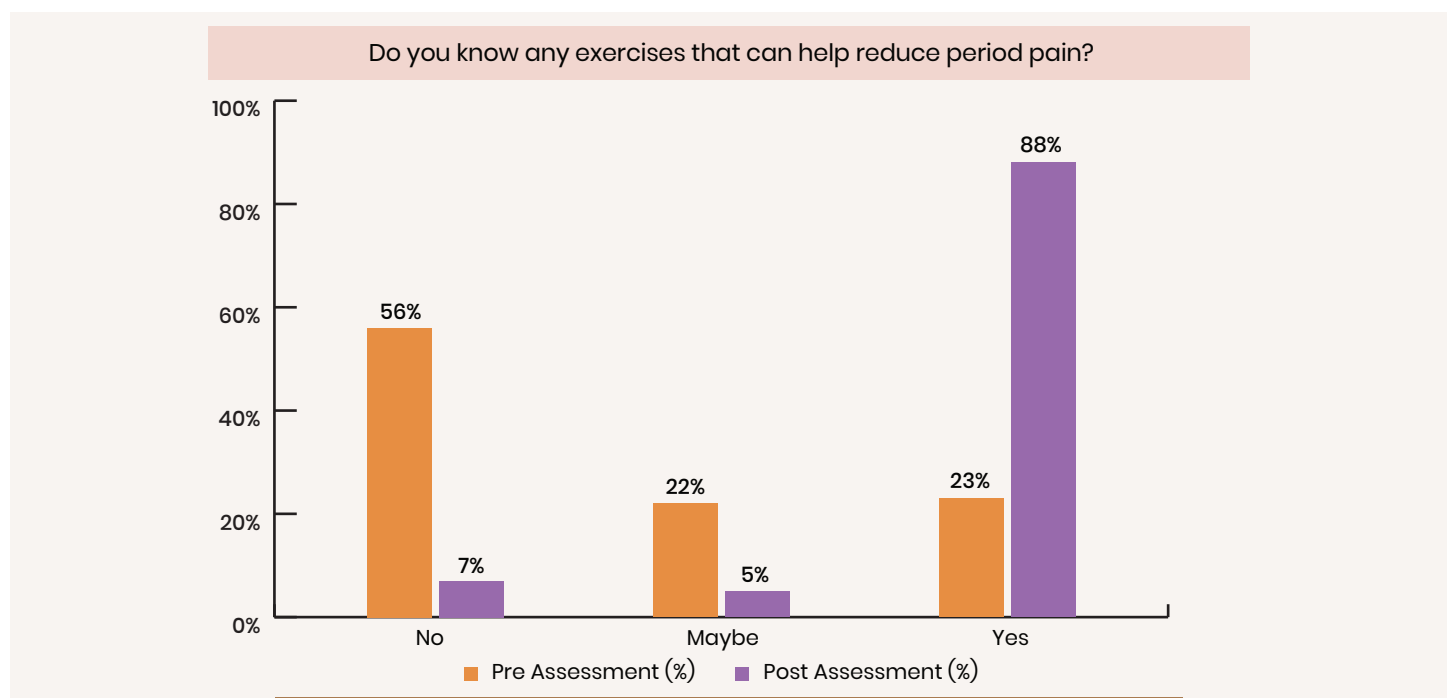
A remarkable shift in perception was observed, with 84% rejecting the myth of period blood being impure, compared to just 12% before the sessions. Prior to the intervention, women across all jails strongly associated menstruation with impurity, leading to restrictions on their access to spaces, certain foods, and even their own health and hygiene—avoiding exercise, showers, and hair washing. This significant change underscores the effectiveness of the sessions in dismantling deep-rooted taboos and fostering awareness. It marks a crucial step towards normalizing menstruation and promoting menstrual health education.



