



VISIT TO SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION, ACTION & RESEARCH IN COMMUNITY HEALTH (SEARCH), GADCHIROLI, MAHARASHTRA

Manan J Patel

Sir,

We were very fortunate to have opportunity to participate in 'Public Health Practice Workshop' organized by 'Society for Education, Action & Research in Community Health, Gadchiroli' (SEARCH) which is also known as 'Shodhgram'. Even though SEARCH is well known to all public health persons, I would like to narrate few information about it.

SEARCH (Society for Education, Action and Research in Community Health) is a non-government organization founded in 1985 by a doctor couple, Abhay Bang and Rani Bang.¹ Shodhgram is situated 17 kms from Gadchiroli on Gadchiroli- Dhanora road. Gadchiroli is a located at the Eastern end of Maharashtra, 1000 km from Mumbai, 200 km South of the city of Nagpur. Gadchiroli is a very backward area mainly inhabited by the indigenous tribal people (the Adivasis).² Vision of SEARCH is realisation of 'Aarogya-Swaraj', i.e. people's health in people's hands, by empowering individuals and communities to take charge of their own health, and thereby, help them achieve freedom from disease as well as dependence.¹ SEARCH developed a Home-Based Newborn Care (HBNC) package which provides health education to women in their communities as well as to provide basic care for expecting mothers and newborn children delivered at a low cost by community health workers at the village level.^{3,4} This concept of HBNC drew the attention of many national and international agencies and was operationalized at national level by Government of India in year 2011.⁵

With this background, Indian Association of Preventive and Social Medicine, Gujarat Chapter (IAPSM-GC) organized visit to SEARCH-Gadchiroli to learn their model of community

health. Total 38 participants participated in 'Public Health Practice Workshop' at SEARCH during 23rd to 27th Dec, 2014. Among them 37 were post graduate students of department of Community Medicine of 8 different medical colleges of Gujarat state. We travelled to Nagpur by railway and from there we hired a private bus to reach SEARCH. In the way, we introduced ourselves to each other to make contact with our Community Medicine colleagues.

We reached SEARCH campus in the evening of 23rd Dec, 2014. We were accommodated at visitors' room having attractive tribal look from outside. Simple and balanced diet was provided by mess situated in the campus. We gathered at Pimpal hall where after introduction we were divided in 6 different groups for field visit and assignment distribution. We had to prepare 3 years plan for a programme to address public health problem assigned to individual groups for implementation in rural Gadchiroli which was to be presented on the 4th day of the workshop. Six different topics were as follows:

- 1) Sanitation and diarrhoea
- 2) Tobacco consumption
- 3) Malnutrition in under 5 years children
- 4) Anemia among women in the reproductive age group
- 5) Cardiovascular disease (hypertension, stroke, ischemic heart disease)
- 6) Mental health disorders

'Shramyog' for cleaning of SEARCH campus is scheduled every Wednesday and Saturday. So on second day, we done 'Shram-daan' in the early morning. Morning session started with singing a song 'Tu Zinda Hai'- A song by Shankar Shailendra, written during India's struggle for Independence from British Rule. Dr. Abhay Bang

narrated his life story, his journey from Mahatma Gandhi's Sevagram ashram to his current residence - Shodhgram in tribal Gadchiroli. Mr. Mahesh Deshmukh, statistician of SEARCH presented the past and present statistics collected by the organization and method of accurate data collection system adopted by SEARCH. In the afternoon session, there was a presentation of evolution of Home Based Newborn Care, challenges faced during initial phase and appreciation on success of approach elaborated by very well by Dr. Abhay Bang. In between we were assigned small group exercise named 'How to reduce infant mortality in tribal areas?' and reading and discussing the published article related to HBNC.

On day 3, we all went for field visit in five groups to five different villages among 39 intervention villages of Gadchiroli district which are covered by SEARCH for implementation of HBNC and other services like tobacco and alcohol control. We visited male and female arogyadoots' (Community Health Workers) home and learn about the techniques and logistics they were using for HBNC. We also discussed about the prevalence of disease in community those were assigned to us for health program design assignment on first day. In the afternoon, we visited "Ma Danteshwari Hospital" in the campus run by SEARCH with Amrut Bang, younger son of Dr. Abhay Bang. It is a multi-specialty hospital providing Medicine, Gynecology and Pediatric outdoor and indoor patient services. Hospital is having well-equipped operation theatre used for obstetric cases and surgical camp patients. In the evening, we were given a paper published by Dr. Rani Bang et al titled "High Prevalence of Gynaecological Diseases in Rural Indian Women" to read and discuss it.⁶ Dr. Yogesh Kalkonde, physician-member of SEARCH, enlightened us about the difficulties and barriers of Malaria control in tribal area through people's stories.

Day 4 was allotted for group exercise and presentations of all groups. Each groups had at least 6 members and all the members had to participate in group exercise and finally present any one subhead of the proposed programme i.e. burden of public health problem, intervention strategies, goals, objectives, action plan, evaluation, constraints or barriers, budget of the plan etc. There was fighting, conflicting, agreeing,

accepting behaviors in the group members during discussion and presentation but finally it ended with lots of knowledge expansion and fun. In the evening after prayers, Reflections shared by Dr. Rani Bang regarding women's health especially reproductive health issue in such a tribal area were fascinating and remarkable. On day 5, we shared feedback of the workshop to Dr. Abhay Bang and other SEARCH members and listened to what their opinion about us was.

Attending this workshop at SEARCH was an unforgettable public health learning experience. We learned how to work for community and with community and what would be the challenges and how to overcome them by knowledge and skills. To the persons working in the field of public health, we would absolutely recommend a visit to SEARCH in their lifetime.

Manan J Patel

Post-graduate student,
Dept. of Community Medicine,
SMIMER, Surat
E-mail: mananpatel14@gmail.com

REFERENCES

1. SEARCH- Society for Education, Action & Research in Community Health. Available at: <http://searchgadchiroli.org/aboutus1.html>. Accessed on 2nd Feb, 2015.
2. Dr. Abhay Bang. Sevagram to Shodhgram-Journey in search of health for the people.
3. Case Study: Society for Education, Action and Research in Community Health (SEARCH). Centre for High Impact Philanthropy. University of Pennsylvania. Location: Gadchiroli, India Available at: <http://www.impact.upenn.edu/international-issues/toolkit-childsurvival-casestudy-searchnewborn>. Accessed on 2nd Feb, 2015.
4. Abhay T Bang, Rani A Bang, Sanjay B Baitule, M Hanimi Reddy, Mahesh D Deshmukh. Effect of Home-based Neonatal care and Management of Sepsis on Neonatal Mortality: field trial in rural India. *The Lancet* 1999; 354: 1955-61.
5. Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India. Home based newborn care operational guidelines 2011. Nirman Bhavan, New Delhi, India: GOI; 2011. p11.
6. Bang RA, Bang AT, Baitule M, Choudhary Y, Sarmukaddam S, Tale O. High Prevalence of Gynaecological Diseases in Rural Indian Women. *The Lancet* January 14,1999: 85-8