

Silicosis in India- A case study of 3 districts of Madhya Pradesh, India

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WHAT IS SILICOSIS?

- Silicosis is an occupational disease which affects the Lungs and is caused by crystalline silica dust
- But crystalline silica dust is no ordinary dust. It is more toxic than sulfuric acid as it cuts and burns the lungs and destroys them.
- Today cancer can be cured by Surgery, Chemotherapy, Radiotherapy

BUT

- No surgery, chemo-radio can cure Silicosis.
Death from this disease is certain.
- People with 1 month of exposure died in 2 years.

SILICOSIS IN 3 DISTRICTS

- Surveys in 102 villages shows 1701 victims of which 538 (1/3 rd) are dead due to exposure between 1983 to 2011.
- Of these 11% (185) of victims are children. And 216 children lost one or more parent.
- 55% of victim families were either landless or owned < 1 acre of hilly rainfed land.
- In 78 % families breadwinner got Disease

Victims now dead



JHENDI : *Her husband deserted her and she was left alone to look after her four children Sirja 10yrs, Sukli 8yrs, Chini 5yrs and Bhangra 3 years old. She is no more*

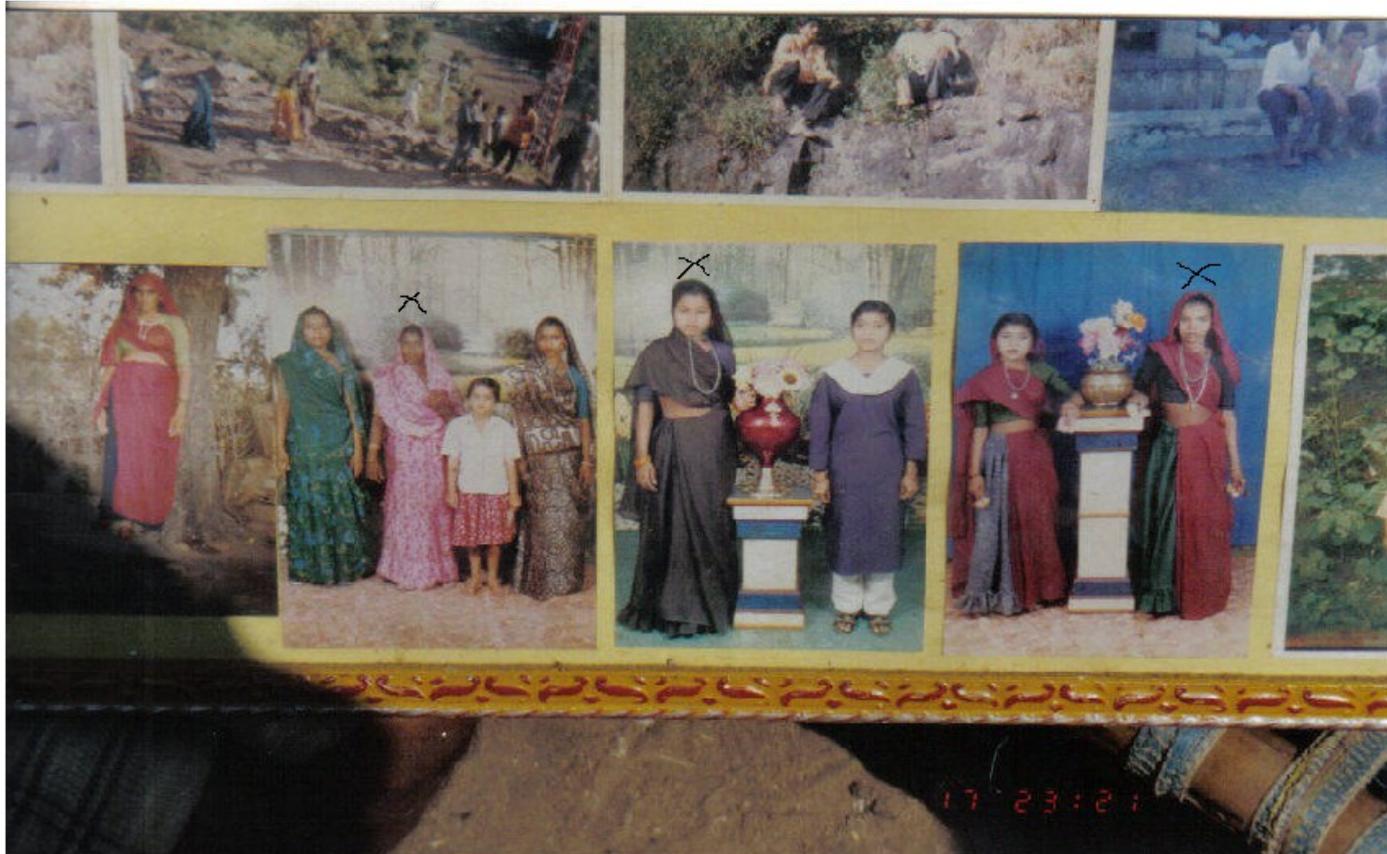


JHENDI- HER STORY

- In 2006, Jhendi has finally got relief from her troubles. But when she lived it was very torturing for her to see herself dying, leaving nobody to look after her 4 children, Sirja 10F, Sukli 8F, Chindi 5F and Bhangra 3M years old.
- Her husband had deserted her. In 2003 Jhendi went to Balasinore to work in Quartz crushing unit to feed herself and her children. She earned Rs 300 per week but when she returned home she already was suffering from cough and difficulty in breathing. She gradually started loosing weight and became very thin.
- She moved to her brother's house in Indersingh Chowki and in a medical camp organized by the Civil Hospital Alirajpur her illness was diagnosed as silicosis. Now even her brother has refused to look after the 4-orphaned children.
- **Jhandi was photographed by us with her children in Dec 2005 she died in 2006.**

