



**SNEHITHA GENDER HELP DESK**

**Report of the study conducted at the Snehitha Centre at Peroorkada,**

**Thiruvananthapuram**

**Submitted before:**

**KUDUMBASHREE**

**State Poverty Eradication Mission,**

**Thiruvananthapuram**

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## **PREFACE**

Crimes against women and children are always on the rise irrespective of time, place and culture and were existing since the beginning of civilization. Women and children were considered to be weak and therefore to be protected. This has been the way of life and with the pace of time their also came a need for restricting them using various means which included physical, sexual and mental abuse also. Kerala is one of the most developed state in the country according to the human development index with high literacy rate, sex ratio and of very less mortality rate, the involvement of women in the service sector is also notable. In spite of these digits which shows a high index of development in the society, the crimes against women are still high where most are occurring at domestic spaces where the society can't easily notice or interfere. The crimes against children are also similar where most of the sexual abuse and assault against children are happening in the home space itself and the criminals are in most of the situations the victims' family or relative. It was in this circumstance that Snehitha which is an agency under the Women Empowerment wing of Kudumbashree began functioning. Snehitha is a 24/7 working gender help desk, it functions to provide help to women and children who faces abuses of various forms.

This report is the result of the study that was conducted at Snehitha Gender Help Desk at Peroorkada, Thiruvananthapuram, and its supporting organisations. This report aims in understanding the working of Snehitha, the impact of it and on how it tackles various kinds of cases that are reported there.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Kudumbashree State Mission for giving me the opportunity to study about Snehitha.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Smt. Soya Thomas, Program Manager- Gender and Balasabha and the entire team of Gender at Kudumbashree, for their valuable guidance and support. I would also like to thank the Snehitha Network of Thiruvananthapuram for their immense love, support, guidance and cooperation. I consider it to be a privilege to work under such an excellent team.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the officials at Child Welfare Committee and District Legal Service Authority, Mahila Samakhya, Nirbhaya and One-stop centre for their valuable cooperation and help.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank my family and friends for their constant support and care, without which I could not have completed this work.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

“Kerala has witnessed the continuous expansion of state welfare - a combination of policies for food security, land reform, improvements in educational and healthcare facilities and social security, which has led to its consecration as an alternate model of development.”(Devika, 2007, pp. 2464). Of the several initiatives for social and economic development, Kudumbashree is one of the most noted institutions aimed towards social and economic welfare introduced by the State.

“Kudumbashree is a female-oriented, community-based, poverty eradication project of the Government of Kerala, which was formally launched in 1998 at Kottakkunn, Malappuram. The mission aims at achieving higher levels of women empowerment by forming self-help groups and encouraging their entrepreneurial and other wider range of activities. The mission aims at achieving higher levels of women empowerment by forming self-help groups and encouraging their entrepreneurial and other wider range of activities. The purpose of the mission is to ensure that women are no longer passive recipients of public assistance, but active leaders in women-involved developmental activities. It aims at capacitating women in order for them to understand and exercise their rights.”(Kudumbashree, 2016).

It was as a part of this special project that Snehitha began functioning in the state, on Sept. 10<sup>th</sup> 2013. It aims at providing all necessary services under one roof for women and children who need care and protection. Snehitha provides short-term shelter for women and children in order to protect and rehabilitate those in distress. Snehitha works in close interface and collaboration with different government and non-governmental organisation working in the same field. The Help Desk extends services such as short-term shelter, counselling and guidance, legal and medical aid, access to services of other governmental and non-governmental organisations etc

### **Objective:**

- Understand the functioning of Snehitha
- Its impact on the society and lives of people
- How different types of cases that are reported there are handled and the procedures that are attached to it.

- What are the drawbacks that Snehitha faces

## **BACKGROUND**

Within the last 17 years of its formation, Kudumbashree has grown from a pioneering agency for poverty alleviation to a more efficient initiative that rests on economic empowerment and social development strategies. Interestingly, Kerala is increasingly known for its distinct model of development known as the Kerala Model. “The state’s indicators of social development are comparable to those of many developed countries, even though the state's per capita income is low in comparison to them. Achievements such as low levels of infant mortality and population growth, and high levels of literacy and life expectancy, low birth rates, high rates of contraception etc., along with the factors responsible for such achievements have been considered characteristic results of the Kerala model.”(Kerala Model, 2016).

