

## **OPEN DEFECATION IN INDIA: A MAJOR HEALTH PROBLEMS AND DIFFICULTY IN INFECTION CONTROL**

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### **Introduction**

India is a developing nation. Around 68% population lives in the rural areas. It is the seventh largest economy in the world and one of the fastest growing countries in the world. However, significant challenges to the provision of environmental services such as water, sanitation, solid waste management, and drainage. The general health of Indians has improved and the life expectancy has increased, myriad health and sanitation problems still stare one in the face. The biggest one is open defecation, which is the mother of all infection and morbidity and sometimes mortality. In India open defecation is one of the major health hazards and it affects environment. Even when people are not aware of the health risks related to open defecation.

Most of open defecation occurs in villages with a prevalence of 65%.<sup>2</sup> In urban settings the prevalence is close to 16%. The problem has thick deep roots with a multi-factorial origin. Unavailability of proper toilets or toilets with dimly lit, broken or clogged latrines is common. However, the biggest problem is the mind-set of people in both rural and urban settings. Children grow watching parents and grandparents practice open defecation. Maximum number of farmers believes that waking up early and defecating in the field and they believe that not only adds natural fertilizer to the soil, but also rejuvenates the bowel and the mind. The places where they defecate are very close to their residential areas and there is hundred per cent chance of mixing the night soil and urine in to the drinking water and other water courses which are used by the people for everyday purpose. This will affect the health of the people particularly the susceptible group such as the women, adolescents and children.

### **Open defecation policies in India**

The first Indian national campaign to target launched the Central Rural Sanitation Program (CRSP-1986). The main objectives of the program are:

- To provide 25% of the rural population with improving the quality of life and
- To provide privacy and dignity to women improved hygiene amenities, with the focus of latrine construction.

As a result, latrines were built regardless of low demand/need and latrines were largely unused/vacant by the public.

In 1999, CRSP as updated as the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC). To make India open defecation free by 2017, Total Sanitation Campaign also offered monetary subsidies for Below Poverty Line (BPL) families for toilet construction by observing this monetary subsidies people are attention is concentrate on construction of toilets. But, census 2011, report shows moderate increase of toilets in India.

In 2012, the TSC was replaced by Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA) with the new target to improved sanitation facilities for rural households. Under this scheme, toilet construction subsidies increased to 5,500 rupees include Above Poverty Line (APL) families.

After 2014, Narendra Modi government replaced Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) or Clean India Mission. The main goal of the SBA mission is Open Defecation Free (ODF) India by 2019.

India is the capital of open defecation, approximately 59% of the people defecate practice in open places. The 2011 census showed that 46.9% household has toilets and 3.2% use public toilets; remaining 49.8% of people are defecating in the open. The practice has been widely accepted for generations, becoming a well-established tradition deeply rooted from early childhood and is almost an accepted part of the Indian landscape. Open defecation is widespread in rural India where it is practiced by nearly 70% of the rural population, compared to 13% in urban areas.

### **Perceived Advantages of Open Defecation:**

It is associated with pleasure and comfort. 47% of respondents explain the habit by attributing it to comfort and pleasure, and 74% of those who defecate in the open despite having latrine access cite the same reason.<sup>19</sup>

- It is associated with rising up early as well as being industrious and healthy. Many respondents indicated that it gives them the opportunity to breathe some fresh air and

take morning walks. 14% highlight that there are problems with using a latrine, while 12% say it is a habit.<sup>20</sup>

- Among rural Indians open defecation is not widely recognised as a health threat. 43% of respondents reported that latrines are not better for child health. Among those who practice open defecation 51% report that open defecation would be as good as latrine use for child health. The survey also highlights that women are more likely than men to cite open defecation as healthy for their children. The survey further emphasises the lack of health awareness; when asked, 89% of respondents said that they built latrines for reasons of comfort and convenience and only 26% mention perceived health benefits.<sup>21</sup>
- It is associated with the concept of purity in Hinduism. It is believed that one cannot eat and defecate under the same roof and must defecate as far as possible from the household.

### **Challenges to Rural Sanitation**

- The widespread scale of the problem is nearly 70% of rural Indians defecate in the open.
- High population density makes open defecation costly in India. It imposes high costs on human capital and healthcare expenditure.
- Low demand for latrine use hinders what latrine construction can achieve in terms of solving the problem.