IDLA'S FAMILY

The 14 people who died include Harlia 35, Kanki 35, Remla 28, Manibai 25, Ramli 20, Surma 18, Shanti 18, Kehriya 18, Bhanti 17, Patli 16, Bhur Singh 16



STORY OF TWO VILLAGES

- ***Bholwat- Dhayana** are small villages are effected by an epidemic of silicosis.*
- *The total population of Bholwat is 567 and of Dhayana is 1074 . Number of persons affected by silicosis in these villages are 130 and 61 have died in the last 3 years.*
- *Ujari hamlet of village Bholwat has borne the brunt of the tragedy where almost all male members have died.*
- *Apart from the tragedy of loosing their kin the families are finding it hard to make a living and are literally in a starving situation with nothing to eat for days together.*

How people got Silicosis?

- Migrants worked in 'killing factories' (31 in no) which crush Quartz stone to silica dust in the state of Gujarat.
- This Quartz stone contains 100 % silica dust.
- 714 (56% of respondents) victims had less than 1 year of exposure
- 1982 study of ambient air quality in 6 factories by the National Institute of Occupational Health found that silica dust was present in conc. between 81 to 660 times higher than the permissible limit
- Few studies conducted subsequently by the Gujarat Pollution Control Board show that air pollution levels continue to be dangerously above what is safe for workers.
- The owners are fully aware of the toxic nature of their operations: before visiting the factory, get the machinery switched off to avoid inhaling dust.
- Exposure occurs in factories while in employment;
- Disease & death occurs quietly in villages. No Occupational History taken; **No culpability.**

How we got involved?

- We work on health issues
- In 2005, local group reported large number of deaths in remote tribal villages due to *TB*.
- During investigation people told that at time of funeral lungs did not burn and when the lung was cut a white shiny powder came out.
- People reported a link between the disease to labourers who migrated to Gujarat.

Picture of silica factory, Gujarat children playing inside while parents work



WHAT WE DID?

- First investigation report was done in 2005.
- Subsequently village level Surveys found more and more victims
 - 2006- 424, 2011-1244
 - 2008-809, 2012-1701
- Silicosis detection camps organized at block and district hospital of affected districts.
- Cases confirmed by medical experts and Institutions.

What we did?

Sangharsh & Nirman

- 3 extensive Survey Reports- “Destined to Die I,II,III” 2005-2011
- Documentary – “Culpable Homicide” 2006
- Project to check migration: 2010
- Rehabilitation of Orphans
- Media Campaign
- Victim Organization – Silicosis Pedit Sangh
- Complaints to National Human Rights Comm.
- Writ in Supreme Court

Networking , Natural Allies

- Khedut majdoor chetna Sanghat- Petitioner in Public Interest Litigation, Complainant in National Human Rights Commission(NHRC)
- Adivasi Dalit Morcha- Part of Campaign group
- Shilpi Kendra- Coordination of Campaign, Complainant in NHRC.
- Silicosis Peedit Sangathan-(Silicosis Victim Organisation)- Awareness, Mobilisation, Advocacy.
- National Network- People's Health Movement.

RESULTS

- 2009: Supreme court ordered compensation
- Recommended NHRC for deciding relief for confirmed cases
- 2010 : NHRC ordered Rs 3 Lacs to 248 victims and rehabilitation for 304 victims
- Despite the order of SC and NHRC recommendation no commitments from state to pay compensation.
- Gujarat : Several deaths, 375 confirmed, denied compensation and treatment.
- MP: Making plan for rehabilitation from more than one year.

What is to be Done?

- Immediate compensation for victims.
- Rehabilitation for Orphans and Widows
- Close killing factories immediately
- Criminal Action Against Factory Owners
- Check Outmigration

Govt. in Denial Mode

- Indian Council Of Medical Research in 2007 estimated 700000 silicosis cases in India

BUT

- Govt. Of India Press release on 18 June 2012 gave state wise details of Occu'l Disease reported in factories
 - In Guj Silicosis 2008-nil, 2009-nil, 2010-14
 - In WB Silicosis 2008-nil, 2009-23, 2010- no info

PHM Support

- PHM India is involve in strengthening Campaign on occupational health issues in India.
- PHM in different countries should write to Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh Government and GOI to Provide Compensation and speedy Rehabilitation of Silicosis victims.
- PHM in different countries should strenghen coalition on occupational health issues build pressure on National Government to strenghen laws for unorganized and migrant workers.

THANKS

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