According to Devika, (2007) “there exists a gender paradox that remains as a glitch in our developmental model. Even as women in Kerala have shared the fruits of human development to some extent, other indicators like unemployment rates among women, work-participation ratio etc., portray a bleak picture. Gendered choices of occupation, lack of freedom of mobility, sexual choices, and restricted freedom in the public sphere and the free circulation of misogynistic ideas in the public discourse complete the gender paradox.” (pp. 275). The established patriarchal norms male-centred knowledge base and inaccessibility to constitutional and legal provisions hamper the sustainable economic independence and empowerment of women.

“Crimes against has been increasing alarmingly and despite the presence of modern crime surveillance technologies and access to information and networking, guaranteeing the safety and security of women has become a serious challenge for all. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) states that, "violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women.” (Thara Bhai, 2012, pp i)

“Kerala ranks among the Indian states/union territories with higher rates of crime against women. Recent research about rising dowry rates in marriage across almost all social groups, studies on women's contraceptive-use patterns and birth control practices and on cruelty at home and domestic violence reveal a disconcerting picture.”(Thara Bhai, pp i) This acted as an impetus to the introduction of Snehitha Gender Help Desks under Kudumbashree.

All activities under the GSLP (Gender Self-Learning Programme) of Kudumbashree including Snehitha, Nirbhaya crime mapping, gender corner, anti-human trafficking, Vanitha Sabhas, Pustakayatra, Sreesakti-web portal etc. aim directly towards women empowerment and their upliftment. The three-tiered federated structure of Kudumbashree created a deep-rooted network that would efficiently add to the success of this program. Through these inter-connected initiatives and close collaboration with other governmental and non-governmental organisations, Kudumbashree aims at building a state with a safe and protected environment for women and children where they can realise their rights to the highest extent.

## **METHODOLOGY:**

1. Collecting relevant information from Kudumbashree office
2. Visit to Snehitha centre (regional) at Thiruvananthapuram and getting details about its function its beneficiaries and its impact in detail.
3. Understanding the functions and initiatives taken by the institution – Snehitha.
4. Personal interviews of the staff, previous inmates and other officials.
5. Listing out the various institutions and agencies connected with Snehitha.
6. Visit conducted to the same and a report prepared. The list includes following institutions and agencies:
  - ✓ Snehitha
  - ✓ Child Welfare Committee
  - ✓ District Child Protection Office
  - ✓ Nirbhaya office
  - ✓ One-stop Centre
  - ✓ Mahila Samkhya
  - ✓ District Legal Service Authority



## **OBSERVATION**

### **Snehitha and its functions**

Some of the key functions under Kudumbashree lie under three major domains, which are; economic development, social upliftment and women's empowerment, it was by keeping in mind the above objectives that Snehitha came into being with the aim to improve and uplift the overall conditions of women in the society. The then Social Welfare minister M. K. Muneer formally inaugurated the Snehitha Gender Help Desk. It was initially open at only three districts which by 2018 expanded to all the districts in the state. Snehitha extends services such as temporary shelter, legal aid, medical aid, counselling services etc. to those women and children who are in distress or have been victims of any sort of violence or exploitation. Women who hail from distant places and who need temporary shelter for a limited period can avail the same here. Additionally, the centre extends them with other necessary services such as linking them to other related or relevant institutions such as Police Station, Hospitals, Legal Service Authority or Court, etc. Other services of the centre includes tele-counselling, referral services and follow-up, linkage to services of various governmental and non-governmental organisations etc.

It initially opened at three centres, Malappuram, Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram, which by 2017 is now present at all districts. Every Snehitha across the state has 11 staff members which includes:

- 5 Service providers
- 2 Counsellors
- 2 Securities
- 1 Office assistant, and,
- 1 Caretaker, where all the staffs are females.