### **Impacts:**

According to the World Health Organization 2011 report shows merely 0.7 million deaths have occurred due to the infectious diarrhoea. It can also lead to malnutrition and underdeveloped growth among the women and children. Open defecation can lead to water pollution and affecting ground surface water. The faecal pathogens are transmitted to water and it leads to water borne diseases. Open defecation is one of the important causes of diarrheal death. Nearly 2,000 children under the age of five dies every day, one in every 40 seconds, from diarrhoea. Due to open defecation there is a lack of sanitation and hygiene is the major factor in causing various diseases are mainly:

- Diarrhoea and Intestinal worm Infections
- Typhoid
- Cholera

- Hepatitis
- Polio
- Trachoma and others.

There can be many reasons why a person openly defecates and these may include:

- Poor sanitation.
- Lack of awareness.
- Non availability of toilets.
- Public Toilets are available but are grimy, dark, smell bad, or unattractive (due to non-maintenance).
- Toilets are available but there is a risk, e.g. if the public toilets common for all.
- Public Toilets are not available as part of the household but only at some distance and it may be dangerous to get there at night.

Therefore the reasons for open defecation are wide-ranging and it can unquestionably be a voluntary choice, habits and comfort.

### **Open Defecation and Health Hazards**

The practice of open defecation is one of the higher risks in the world. Which affects more than 161 million of women and children's in worldwide (WHO). The new plans are proposed in sustainable development goals by the UN General Assembly in September 2015 include a target to eliminate open defecation by 2030(SDGs). Open defecation exposes women to the danger of physical attacks and encounters such as snake bites and others. Open defecation also cripples national development worldwide.

The major causes for open defecation and health hazards in India.

- India has the largest number of people still defecating in the open places.
- About 65 per cent of people in rural areas do not have access to toilets.
- Open defecation is actually still increasing in the poorest fragment of the population.
- Only 11 per cent of child faeces dispose safely.
- More than 80 per cent of children's faeces are left in the open places are garbage.
- Merely 44 per cent of mothers disposing of their children's faeces in the open.
- In India more than 188,000 children's die due to diarrhoea.
- Nearly 43 per cent of children's are suffered due to malnutrition.

In India more than 50 percent of people are using open toilet especially more number of rural people are using open toilets compare to urban people. Now government are taking effective steps to eradicate the open defecation in India.

Majority of the studies revealed that poor sanitation practices like open defecation have been known to cause stunting in children, contamination of water sources which leading to cholera, typhoid and dysentery. Open defecation also affect pregnancy apart from diarrhoea and other gastrointestinal infections due to faecal oral contamination.

In India the highest numbers of deaths of children under the age of five years, as well as high levels of malnourishment, high levels of poverty, lack of awareness (particularly in urban slums people and rural people). Achievements of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) On October 2, 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan or Clean India Mission. The campaign, inaugurated to coincide with Gandhi Jayanti, aims to understand its vision of 'Clean India' by October 2, 2019, the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

According to the Ministry of drinking water and sanitation, in 2015 the achievements report shows nearly 80 lakh toilets have been constructed under the program. But, in December 2016, nearly, 3 crores toilets have been constructed so far. The country still has a long way to go, and the progress made so far needs to be sustained and strengthened for further development.

Hence, the article highlights several reasons for open defecation.

- Open defecation is common practice in rural India.
- Nearly 70 percent of the rural population lives in rural and 89 percent of households are without toilet facilities (census 2011).
- Government of India has been spending more funds to eliminate open defecation as well as toilet construction, but rural open defecation has remained stubbornly too high.

### **Conclusion**

The author viewed that rural people are still not aware about open defecation and its hazards and it affects them more compared to urban people except urban slums. Government of India is also making remedies for open defecation. Nonetheless it is the biggest challenge to eradicate the open defecation in the country. Open Defecation is an extremely complex issue and it needs a holistic approach. The Clean India Mission is bringing partial change but we need complete change to achieve open defecation free country through effective implementation of proper schemes and likeminded government employees, politicians, health

care workers, Public work department members and volunteers and also community people at rural areas and urban slums contributions are required in order to achieve the Clean India Mission aim.

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