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## EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY RADIO ON WOMEN HEALTH

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### Abstract

In today's knowledge-driven society women has to face multitude of challenges in her life in which she often neglects her health related issues and concerns. The common source of information for a women living in rural areas is her family, friends, neighbours, relatives and a few mainstream mediums among which community radio comes out as the most preferred one. Looking at the critical health status of women in our country the Department of Science and Technology has initiated a women oriented health programme in many community radio stations in different phases which demands for active women participation and involvement in its various stages. In this research, we will closely study the community radio station Alfaz-e-Mewat's community based health programme "Sehat Ka Paigaam". The community men and women participation and interaction in the programme, the changes the programme has brought in their lives and some genuine recommendations for making it more effective. Throughout the research a lot of positive changes among the community men and women came out and the listeners have given some very relevant suggestions which can really help in greater community engagements.

### Key Words

Community radio, Women Health, Women participation, Empowerment, Health Consciousness,

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Community based programs.

## **Introduction**

A Community radio is considered to be a real example of a community media. It can be defined as a media where community doing something for itself. It is a non-profit making community owned, managed and informing medium which demands for community participation and involvement in the programmes produced for informing and educating them. In a report on Participatory Communication for Social Change by Rockefeller Foundation they defined community radio in a developing country is “one of the best ways to reach excluded or marginalized communities in targeted, useful ways”.

**Community Radio in India** - Community radio pioneered in India in 1960's with financial aid coming from UNESCO. It then led to an action by A.I.R. to provide around 57,065 radio sets to the community people.

Soon it launched some of its radio station as farm form in five districts of Maharashtra namely, Poona Ahmednagar, Nasik, Satara and Kolhapur taking the cue from Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. A report on the working of farm form was prepared which revealed that villagers can be an excellent knowledge delivers and this medium can be an important force for village democracy.

On Dec 9<sup>th</sup> 1995, the Supreme Court of India gave one of the historic ruling on opening of air waves and declaring it as public.

In December 2002, Community radio network started growing licences were given to the well-established educational institution recognised by central and state government.

For over ten years, non-profit development organisations and media activist groups have been campaigning for the right to set up low-cost local radio broadcasting facilities. Finally on November 16<sup>th</sup> 2006, the Union Cabinet cleared the community radio policy. (Chakraborty)

They came out with some basic eligibility criteria for setting up a community radio station:

- Community cooperatives
- Local Self-Help Groups
- NGOs and voluntary organizations
- Educational institutions/Universities/Schools. (Broadcasting)

Apart from the guidelines on selection process, Grant of permission, Content regulation and monitoring, funding and transmitter power and range are also given. India currently has 196 CR stations although in year 2007 the government promised to set up 4000 stations. (website) The Ministry of Information and broadcasting have recently amended the policy guidelines for renewal of license and license extension and also allowing the current CSR station to broadcast news and current affair sources exclusively from All India Radio. (LiveMint) This research will study Community Radio station owned and run by NGO: Alfaz-e-Mewat situated in Ghaghas Village Mewat, Haryana. Alfaz-e-Mewat Community Radio of Sehgal Foundation is the second most heard station of Mewat. It was among the 14 community radio stations (CRS) chosen in Fourth Phase for running health programme for community women after a shortlist was finalized based on their presentations to implement the project in new areas. The study was conducted in (10) villages. The CR station is geographically located about 75 KMs away from Gurugram. Alfaz-e-Mewat CR caters to about 225 villages in the vicinity. Some of these villages are not even accessible by road. In this research we will try to understand Alfaz-e-Mewat health program called “Sehat ka Paigaam” initiated by Science for Women Health and Nutrition, Department of Science and Technology. The opinion and involvement of community leaders, women and men, the changes the programme has brought in their lives and suggestions for the improvement of the programme.

**Research methodology** – Research is based on direct personal interview taken from various respondents using the community radio. Interview is taken from 50 respondents from 10 villages of Mewat district of Haryana state of India.

### **Finding and Discussions**

Alfaz-e-Mewat community radio programmes are broadcasted in twenty five villages. The communities includes both Hindu and Muslim people. A total of 50 households were identified from these areas and from each household woman listeners, community leaders and men were

selected for the study. Utmost care was taken to ensure that women (above 16 years) from all age groups and different marital status were included in the survey; households were selected to cover all socio-religious sections and economic strata in the community; efforts were made to ensure that the sample is representative of the spread of literacy/education among men and women.