Misconceptions around hair washing during menstruation reduced, as 89% recognized it as safe, up from 40% pre-assessment. In majority of jails, women would not wash their hair till the 3rd, 4th day of their periods, refusing to do it in the first few days saying that they would only do so towards the end as a mark of being clean after their periods. The session replaced this myth with a fact and post analysis saw a change in their perception. **This was observed most in the Nari Bandi Niketan (Lucknow), Hardoi, District Jail Lucknow, Gyanpur, Gazipur, Mirzapur among other jails.**

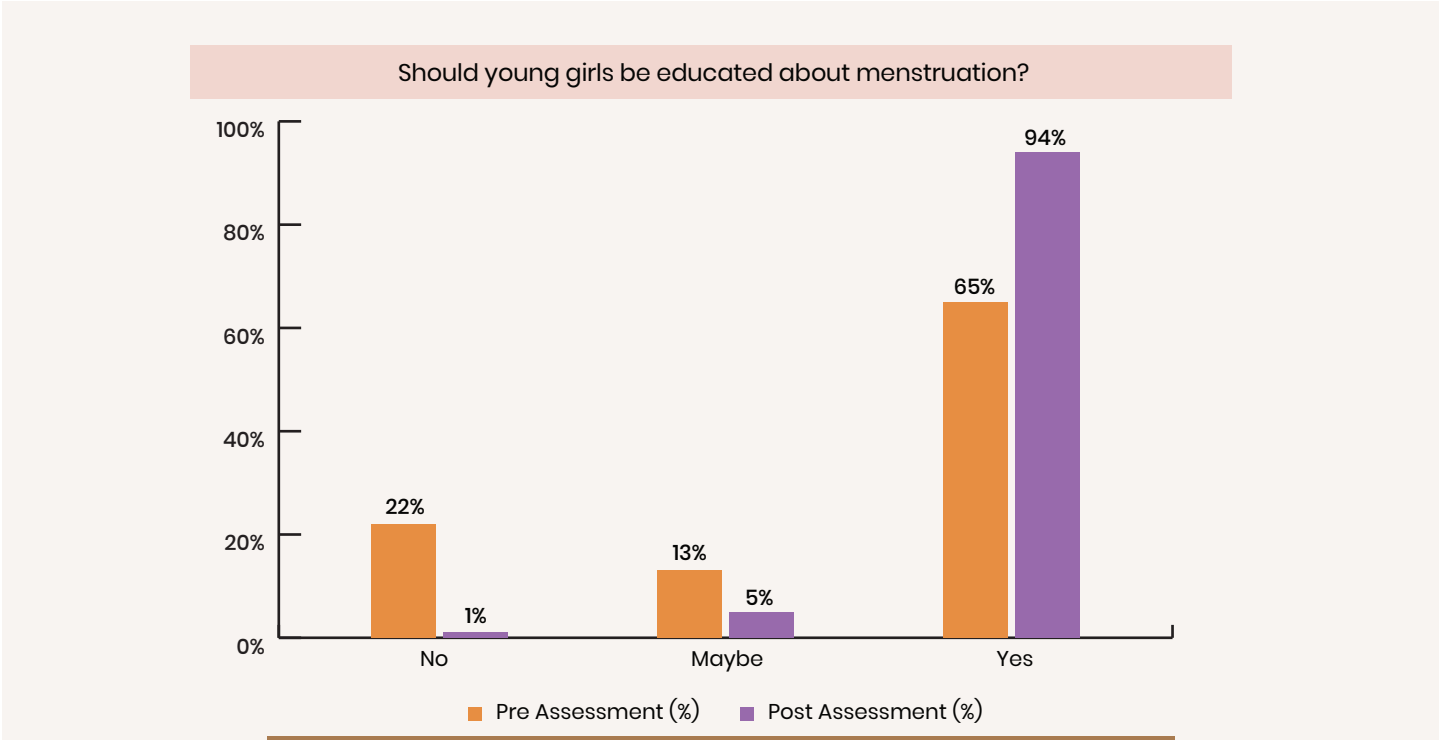


Awareness about the benefits of exercising during periods improved, with 89% agreeing post-assessment, a sharp rise from 37% before. In a lot of jails, female inmates were uncomfortable with the idea of exercising during periods holding onto the notion that it would increase the flow, or cause cysts/fibroids, etc. But after the session they understood that some light exercises/asanas could actually be relieve them of pain and discomfort. **This was observed most in Nari Bandi Niketan (Lucknow), Lakhimpur, Sitapur, Hardoi, Rae Bareli, Dasna, Gyanpur, Gorakhpur, Basti and Azamgarh among other jails.**