Only 5 members will be in duty at a time, and there is a continuous change of shift as Snehitha is a 24/7 vigilant body. Staffs are well occupied in handling all kinds of situations that arises at all times.

There are different types of cases that are handled at Snehitha which mainly includes cases such as domestic violence, sexual abuse and child abuse of women and children below the age of 18 (only girls) and boys less than the age of 4. Public also approach Snehitha for the sole of purpose of shelter and if their time period extends more than what Snehitha can provide for then they will we moved to long term shelter home. Domestic violence are the most reported cases at Snehitha, followed by cases of sexual abuse and child abuse.

### Domestic violence

Domestic violence means to physically, emotionally, mentally or sexually abusing women in their own homes by her family members (including her own family members as well as her in-laws). This is one of the hardest one to tackle as hardly do women come out in the open to complain about her family members, due to the stigma attached as well as due to the fear of losing her family and support. But with the increased awareness about the legal and other kinds of help that are provided for the victims, more women do come out in the open now.

When a case is reported at Snehitha either by a third person or by the victim herself through person or via telephone the authenticity is originally checked by the other Kudumbashree staffs in that area, and if it turn out to be true the next step would be taken. The first and foremost step taken would be to provide shelter to the victim and later on call the family and try to sort the issue by continuous counselling, whilst most of the cases gets resolved in this manner there are cases where they need to seek the help of DLSA and later on by taking protection from the protection officer. If in case the abuser violates this protection document then the police can arrest him/her for an unbailable offence. If the crime is reported via an emergency call, then police will go and arrest the abuser in the spot itself and the family will be brought to Snehitha, and only later on will be the above mentioned proceedings be carried on.

### Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse against both women and children are in a drastic growth in the recent times. In most of the cases since marital rape is neither considered a legal offence and also because of the taboo is attached to it there are a more reported cases of sexual abuse of unmarried women and girls more. There are two types of cases that comes under sexual abuse one were the survivors are below the age of 18 and the other above it. If the survivor is below the age of 18 (POCSO

case) and if reported to Police Station or directly to Snehitha, first and foremost Child Welfare Committee will be informed, from where the legal proceedings will be initiated, Snehitha provides shelter and counselling for the survivor till the court proceedings are initiated, they also accompany the survivor for the medical tests and other formalities. The case then goes to the child protection officer who conducts an enquiry regarding the situation in the child's home and makes a clear analysis of his/her safety, if found safe, then they will be allowed to stay there, if else they will be moved to shelter homes for Sexually abused children under Mahila Samkhya named Nirbhaya till the age of 18 after which if they want to continue living there they will moved to special home. Follow ups are conducted by Snehitha and the other bodies if the child returns else no further follow ups are initiated.

In the cases where the survivor is above the age of 18, legally formalities will be initiated immediately and Snehitha provides the necessary help, and once the court proceedings are initiated they will be moved for homes similar to that of Nirbhaya named Mahila Mandiram.

### Child Abuse

Child Abuse is another major form of abuse that is prevalent among the society now. Children are easy targets for seeking vengeance for religious, property or personal feud as seen in the recent 'Kathua case' as well. Children are no longer safe in their homes and paedophilia is in the rise as statistics also shows. So when such cases are registered firstly efforts will be made to bring the child to a normal state and only later own will be police fir be made and the accused is arrested. If the case is that of sexual abuse then it will come under POSCO Act and the proceedings that are mentioned above will be initiated. If it is physical, emotional or mental abuse then they will be send to a short stay home and if the environment back home is found safe, the child will be allowed to stay in the house with the family members while the culprit will be in jail. If the child doesn't have family then they will be sent to orphanages which are run by the government.

In all the above mentioned cases the safety of the survivor is of vital importance, as they are extremely prove to attacks again and their mental and emotional stability are in extreme danger, while in some situations suicidal tendencies are also shown.

## Counselling

Free counselling sessions are provided to all females and to males below the age of 18. These counselling sessions are given to survivors of various forms of abuse as well as others who approach Snehitha for counselling purpose only. Snehitha provides home counselling of found extremely in need. These counselling sessions are extremely benefitting for the inmates and the case survivors as they not only help the survivors to come back to a normal state of being, but also help them in recovering at a faster rate, and in helping in being a better person.