In the present study we found out that the programme “Sehat ka Paigaam” is liked by the community women and men both. They share their learning’s with their neighbours, children and relatives and also tried to implement it in their own lives too. In all the available mass mediums community radio is one of the most preferred and most listened mediums for both men and women of Mewat. The women usually listen to radio in the afternoon and in the evening while men usually listen to it in the evening and night, in their radio sets, automobiles and mobile phones.

**Dealing With The Problems In The Society** - Alfaz-e-Mewat community radio is liked by the community because this station is focusing on important issues related to the community such as sanitation, hygiene and AIDS etc. Its content is produced in their local languages viz- Hindi, Urdu and Mewati so it becomes easier for them to connect and understand. Many women said that the programs which are dedicated to children and teenagers are helping in the studies of their children and are contributing a lot to their knowledge in an interesting way. Lastly with the low literacy in the area there are many who like listening to radio.

**The Health issues and concerns of Community** - The community women and men are not aware of the diseases which are prevalent in their community and many women suffer from Leucorrhoea, a disease in which excessive white discharges from the body and there is a high possibility that this disease may give rise to many other reproductive organ issues. (Bhawani Devi, Asha worker). Both men and women have observed that women in their community are highly Anaemic and they do not take proper care of their of their health and diet, due to which they can suffer from serious problems related to heart, blood pressure and in some cases bone marrow as well. Many women have shown their concern over a rumour which has spread in the villages that the vaccination provided by the local health care centres are leading to impotency and slow growth of their children. Because of this many women are scared of taking their

children to hospitals for vaccinations.

Most of the men believe that the level of myths and superstitious activities have substantially reduced with the time, however there are few people who still support and go for these practices. People think that the private dispensaries and hospitals are better than the government hospital and health centre but many people are ignorant of the fact about their forged degrees of the doctors who are sitting in these dispensaries.

While many of the women still have faith in the local Peerh and Baba's some of the diseases for which even today superstition and myths have not gone are typhoid, chickenpox and jaundice. Example of the common practice done to a patient suffering from jaundice the patient is asked to wear a garland of roots of certain tree for about 7-10 days which will finally be curing the disease.

### **Observations and Recommendations**

Alfaz-e-Mewat 107.8 MHz is well received in the community as it cuts across the educational and economic backgrounds it serves. It was observed that the community radio station still requires more community participation so that both men and women gets interested in listening to programmes. It certainly have potential community participants.

1. Most of the participants were aware and was vocal about the health problems of their community which proved to be hurdles for their basic health. It was interesting to know that the men are also aware of the health and women issues and concerns.
2. Both men and women believes that "Sehat ka Paigaam" is more about women, an important male perspective, ideas and opinions are missing from the show. Therefore for better community engagement it was advised to involve men too. Health is a basic concern so both men and women should be equally involved for better and successful working of this programme.
3. The Mewat women were very knowledgeable and creative in terms of weaving their ideas and giving suggestions. Most of them showed their eagerness to participate in the program but due to their children and household works they have not became the part of the programme.
4. The variety of experts, guests and doctors are limited in the programme most of them are from Mewat only so some suggested that it would be very interesting and more informative if experts from outside Haryana are called in the programme. Thus there is a scope of producing the

episodes in a more detailed form.

5. Most of the women have heard “Sehat ka Paigaam” but they have basic confidence to face the microphone. There is an urgent need to train more women according to the program design with respect to the 365 episodes that have to be produced during this project.

6. Few men said that in most of the episodes of the programme the doctors or experts portion are recorded if they will be available live on the show community women can directly ask their queries and confusion from the doctor. Thus it can facilitate as an immediate problem solver.

7. Some women also talked about the duration of the program they feel that it should be increased from half an hour to at least an hour. While there are other women in community who talked of the same issue of time and suggested that they feel that the duration of the programme should be shorten down listening to a particular issue for more than 15 minutes after sometimes gets boring and monotonous.

8. Technical capacity building is very much needed to be given to the community women with almost one year of completion many community women have come up to the community meetings and the radio studio but their knowledge about the technicality of radio is very minimum so further enhance of their skill and efficiency is highly recommended.