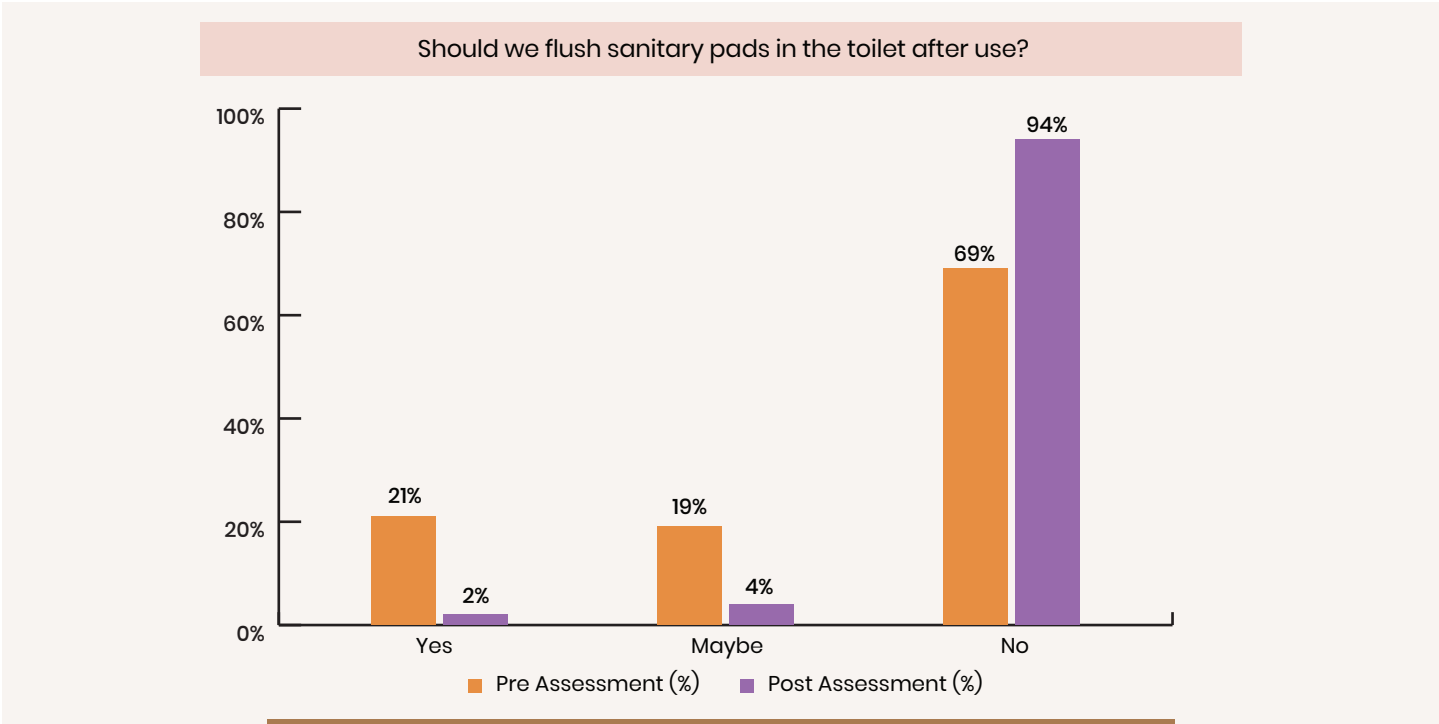




Awareness of pain-relief exercises grew significantly, with 88% acknowledging their benefits post-assessment, compared to 23% earlier.



Support for menstrual education strengthened, with 94% agreeing post-assessment, an increase from 65% pre-assessment.



Awareness about proper disposal of sanitary pads improved, with 94% recognizing they should not be flushed, up from 69% pre-assessment.

