

Gender and Sanitation: Observations from North India

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Abstract

Taking Allahabad district, Uttar Pradesh as its 'site of fieldwork', the objective of the paper is to delineate the interlinkages between gender and sanitation. Primary data pertaining to 225 respondents were collected through questionnaire, in-depth interviews and Focused Group Discussions. Non-participant Observation helped the researcher to understand the issue at hand more aptly. It emerged from the fieldwork that sanitation facilities in terms of safely managed toilets are vital for the overall health (both physical and mental) of the adolescent girls and women. The practice of open defecation resorted by women respondents due to lack of toilets in the household is the singular reason of incidents of harassment and abuse which are subsequently linked to psycho-social stress related to sanitation. The paper concludes by underlining that for the women, the availability and accessibility of safe sanitation facility in terms of clean and hygienic toilets is a must.

Keywords: Gender, Sanitation, Gender-based violence, Open Defecation (OD), Psychological Stress

Introduction

Of late, the issue of sanitation (in terms of safely managed sanitation services) has emerged as an important variable having significant bearing upon the overall human health and wellbeing. Sanitation can be broadly understood as an emphasis on hygiene and thus to prevent the occurrence of diseases. In its broadest sense, it relates with provision of clean drinking water on one hand and safe protective and adequate disposal of the sewage. It needs to be underlined that the term 'sanitation' itself has transformed from unsafe sanitation to safe and improved sanitation to sustainable sanitation. It has been argued that adequate sanitation facilities and appropriate hygiene practices do result in fewer prevalence of infectious diseases (less burden of disease) among humans and thus positively impacts the quality and longevity of life.

The inclusion of sanitation issues within the global development (human) discourse; for instance, in the United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 7 (Target 7.C) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 reflects its increasing importance in the human lives. SDG Target 6.2 aims to achieve access

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