9. There was a rumour which was spread in the villages that vaccination can stop the growth of their children and in future can make them impotent too. Community men and women are scared currently many have even stopped going to doctor for vaccinations. Therefore many community leaders and women came up with the suggestion to produce a dedicated episode of “Sehat Ka Paigaam” on this issue in order to debunk this running rumour from the community people minds.

10. Many women have appreciated the content and style of the program for them 365 episodes were not enough it is a show which most of them thoroughly enjoys and have enthusiastically started sharing the tips learned from the show with their family, friends and neighbours.

11. Homemakers participation needs to be encouraged. The programmes recordings in the field should be arranged, according to the suitability of community women. Most of them stay engrossed with their daily household work so the production team should visit the field in the timings that are suggested by them. A good example for this can be Live outdoor broadcasts with

participatory programmes through radio can work for the community.

12. “Sehat ka Paigaam” has a very simple format there is a scope of improvement its episode can be produced in a drama format too. *“Different characters in the episodes will make the episode more interesting to listen and these characters can become the brand ambassadors of the programme and can be remembered even after this show episodes get over.* (Fakat Hussain)

## **Conclusion**

Community Radio has been productive not just while obliging the ladies issues like wellbeing, sanitation and security, however it has likewise helped ladies by sharing learning and data, prompting ladies supporting their rights against patriarchy and in political situations. This is flawlessly portrayed by Radio Alfaz-e Mewat, arranged just 75kms far from the capital yet is one of India's most impeded and confined locale.

In the research paper several aspects have been considered and on the basis of analysis of every aspect the researcher came to a conclusion that Alfaz-e-Mewat community radio station is one of the most popular community radio stations of Mewat.

The program Sehat Ka Paigaam for Science for Women Health and Nutrition is among the popular programs of the station. It has garnered an immense support from the listeners. The listenership of programs has increased over the period. Lot of ASHA workers are working closely with the radio station on the episodes and facilitating community discussions on health topics. Through village-based events, meetings, narrowcasting sessions, they engage with community women and have their voices included in the programs.

Both men and women have accepted to the fact the program have brought some amount changes in their attitude and behavior towards and issues related to it. They supports the idea that this program carries the potential to bring a social change in the society.

The loopholes was found that the community participation is not as much as mentioned in the policy and the guideline, both men and women believes that the programs is very women centric it should also be touching upon men issues, concerns and involve them and lastly the question arises on the sustainability of the program which needs to be improved.

Another concern which came out was about the transparency of the program the show format claims to make 1000 community women involvement, 500 will have the occasion to participate, 25 of them empowered to produce and present their programs and at least 10 women radio

jockey. Considering these factors the genuineness of the so called health program on radio is under some serious questions.

The Alfaz-e-Meawat team should continue to work with women on health issues in a more concerted way.

Apart from this, upon doing the literature review of the same topic, it could be concluded that the popularity of community radio continues to grow despite the increase in usage of telephone, internet and other modern means. They are often funded by the NGO's who are working on community issues and need to express themselves in order to reach to larger audience. Another factor of success for community radio especially in relation to rural areas is that it is very cheap and works on minimal costs, which turn out to be favourable for everyone in the long run. It was also observed that the proliferation of information on community radio is far less than the other means of mass communication. Community radio is an effective way to create awareness and reach out to women. It has the power of changing the lives of women. It encourages them to fight against patriarchy; stand up for their rights in social and political arenas and at the same time helps in dealing with various social and health issues. It has empowered them to become their own masters and lead their lives with confidence. Community radio can be a great source of education as well. It educates them about their rights, voting, reservations in panchayati raj institutions, etc. In some areas like Mewat, it acts as a mediator between the local public and various governmental organisations, thus intervening in their problems and complaints and, helping them get justice. Experts in this field have claimed that the community radio will reach out to at least 20 lac women this year with social message of health and nutrition which strengthens the fact that community radio is one of the biggest sources of uplifting the overall standard of living of women in our country.

We hope that these findings and results will be an eye opener to the real problems facing the women at the grassroots level in the country and it can also help Sehgal Foundation and other developmental agencies in tackling vital social issues and problems in a more planned and constructive way.

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