Conclusion

By challenging taboos and fostering informed choices, the sessions have empowered incarcerated women with knowledge that not only enhances their well-being but also promotes dignity and self-care. Equally important has been the improved access to sanitary napkins through vending machines and structured distribution mechanisms, addressing a long-standing gap in menstrual hygiene management within prisons.

Importantly, the project goes beyond access and awareness, it positions menstrual health as a fundamental human right and strives to make menstrual hygiene management a sustained norm rather than an occasional necessity. Through continuous education, inclusion, and system-level engagement, Project Sshakti seeks to embed menstrual health within the everyday culture of prisons, ensuring that every woman, regardless of her circumstances, can manage menstruation safely and with dignity.

Way Forward

Building on the success of the initial educational and access-focused interventions under Project Sshakti, the next phase will focus on expanding the initiative to more remote and under-resourced prisons across Uttar Pradesh. These facilities often face significant challenges in ensuring consistent access to menstrual hygiene products and providing structured information around menstrual health.

The way forward envisions a sustainable, rights-based, and system-integrated model for menstrual health management within the prison ecosystem. This will include:

- Reinforcing knowledge and behavior change through periodic awareness sessions, interactive demonstrations, and follow-up activities that help retain and deepen understanding.
- Ensuring sustained access to sanitary napkins through reliable, prison-based mechanisms such as vending machines and structured distribution led by prison authorities.
- Institutionalizing menstrual health management by integrating it into regular prison health and rehabilitation protocols in collaboration with prison staff and state authorities.
- Creating a self-sustaining knowledge system within prisons—where trained inmates and staff serve as peer educators, ensuring that even new entrants are informed about menstrual health practices and available facilities. This approach guarantees continuity, making the program sustainable even in the absence of external facilitators.
- Embedding menstrual health within the broader women's rights and rehabilitation framework, recognizing that menstrual dignity is central to physical health, mental well-being, and gender equality.



Ultimately, Project Sshakti aims not only to enhance access and awareness but also to normalize menstrual health as a standard and sustained practice within correctional institutions. By empowering both inmates and prison authorities to uphold menstrual health as a right, not a privilege, the project paves the way for a more inclusive, dignified, and equitable custodial environment for women.

Testimonials



"Female inmates must have learned a lot from this session on Menstrual Health and Hygiene because anything like this has not been conducted before in this prison. Women here have various religious beliefs regarding menstruation and I am glad this session addressed those myths without hurting their sentiments. Perhaps this will help change their mindset. Additionally, I also liked how the session focussed on hygiene because inmates here are poor at maintaining it, they don't shower or clean after themselves hence talking to them about keeping themselves clean and proper would benefit them not only while they are menstruating but also when they are not."

Sumaiya Praveen

Deputy Jailer, Rae Bareilly District Jail

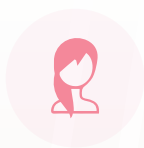


"Very good initiative. I think it will help in bettering the health of women inmates and will create awareness around health and hygiene among them. Thanks to Spark Minda Foundation, Bharatcares, and India Vision Foundation for this pioneering effort."

Sanjay Kumar Shahi

Superintendent, District Jail Gautam Buddha Nagar





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“We really appreciate a pad vending machine being installed for us at the jail. Thank you for thinking about us, our health and hygiene. We will not use the same sanitary pad for more than 5-6 hours now. We will change it as soon as it fills up and dispose it properly in a dustbin.”

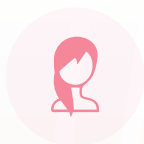
Female Inmate
District Jail Mau



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“Till now I believed that period blood was impure and dirty, making me impure when I am menstruating. But through this session I learnt about my body, I learnt why we get our period and how the same blood helps nourish the baby in the womb until it comes out. This blood cannot be dirty, it cannot be impure. How can it be, it births the next generation.”

Female Inmate
Sonbhadra



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“My mother has always told me to not exert myself when I am on my period. She wouldn't let me go out to play or lift heavy things. In this session I learnt that it is okay to exercise during period and how some asanas can actually bring relief. I learnt some asanas in the session and I will use the book to teach my mother and sisters also.”

Female Inmate
Sonbhadra





Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Programme

Annual Report 2024-25

Submitted to:



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