## Destitute

Majority of the destitute cases that approach Snehitha are of the ones of the age above 50. Once such cases comes into the notice the family is given repeated counselling sessions, and if that is also found unsuccessful then a complaint is filed at the RDO. A compromise is made at these situations, fearing the legal complications. The family will then take care of the person and a follow up will be conducted by Snehitha.

## **Snehitha and its Impact**

Snehitha and its services has left a deep foot print in the lives of the people who has accepted help from Snehitha.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Domestic Violence cases</b>	<b>Child Abuse cases</b>	<b>Sexual Violence cases</b>	<b>Shelter provided</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2013 (from Sept.)</b>	46	4	3	40	<b>146</b>
<b>2014</b>	175	27	16	160	<b>597</b>
<b>2015</b>	125	26	8	239	<b>398</b>
<b>2016</b>	73	24	4	209	<b>334</b>

<b>2017</b>	106	41	8	171	<b>326</b>
<b>2018 (till May)</b>	56	42	3	60	<b>161</b>

According to the inmates, associated institutions and the beneficiaries Snehitha has shown a huge improvement in the life of the people and in tackling serious situations and in empowering women.

### Snehitha Experience:

Personal and telephonic interviews of the current and the former inmates revealed that they were extremely happy with the way they were taken care of at the centre. Most of them explained how the guidance and counselling that they received from the centre has improved their lives drastically, and that they now feel that they have a place in the society. They felt secure and that they had someone to raise a voice for them.

*“Snehitha has helped me gain back my respect in the society.”*

*“The counselling that my husband and I received from Snehitha has saved our marriage.”*

*“My husband left me when I was pregnant and refused to take responsibility for our child. I have been looked down upon by everyone in the society ever since. Snehitha has ensured that I gain justice.”* -Domestic abuse and mental abuse survivor

*“Snehitha has helped me free myself from an abusive relationship. I can finally live a life of dignity.”* –Domestic Violence survivor

*“My daughter has suicidal tendencies and needed immediate counselling. I was asked to shift her to Snehitha for a short period until I find an appropriate institute for her stay. The Staff at Snehitha has taken care of my daughter just as I would have. She seemed extremely happy during the time she spent there.”* -A student who took counselling sessions from Snehitha

## **CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

Snehitha is known for its excellent and devoted staff and effective handling of each case. Snehitha being a public service body also has its own restrictions. Though the condition at Snehitha is much better than their previous office at Shasthamangalam, there is an overburden of work, in most of the situations as they have to do conduct awareness campaigns as well as tend to the inmates, and fulfil their needs. The infrastructure and funds are no more the problem, as the state budget allocates a considerable amount of funds and they also get the central government grants that Kudumbashree receives.

One of the major setbacks of Snehitha is the lack of awareness of this institution among the public and its capabilities in securing and improving the lives of women and children. Visits to the related government and non-governmental organisations brought to light the fact that even as these linkages and collaborations are highly essential, there exists a lack of proper liaison among these institutions. Institutions like the Mahila Mandiram, One-stop Centre, Child Welfare Committee etc have strong and standing linkages with Snehitha. Most of the other institutions do not have in-depth understanding of the functioning and objectives of Snehitha other than the knowledge that they function as a short-stay home and that they provide in-house counselling services. From the visit to DLSA and Mahila Samakhya one could say that though they are aware of the role and importance of Snehitha they are not very well aware of the duties and functioning of Snehitha in other aspects which does not come under their department.

All said and done, institutions like Snehitha are highly relevant and act as effective solutions to the issues related to women and children. The grass-root level strong linkages established by Kudumbashree together with its initiatives like Snehitha Centres make it an effective solution on the whole.

Snehitha is efficient in tackling a wider range of issues. They do not face the problem of overcrowding. Snehitha is distinct as it provides the much needed short stay for the aggrieved women and children under the same roof. Snehitha has an efficient staff which has been successfully rendering its services for numerous women and children. The in-house counselling services and the follow-ups offered by Snehitha has been adding to the effectiveness of Snehitha.

Snehitha has succeeded in creating a humanitarian atmosphere for all those who approach it. The Staff there are very cooperative. It is a complete package yet needs appropriate support and aid in order to develop and emerge as a permanent solution.

Collaboration with Snehitha smoothens and speeds up the functioning of Police Stations by helping them render their services better. Tie-ups at the local and Panchayath levels help the Police return the stranded and lost women and children to their respective homes. Childline finds Snehitha extremely important, as other institutions do not have provisions to let the child and the mother stay together.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATION

“Politics has been recognised as the major arena where battles over social development were fought and won. Kerala is a state that has a strong political society that mediates between the masses and the state, which successfully presented the demands of basic amenities of life to the State that is largely committed to socialistic national development.” (Devika, 2007, pp. 2464)

There is a growing need for more action towards the safeguard of women and children in the society. Kudumbashree has been working actively towards the same, yet much more is left to achieve.

Snehitha is an excellent initiative brought forward by Kudumbashree. But more efforts needs to be taken for spreading awareness to the public about the institution and how much helpful it can be for the public. Some of the ideas that can be utilised for spreading awareness about the institution are:

- by, conducting more camps at NHG (Ayalkuttam) levels which has a more reach at the grass root levels, where people from all categories can attend.
- by, conducting classes at schools and government and private offices which can benefit the public a lot.

Snehitha can also help schools in conduction Sex Education along with awareness camps as to some extend awareness about sex and sexual abuse will also help the students and can to some extend prevent sexual crimes against children from their colleagues.

Further the infrastructure and the strength of the institution should also develop, as with the growing awareness more cases will come into the attention of Snehitha, and the public will have a source to approach for their grievances. There are no sort stay homes for boys who are survivors of sexual and physical abuse, and for the cases such so reported at Snehitha once referred to CWC and further to Children’s homes, Snehitha doesn’t have any follow-ups.

All said and done, institutions like Snehitha are highly relevant and act as effective solutions to the issues related to women and children. The grass-root level strong linkages established by Kudumbashree together with its initiatives like Snehitha Centres make it an effective solution on the whole.



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Once we look into the statistics from Snehitha and the cases that are reported since 2013 we can see a definite increase in the cases reported which can be interpreted in two ways, either that the reach and awareness of Snehitha is increasing, or that the violence against boys, girls and women are increasing, or both. But in the above scenario there is a chance for both the incidents to occur in a simultaneous fashion.

One of the major issue that came up from Mahila Samkhya is that the treatment for the survivor of sexual abuse below the age of 18, is extremely nice and welcoming that when they are shifted to long term shelter homes is that they expect the same kind of treatment there also, and when they don't get it they become extremely rebel some.

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## Appendix

### LIST OF INSTITUTIONS AND AGENCIES VISITED

Sl. No,	Date of visit	Name and address of the Institution/Agency
1.	7 <sup>th</sup> May, 2018	Kudumbashree State Poverty Eradication Mission
2.	8 <sup>th</sup> May, 2018	Kudumbashree State Poverty Eradication Mission
3.	9 <sup>th</sup> May, 2018	Kudumbashree State Gender Mission
4.	10 <sup>th</sup> May, 2018	Kudumbashree State Gender Mission
5.	10 <sup>th</sup> May, 2018	Snehitha
6.	13 <sup>th</sup> May, 2018	Snehitha
7.	18 <sup>th</sup> May, 2018	Kudumbashree State Gender Mission
8.	29 <sup>th</sup> May, 2018	Snehitha stall, conducted by the Government of Kerala in accordance with their second anniversary
9.	30 <sup>th</sup> May, 2018	District Legal Service Authority
10.	1 <sup>st</sup> June, 2018	Child Welfare Committee
11.	8 <sup>th</sup> June, 2018	One-stop centre and
12.	8 <sup>th</sup> June, 2018	Nirbhaya Office

13.	11 <sup>th</sup> June, 2018	Mahila Samkhya
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